



Statement of the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Hon NN Mapisa-Nqakula, on the occasion of the briefing the National Assembly of the Parliament of RSA, 23rd April 2013, Cape Town

Hon Speaker and Honourable Members,

We welcome the opportunity given to us to present this statement and thank the Presiding Officers for their positive consideration of our request in this regard.

As government, our imperative to fully account and report to our people through their representatives in this House remains an important consideration in the execution of our mandate.

Since this Executive Statement follows our comprehensive briefing to the Joint Standing Committee on Defence, we will not dwell much on the issues of background.

However, it is important to note that South Africa signed a Defence Cooperation MOU with the CAR in 2007. This followed decisions of the AU Peace and Stability Council for the member states, “in the name of African solidarity” to assist with the post conflict recovery of that country. South Africa, therefore did not just decide on its own to go into the C.A.R.

The initial deployment had ranged between 30 and 85 members over a five year period. The MOU provided that it shall remain in force for a period of 5 years and can be extended by means of an Exchange of Notes between the Parties through the diplomatic channel. It provides further that the termination of this MOU **shall not** affect the implementation of the other agreements, conventions or contracts concluded under this MOU, except if the Parties have provided otherwise. In line with this, after extensive negotiations, the MOU was renewed in December 2012.

When the security situation in the CAR deteriorated earlier this year, the government made an assessment that resulted in the deployment of 200 additional troops in the CAR as a protection force for the trainers and the military assets that were already in that country. This was very important because a contingent of unarmed SANDF trainers and South African government assets were in the CAR. It was also important to ensure that South African military assets in the CAR do not fall into the wrong hands.

We had also taken a decision to continue monitoring the situation in order to inform further action, if necessary, to protect our personnel and our assets.

On 11 January 2013, CAR President Francois Bozize and the rebels who sought to overthrow him, reached a deal to create a coalition government with the country's political opposition. This agreement, facilitated by the regional body ECCAS, would allow Bozize to stay in office until 2016 with the provision that a prime minister will be appointed from the country's political opposition.

It is important, in this regard, to appreciate that, prior to the recent conflict, the CAR was a fragile state slowly recovering from decades of instability and ***coup de tats***.

Speaker,

Let me assure all our people that, South Africa's involvement in the Central African Republic, just as was the case in Burundi, DRC, Sudan and elsewhere, has been in pursuance of our international obligation to ensure stability and peace in the continent.

As we have indicated before, our foreign policy is fundamentally based and designed for the furtherance of South Africa's national and strategic interest. The Freedom Charter directs that "There shall be peace and friendship, South Africa will respect the rights of other states and will strive for peace."

Our foreign policy objectives are based on the need to build a better Africa and a better world and recognize that the future development of our own country is intrinsically linked, first and foremost, to that of the Continent.

There is no possibility of developmental and economic success for a South Africa that is surrounded in a pool of instability, war and hunger around the continent.

A key principle that informs our foreign policy is the "diplomacy of ubuntu", reflected in the idea that ***we affirm our humanity when we affirm the humanity of others***.

In line with the character of a democratic society we want to build, South Africa chose a diplomatic policy based on the need for peaceful co-existence and friendship with our neighbours.

This is in direct contrast to the Apartheid approach of deploying the previous SADF for cross border raids killing innocent civilians within our continent. Members of the official opposition who differ with our policy of friendship, themselves former members of this previous SADF, will wish that their own involvement as members of that Force should be forgotten.

They will desperately want to exploit any negativity about the pursuance of our policies to call for this country to dump the plight of the continent.

As part of this, they have used the mainstream media to build a consistent campaign to distort the mission of our soldiers in the CAR.

The spokespersons of the DA almost thanked their Gods for handing them the gift of the loss of our soldiers so close to the next general elections. This is done without any iota of shame and kindness. When the eyes of the nation are filled with tears, theirs only saw how these tragic deaths will justify the resuscitation of calls for a “motion of no confidence” in a democratically and popularly elected government.

Not once, have the reports about this mission ever emphasised the heroism of our soldiers, selecting to deliberately project an image of a defeated force without giving due recognition to the valour of the 200 SANDF troops who fought for nine hours against a group of 3000, repelled the threat, killing over 700 and suffered minimal casualties.

