



Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans
Republic of South Africa

Speech by Hon Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, RSA Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, on the occasion of the Parliamentary Debate on the President's State of the Nation Address, National Assembly Chamber, Cape Town

19 Feb 2013

Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly
President of the Republic, Mr JG Zuma
Deputy President, Hon KP Motlanthe
Cabinet Colleagues, and Deputy Ministers
Honourable Members
Fellow South Africans and Friends

Mr President, there are many who have already described your 2013 State of the Nation Address as both honest in its assessment of our nation's progress in the 20 years of freedom and a useful basis for our plans going forward. As the African National Congress we can't agree more.

On the occasion of this debate, therefore, we are presented with an opportunity to take a pause, and go back to the basics. To take a step back and remind ourselves of the foundation that forms the basis of our task in building and sustaining the democratic state.

In conceptualising the National Democratic Revolution, the ANC recognised that the first challenge facing our society, was the need to build a nation out of the divisions created by years of colonialisation and sustained later through the system Apartheid.

The recognition, that the racial and class stratification of our society has meant that South Africa entered into its democratic breakthrough of 1994, not as one nation, and this may have resulted in a situation where that political breakthrough could represent different meaning to different sections of our society. Hence the call for nation building as a rallying point to unite our people, and forge a common vision for South Africa. It is these basics, that I want us to look back to in this debate.

Hon. Speaker, as our country edges towards the third decade of freedom, the imperative for us as a nation to build national consensus on what should constitute the absolute priorities for our country.

This national consensus, should be able to assist the country across political and other divides to unite on a minimum program that transcends all sectors of our society.

In his address, the President urged us to look at some of the essential priorities on which we can agree, including and not limited to issues of education, health, poverty and the safety of our children.

He went on to present the National Development Plan (NDP) as an embodiment of our shared set of objectives, a common vision for a different South Africa.

In line with this need to develop a program of essentials on which we can agree, the NDP commits us as a nation to “accelerate progress, deepen democracy and build a more inclusive society.” It calls on South Africans to translate political emancipation, into economic wellbeing for all. Most importantly it strongly asserts that “it is up to all South Africans to fix the future, starting today.”

The President reported in his address last week that the government has accepted the thrust of the National Development Plan and offers it as a basis on which we should unite as a country despite our political affiliations. He has called for a collective effort when he reminded us that “no single force acting individually can achieve the objectives we have set for ourselves.”

Honourable members and friends,

Over the past four years or so, the departments constituting the government’s Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) cluster have engaged with the processes and made input into the development of the National Development Plan.

As part of the cluster, the Department of Defence has had a unique opportunity and we were fortunate that the development of the NDP coincided with process of the Defence Review ensuring alignment between the two.

The Defence Review, initiated by my predecessor, and which will be finalised by the end of the financial year, already positions the role of our Defence Force as a key national asset that can, without detriment to its primary functions, carry out directed actions to support national development.

In this regard, the Review also acknowledges that, the inherent potential of the Defence Force to support national development can be realised almost automatically as a direct result of its normal peacetime activities.

It is however, also important to understand South Africa's international defence obligations, within the context of its support to development.

The role of the military in supporting peace and stability in the continent is in line with our foreign policy objectives. These objectives, recognise the fact that South Africa's own development, cannot happen outside that of the continent and that our fortunes as a country, are dependent and linked to the success of the African story.

Situations of war and instability, in any part of the continent, are detriment to effective development and as a result may pose direct or indirect threat to South Africa's own national interest.

As part of this national consensus, it is important for all of us to understand and appreciate this principle, and consideration in the role played by our Defence Force in supporting peace and development within the continent.

Hon Speaker,

I am aware that recently, there have been attempts to present this important role as unnecessary, wasteful and without benefit to South Africa.

This assertion, in particular with regard to our engagements in the Mozambican Channel, the Central African Republic, and most recently the troops contribution to the SADC Neutral Force in the DRC, has at times been deliberately misleading and dishonest. As unconventional as it is I thought that we should use the opportunity of this debate to clarify these issues.

On Mali

In line with our commitment to democracy and stability in the continent, South Africa has on more than one occasion condemned the unconstitutional changes in government that took place in Mali, in March 2012.

We remain extremely concerned about the control exerted by the armed groups in northern Mali and their thwarted advance towards the south.

In particular, we have expressed concern at the senseless violation and destruction of the museums and other critical parts of the historical Heritage sites. These have included the holy shrines, infrastructure and manuscripts in Timbuktu, including the damage caused to the Ahmed Baba Institute of Higher Learning and Islamic Research.

