



the sandf

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Department:  
Defence  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MESSAGE OF CONDOLENCE BY THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE SANDF AND PRESIDENT OF RSA, MR JG ZUMA AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE OF THE SANDF MEMBERS WHO DIED IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, TSHWANE

02 April 2013

Members of the families of our fallen soldiers,

The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans,

Ministers and Premiers,

Deputy Ministers and Executive Mayors,

The Chief of the South African National Defence Force,

The Secretary for Defence,

Members of the Plenary Defence Staff Council,

Members of the Military Command

Generals, Admirals, Flag Officers

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I salute you all today on behalf of the Government of South Africa and on behalf of the commanders and soldiers of the South African National Defence Force.

We humbly greet you all in the name of the fallen heroes of the South African National Defence Force.

We have gathered here to pay tribute to our young servicemen who were part of the South African National Defence Force contingent who lost their lives in combat last week.

The attack on our base in the outskirts of the capital of the Central African Republic, Bangui, saw the loss of 13 young and brave men and resulted in the injury of 27.

The ceremony to receive their mortal remains was held on Thursday at the Waterkloof Airforce Base, whilst the injured servicemen are being cared for at 1 Military Hospital.

Bereaved families,

Compatriots and friends,

From every corner of our country, South Africans have expressed their pain and outrage at the death of our soldiers.

The 13 heroes who bravely fought to protect their own are the following:

1. Corporal Mokgadi Darius Seakamela,
2. Corporal Ntebaleng Andrew Mogorosi,
3. Lance Corporal Daniel Sello Molara,
4. Lance Corporal Lukas Mohapi Tsheke,
5. Rifleman Lesego Maxwell Hertzog,
6. Rifleman Zamani Jim Mxhosana,
7. Rifleman Xolani Dlamini,
8. Rifleman Vusumzi Joseph Ngaleka,
9. Rifleman Karabo Edwin Matsheka,
10. Rifleman Khomotso Paul Msenga,
11. Rifleman Maleisane Samuel Thulo,
12. Rifleman Motsamai William Bojane and
13. Rifleman Thabiso Anthon Phirimana.

We salute them and honour them for the supreme sacrifice they have paid for the achievement of peace in Africa.

They fought side by side as true soldiers, fighting off a large group of rebels who had attacked the South African military base.

Though it may seem as they were outnumbered, they were able to hold their own in a battle that lasted over 9 hours. As South Africans we should be truly proud of these soldiers.

There are those who merely talk about South Africa and our wonderful freedom, rights and privileges and the need for peace and progress in the African continent.

Then, there are those who are always ready to act to protect the integrity of the Republic of South Africa and to contribute to the building of a peaceful and prosperous Africa.

Our fallen soldiers were in that latter category.

The tears of grief from the families are both inevitable and deserved, because of the calibre of men we have lost. To the families, your pain is shared by thousands of South Africans in many corners of the country and the continent.

When future generations ask what kind of men and women these were, who gave so much of their lives to the service of the people of South Africa and the continent, we will be able to boldly say how special they were, to put their own lives at risk for such a noble mission of building peace in the continent.

Compatriots,

This is a period of mourning, a period in which we must pay our respects and honour these selfless compatriots who remained true to the oath of office that they took when they joined the SANDF.

Unfortunately, there are those who have decided to use this period of mourning to try and dishonour the memory of our heroes by peddling various unfounded allegations and conspiracy theories.

There has been a deliberate attempt to cast doubt and distort the purpose of Operation Vimbezela, our mission in CAR.

We will not be side-tracked by those who are on a perpetual campaign against this democratic government.

Let me emphasise that we reject any insinuation that these soldiers were sent to the CAR for any reason other than in pursuit of the national interest and the interests of the African continent.

Our national servicemen died for a worthy cause. They died in defence of the country's foreign policy.

They died defending our commitment to the renewal of the African continent, and to the promotion of peace and stability which would lead to sustainable development in Africa.

Our foreign policy is premised on the vision of building a better Africa and a better world.

It is built on the foundation of Ubuntu and an understanding that we cannot be an island of peace and prosperity if our neighbours still battle with conflicts and poverty. We believe that as an integral part of the African continent, we must develop together with our neighbours in the continent.