This urge for a negative slant, to distort the record of history and not accord hero status to these soldiers is regrettable. Those bent on this campaign, have even advance to vulgarity by the opposition, depicting our soldiers as mercenaries who were deployed without official status in the C.A.R. We will however not allow for their memory to be tarnished and used to score political points.

We will, even if the established media refuse to hear this, continue to speak for them as they are no longer here to represent their own honour.

Failure to report the genesis of our deployment to the CAR, is complicit on the part of the media. To ignore all recorded facts about the AU Peace and Stability decisions about the CAR before South Africa's involvement, choosing simply to project the coffee-table talk of the opposition, is collusion of the highest order in a sinister plot to undermine our policy.

Assuming that the allegations by the opposition are true, that will mean that the South African government, the AU and the United Nations went into the CAR under the guise of helping the recovery of a country "that was not really experiencing effects of decades of civil wars", to support a peace deal "that was never signed"; to ensure the stability of a Great Lakes region "whose fragile peace was never at risk" and protect the rights of the vulnerable citizens who "were never living with the threat of fear, hunger and violence."

Of course, battles and military operations, particularly in foreign lands, are naturally froth with negative aspects. So if you are in the game of

negativity, you will always have plenty to go around, and plenty to twist and suit your context.

Nowhere in the world has a government ever been asked to bear its security plans so nakedly to the point of compromising our strategic defence capacity.

We have seen a disturbing trend where members of this House and some remnants of the old order SADF have leaked strategic information about our troop movements and strategic positions which were widely broadcast in the media. The question we ask is, “for whose benefit was this release of information?” Certainly not for our country as this information puts the lives of our deployed soldiers in danger. Whatever our differences, is it not possible for us to restrain the salacious love for headlines so as to protect the integrity and security of our own country?

Hon Members, as you would recall, during our brief to the Joint Standing Committee on Defence, we did indicate that when the security situation deteriorated, in January, and after the signing of the Peace deal, UN representative Madam Vogt, called on SA and the other foreign troops not to withdraw their respective deployments in that country. Recently, I was approached by Madam Vogt, the UN representative, who expressed shock and concern, that she received an e-mail from the DA’s David Maynier who is investigating whether I as Minister had lied when I indicated that the UN representative has asked SA to remain in the CAR. It is a desperate attempt at finding something, anything at all, to embarrass the SA government and its respected standing in the UN system. This is not how we are supposed to engage with problems of our country. I am here in the

same country as Hon. Maynier, he has never asked me for evidence of this call as made by Madame Vogt. For evidence of Madam Vogt 's statement of the 24th of January 2013, he could have simply googled her name.

Hon Members,

South Africa will continue participating in the multi-lateral partnerships to ensure peace and stability in the region. While the loss of our soldiers is regrettable, it is important that we learn the lessons from such a loss, but not abandon the cause to build a better continent and end the human suffering of fellow Africans.

This mistake has been made before. In 1993, the world watched in horror as 18 American Soldiers were killed and dragged through the streets of Mogadishu by Farah Aiddid's rebels. They were part of a team that provided security for humanitarian relief in Somalia. The US government was then forced to withdraw its soldiers as people demanded to know why their soldiers died in some insignificant African country not linked to the US interest.

We know now that, before that withdrawal, the US special forces had been successful in their mission of capturing top the Aiddid's generals, despite the unfortunate loss of 18 members. We also know now that although Americans then did not see how Somalia was any of their business, the withdrawal of US forces resulted in Somalia degenerating into a failed state. As a result, over the past 20 years, the Al Shabaab militia grew more

powerful and piracy activities along the Somali east coast developed unwatched. This, as we know, has resulted in the capture of goods and abduction of people in boats and ships, including Americans.

The dumping of Somalia by the US troops in 1993, has resulted in the single biggest maritime security issue for the whole world today, simply because someone convinced Americans, wrongly so, that Africa was not worth their attention and sacrifice.

Our people, who have benefitted immensely from the generosity of human solidarity, should not now be taught to be indifferent to the suffering of others and to distrust their own government.

Speaker,

The South African government will always endeavour to adhere to the constitution in executing its mandate. We believe that we have done so even with troops deployment. However, if any administrative mistakes are identified about the flow of communication, particularly with Parliament, it will be a pity for that to be exploited to vilify this mission or our work in the continent in general. We stand prepared to take the lessons of the C.A.R mission, both in terms of operational planning and communication, to ensure strengthen ourselves in future deployments.

I thank you