



defence

Department:
Defence
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS
Republic of South Africa

MEDIA ADVISORY

OPENING ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE AFRICAN
CONFERENCE OF COMMANDANTS' BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE
AND MILITARY VETERANS, HON. N. N. MAPISA-NQAKULA, MP...

01 NOVEMBER 2017; CSIR CONFERENCE CENTRE, PRETORIA

“THE RELEVANCE OF AFRICAN MILITARY/SECURITY: HISTORICAL
CASE STUDIES AND SCENARIOS”

South Africa's Secretary for Defence Dr Sam Gulube

Chief of the South African National Defence Force, General Solly Shoke

Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff of Sudan, General Hassan, your
Commandant and senior officers

Commandant of the Uganda Senior Command and Staff College, Lt. General
Andrew Gutti

South Africa's Chief of Staff Lt. General Vusi Masondo

Chiefs of Services and Divisions

Chairperson of the Defence Force Service Commission and Commissioners

Members of the African Commandants Conference Troika- Rwanda, Botswana and South Africa respectively

The GoC Training Command Maj. General Mbatha

Members of the Defence Secretariat

Commandants of Defence Command and Staff Colleges

Defence and Military Attachés

Representatives of the Defence Industry

Academics and Strategic Partners of the ACOC

Host and Chairperson of the African Conference of Commandants 2017 Brig. Gen. Siseko Nombewu

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed an honor and privilege to deliver the opening address of the African Conference of Commandants (ACOC) 2017. In the time since its establishment, even as the SANDF participated, it has never been elevated to the level that it is this year, today. As the Minister responsible for the portfolios of Defence and Military Veterans, I wish to express sincerest gratitude that the SADC gave the opportunity to host this esteemed conference and golden opportunity. This was given by the military think tanks

of the continent, and South Africa was given the honour to become Chair of ACOC 2017. As we are gathered here today, we have represented twenty three countries, mostly directly from their capitals. It also through their Defence Attachés. The attendance and representation comprises a full General; two lieutenant generals; seven Major Generals; seven Brigadier Generals, to mention the most senior. We have as the total strength forty three participants plus invited guests, and believe this would make for very fruitful deliberations through the ACOC conference.

I also wish to commend the SADC for having entrusted not only South Africa to host ACOC 2017, but with ACOC 2018 to be hosted by Botswana and ACOC 2019 by Namibia respectively, still within the SADC. In the spirit of regional and continental cooperation, I hope the next round will go to other regions on the continent. This augurs well for regional cooperation and the processes towards the full establishment of the African Standby Force throughout the continent, of which the regions are critical building blocks.

Distinguished officers, Ladies and Gentlemen...what is this ACOC and where does it draw its origins from? ACOC was formed to enhance military professionalism on the African continent through effective utilization of education, training and development of officers, in command and staff colleges. This vision was a culmination of the efforts of the first Commandants of the South African War College, the late Major General William Nkonyeni. He drove the efforts to establish this in 2007 already, and by the time he passed on, the seed had been planted and today we have an organisation with representation across the continent and represented in all the regional blocs...south, central, east, west and the north respectively.

Once the seed took root, regular engagements and annual meetings ensured that the glue held it together. As the host country during 2017, we are pleased

that we again have the opportunity to host on the occasion of the tenth anniversary. The annual gathering of Commandants cannot be overemphasized, for these provide an opportunity to check progress made and where there is a need to help one another, in the spirit of achieving the goals of Agenda 2063, but also enhancing peace and security on the continent.

At the founding conference the theme at the time was “Developing and Transforming Education in the Military, a contribution to African Security”. This theme set the scene for the development of ACOC, and enhanced military professionalism through education, training and development. The exchange of Directing Staffs, Military Staffs and learners at our colleges has contributed immensely to the development of Confidence and Security Building Measures, (CSBMs) at the bilateral and multilateral levels respectively. Most if not all of our countries have bilateral and even trilateral memoranda of understanding with each other, in addition to those with the regional organizations such as SADC, ECOWAS, ECCAS to mention but a few and of course with the African Union.

We need to make more use of these mechanisms also to ensure that our principals have the comfort that as defence and military establishments, we are cooperating and able to share information and expertise, in addition to have our staffs and personnel inside each other’s’ colleges and education establishments, at different levels.

The ACOC needs to enhance “harmonization, interoperability, commonality, standardization and cooperation between African Command Staff Colleges”, according to its founding aims and objectives. Therefore as we gather for this session of ACOC 2017, let us reflect on whether we achieved the objectives of the founding conference as stated earlier. This year’s theme is “The

relevance of African Military/Security historical case studies and scenarios". It is my hope that as ACOC 2017 takes place, there is also cognizance of the challenges facing our countries, regions and the continent. This is against the backdrop of the realities of conflicts in some of our regions, and how we need to put our shoulders behind the wheel to ensure that we bring lasting peace and stability to our continent.

I recently had an opportunity to attend the meeting of the Heads of State and representing SADC in Congo-Brazzaville, under the auspices of the Framework Agreement examining the resolution of the Great Lakes conflict. Without getting into detail, it is important to emphasize that the resolution to the problems in the continent also lie with you, by way of the kind of advise provided to our principals, and also taking advantage of the fact that there is this forum of ACOC which brings together a number of countries from all regions of the continent. A critical element of interoperability and collaboration is the ability to communicate with each other. This means that the official languages of the continent need to be taught, and recognized even in regions that do not speak or communicate in those languages. In this regard, the main languages English, French, Portuguese and Arabic, in no order of preference, need to have equal status and treatment, and places a responsibility upon all of us to learn these languages from each other to enhance better cooperation.

I am pleased that before you return to your capitals, there will be an opportunity to visit one of the well preserved African battle sites in the RSA, where King Dingaan's forces destroyed the British imperial colonial forces at the famed Battle of Isandhlwana, a clash of top end western artillery and weaponry defeated by African spears and shields!

Colleagues, ten years since the ACOC started, the world has gone through a “revolution of military affairs”, which were buzzwords in the late nineteen nineties. This forces us to rethink the nature of military professionalism and the use of armed forces in the post-Cold War era. Much thinking needs to also be given to developing civil-military relations in our countries, the linkages between Security and development and between Security and justice. Having said this, how do our experiences bode for creating a sustainable peacekeeping capability in Africa?

This is against the background that as we teach and develop our staffs at the war colleges, the critical reality facing us is that “over one hundred countries provide uniformed personnel in support of at least fifteen ongoing UN peace operations. Correspondingly, more and more nations train, resource and equip their armed forces to achieve proficiency in the unique military skill set required for a peacekeeping environment. This is particularly true in Africa. Not only do seventy eight percent of all UN peacekeepers currently serve in the African continent, but nearly half of ALL uniformed peacekeepers are African”.

We as South Africa are part of those statistics, in partnership with Other Nations wherever we are deployed, such as in the DRC, wherein we are part of MONUSCO and together with Tanzania and Malawi are in the Force Intervention Brigade, FiB.

This means that as we conduct our business at our colleges, part of the doctrine development has to be “the soldier and meeting the challenges of the times”! I am of the belief that as you deliberate during ACOC 2017, you will find a way to adapt to these existing and emerging challenges, and ensure that there is a smooth handover to the next ACOC 2018 host, Botswana.

As I take leave of you, I wish you very fruitful deliberations, and hope that each one of the countries and regions represented here will ensure that ACOC has membership of all the Member states of the African Union.

I thank you...