Our belief in a free and prosperous Africa dates back a century.

Our ultimate vision of the type of Africa we want to see, is best encapsulated in the April 1906 essay by one of the founding fathers of this free South Africa, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, entitled; "The Regeneration of Africa".

We are inspired when Dr Seme states;

"The brighter day is rising upon Africa.

Already I seem to see her chains dissolved, her desert plains red with harvest, her Abyssinia and her Zululand the seats of science and religion, reflecting the glory of the rising sun from the spires of their churches and universities. Her Congo and her Gambia whitened with commerce, her crowded cities sending forth the hum of business, and all her sons employed in advancing the victories of peace-greater and more abiding than the spoils of war."

This is the Africa that these heroic soldiers sought to build and it is this Africa that their children and grand children must live in.

Inspired by such a vision, South Africa sent soldiers to the Central African Republic, in response to a directive of the African Union of 2007.

During that year, the African Union Peace and Security Council directed that its member states should, "in the name of African Solidarity" provide support for the socio-economic recovery and the consolidation of peace and stability in the Central African Republic, which had gone through periods of instability.

Measures proposed included among others "Assistance towards the Defence and Security Sector".

In February 2007, South Africa signed the Defence Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding with the CAR (Operation Vimbezela), in line with this AU directive. The aim of this Operation was for South Africa to assist in the training of the CAR army.

The military training included the Protection Force, VIP Protection, training of group leaders, specialists and infantry, refurbishment of bases and barracks and the provision of equipment.

When the security situation in the CAR deteriorated in the late 2012, our 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.

These additional soldiers were not trainers. They were not deployed to train but as a protection force for the trainers.

The SANDF is continuing with its assessment and appreciation of the events that led to this tragedy. This assessment is standard in the Defence Force. It is necessary in order to avoid similar losses of lives in future and current deployments.

The problem in South Africa is that everybody wants to run the country. Government must be given the space to do its work of running the country to implement the policies of the ruling party that was voted into office by millions of our people.

There must also be an appreciation that military matters and decisions are not matters that are discussed in public, other than to share broader policy.

No country discusses its military strategy in public in the manner in which South Africa is expected to do in this country. Those who are engaging in this game should be careful not to endanger both the national interest and the security of the Republic while pursuing party political goals.

Compatriots,

We are continuing to consult the Central African region and the African Union on this matter.

I will tomorrow attend the Extra-ordinary Summit of the Economic Community of Central African States, convened by the chairman, the President of Chad to discuss the situation in the Central African Republic. We will be guided by the continent as to what to do next.

South Africa will continue to work for the regeneration of the continent, as guided by our founding leaders.

We are a country with a rich and noble history of building peace and friendship with the world.

One of the outstanding men to whom we owe our freedom, former ANC President Mr Oliver Tambo said in 1977 addressing the First Congress of the Angolan ruling party, the MPLA in Luanda in 1977.

He stated: "We seek to live in peace with our neighbours and the peoples of the world in conditions of equality, mutual respect and equal advantage".

In this vein, may the blood of our heroic soldiers, that has been shed so untimely, contribute to the building of lasting peace in the continent.

May it lead us to a period where there shall be an end to the unconstitutional changes of power and governments in Africa, where soldiers decide to take over government by force instead of through the ballot box.

The African Union Constitutive Act pronounces strongly its condemnation of unconstitutional changes in government. We remain committed to play our part to make peace, democracy and good governance take root in our beloved continent.

Compatriots,

As you would be aware, we meet as well just a few days after losing five of our soldiers in an air crash at Kruger National Park, whilst on a mission to protect our treasured resource, our rhinos. It is indeed a difficult period for the SANDF and the nation.

It is said that, "The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive".

These words fit all these fallen heroes who gave their all. They gave much to their work.

May the fond memories of all these fallen compatriots remain with us forever.

Sithi emindenini elahlekelwe, duduzekani. Siyazi kubuhlungu, kodwa amaqhawe ethu afele emsebenzini wokwakha ukuthula noxolo e-Afrika. Siyaziqhenya ngamaqhawe ethu onke.

May their souls rest in peace.

Mabalale ngoxolo.

God bless Africa.

I thank you.