

**REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND
MILITARY VETERANS MS NN MAPISA-NQAKULA AT THE
LUNCH HELD IN HONOUR OF MILITARY VETERANS WHO
RECEIVED MEDALS IN RECGONITION OF THEIR ROLE IN
THE LIBERATION OF SOUTH AFRICA, Bloemfontein, 2nd
August 2012.**

Programme Director.

Mr President

Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Members of the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military
Veterans

Premier of the Free State

Esteemed Recipients of Medals

Secretary for Defence

Chief of the South African National Defence Force

Compatriots

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to start by congratulating all the combatants who were members of or People's Army Umkhonto we Sizwe, those who are here and those we honour in absentia, including posthumously.

Let me also congratulate our nation, represented here by the President, for acknowledging its heroes and heroines for their gallant contribution to our freedom, as we so fittingly do here today.

The significance of having the country, through its Defence Force, recognise these combatants as patriots, bring to full

circle the process of uniting our people through the reintegration of non-statutory forces to form one Defence Force that all serves and defends our people with pride.

It is also significant indeed that we gather to honour the founding leaders and other fellow combatants today, the 2nd of August 2012, being the 45th the anniversary of the commencement of the Wankie Campaign in 1967 in the then Rhodesia by MK members of the Luthuli Detachment.

The Luthuli Detachment and the Wankie campaign hold a special place in the history of our country as it represented the first engagement of Mkhonto we Sizwe and therefore set the scene for militant struggles emulated by many generations thereafter to free our people from the injustice of Apartheid.

Today we have gathered here, not only to celebrate this history, as the history of MK and the ANC, but also for us to send a message to all South Africans that together we share and own this heritage.

This morning we witnessed an emotional event of epoch making significance.

We regret that there are many who because of the protracted nature of our revolution could not live to see this day.

But we are consoled by that which we know without doubt – that the founders and members of the High Command who served Madiba, whom God has kept to witness this day, would be proud.

We also have an opportunity today, for the nation to thank the families of these combatants for the sacrifices they had to make, to share their loved ones, and in fact painfully surrendered them, to the struggle for liberation. We hope that the token of this parade can symbolise to you the gratitude of our people.

I am humbled to stand before you – you who have given so much to rescue your country and all of our people from perpetual dehumanisation and oppression.

This day is commemorated in recognition of your sacrifices and the hardships you have endured during our fight for freedom. For the conscious decision you have made to selflessly choose to be separated from your homes, family and friends, and the

effect that the hardships you endured have had on your own lives.

You have in the cause of the liberation of this country, experienced the suffering and horrors of liberation wars throughout the fight against colonialism not only in South Africa but in the southern Africa region.

It is fitting therefore that on this day, we as government, should reaffirm our commitment to uplift the conditions of life for all our veterans and their families. We have to do all we can to ensure that the needs of all our military veterans in particular those from the non-statuary forces have access to social and economic support.

The law already provides for this and it is upon us as a government created out of struggles of these veterans, to create the necessary capacity to make this legal requirements a reality.

It is the best honour we can ever hope to give to those who fought for our freedom without expecting reward.

The establishment of the department of military veterans has given us an opportunity to create a platform to access the needs of our military veterans in an efficient and coordinated manner. We are mindful of the weaknesses that exist in the system and capacity of the newly formed department and we have committed ourselves to tackling them as a priority.

This will mean that we need to move forward with the speed with the implementation of the programmes that will benefit our people, who have waited for such a long time.

We also acknowledge, in all fairness, that many of our veterans of our struggle together with their families, have to this day bore their pain on sacrifices made, with dignity and patience.

Their plight can no longer be about promises we make, but we humbly urge them to allow us, although in this late end, to correct what has been a serious error that has become a thorn and embarrassment to the proud history of our people.

We shall endeavour to do all what is expected of us to make sure that our veterans receive what is due to them and are supported including their families as expected.

I welcome you all to this Luncheon, and invite all to join us in saluting our heroes.

I thank you.