As South Africa, we welcome efforts made by ECOWAS together with the AU and UN in providing a platform for mediation to find a lasting political solution to the Mali crisis. South Africa was part of the donors conference held in Addis

Ababa in January, and pledged \$10 million in addition to the \$15 million that we have pledged in the form of humanitarian aid.

As a matter of record, South Africa will not be contributing any troops to AFISMA as troops have been pledged by the ECOWAS region.

On the Central African Republic (CAR)

South Africa's engagement in the CAR is based on a Bilateral Defence Corporation Agreement and the AU Peace and Security Council resolutions on requiring member states to provide support for the socio-economic recovery and the consolidation of peace and stability in the CAR.

In line with this, South Africa signed a Defence Co-operation (MOU) with the CAR to assist in capacity building in the CAR Army. This military training assistance included provision of equipment.

As we all aware towards the end of last year there were reports of rebel activity and military threats to depose the government in the CAR.

In January this year, we extended the MOU for another 5 years and authorised the deployment of up to 400 soldiers, as part of the military cooperation agreement. The additional South African soldiers were sent to CAR as protectors, should the need arise, for the 26 trainers, and to ensure that the South African assets (vehicles and ammunition) do not fall into the wrong hands and used in the conflict that was developing in the country.

We have since welcomed the deal reached between President Francois Bozize and the rebels who sought to overthrow him to create a coalition government in that country.

On the insistence of the South Africa has not removed its troops in the CAR following concerns that the CAR situation may develop into another Mali situation.

On Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

We have been actively involved on a bi-lateral as well as multi-lateral level in striving to bring peace and stability to the Eastern DRC.

In the multilateral fora South Africa at present continues to support the MONUSCO deployment in the DRC through the contribution of 1, 250 troops.

Following the M23 rebel group takeover of Goma city in the Eastern DRC, on 20 November 2012, South Africa has been actively involved as a member state of

the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in finding a lasting solution for the situation in the Eastern DRC.

A joint strategy was developed by the Chiefs of our Defence Forces of the ICGLR and SADC, proposing that an intervention force be sent to the Eastern DRC.

The AU is currently engaging the United Nations on the strategy and only following this engagement, will it be implemented. Recent reports of South Africa having sent troops to go and fight in the DRC are therefore misplaced.

Should the strategy go ahead, South Africa will not be sending additional troops to the DRC. We have pledged to contribute a brigade to the intervention force by removing our current brigade from MONUSCO so as to serve under the intervention force.

I want to categorically reject recent allegations made in local newspapers as to endangering of the lives of our troops by moving them to the intervention force.

It must also be mentioned that, our troops have been deployed in the Eastern DRC for a number of years and are familiar with the terrain and the forces on the ground. South Africa remains committed to finding a lasting political solution to the problems that result in the destabilisation of the DRC as a whole.

It is important, Hon. Speaker, that the Defence Force continues to be seen, by all of us, as an essential national asset that should be protected from political postulations or used to achieve sectarian political interest. All of us should make careful consideration to avoid the dangerous temptation to play political football with issues of our Defence Force and keep it free of the influences of varying and competing political interests.

For our part as government, we will continue to ensure that the primary functions of our Defence Force will remain those of deterrence, defence and the protection of key national interests.

In a similar vein, it is important for all of us, both within and outside government to desist from the trend of viewing the Defence Force as merely as a cost centre that consumes enormous resources without any substantial reciprocal benefits to the country, and for it to be seen for its true value to the nation and its interest.

Informed by the requirements of the Defence Review, we will continue to engage with both the National Treasury and the Cabinet, on the appropriate resourcing of the Defence Force. It is our view that given the centrality of the Defence mandate to development and our national interest in general, the state should ensure that the capabilities of our Defence Force are not compromised by rolling budget cuts to the detriment of South Africa's role and position in the geopolitical set up.

If there is one area on which we need to quickly build mutual concern and consensus on is the need to protect the Defence Force as the primary defender of our national interest.

Honourable members,

Recent debates in the public arena have also necessitated the need for us to clarify the role of the Defence Force and its domestic obligations.

The Defence Force remains the guarantor of the nation's security and stability.

It is however also a key mandate of the Defence Force to create conditions of peace and stability so indispensable to economic development and the safety of citizens.

The Defence Force has therefore, in line with the requirements of the Constitution deployed its members in support of the SAPS when necessary.

The maintenance of law and order and the fight against crime still remains the central responsibility of the South African Police Services. Only in exceptional circumstances of a serious threat to law and order, should the Defence Force be called upon to assist the police. It is important that all of us resist the temptation to easily call on the Defence Force to conduct normal policing work as this could easily gravitate us into a militarised state reminiscent of the perpetual state of emergency.

As experienced in the past, this kind of action has the potential to erode the public confidence and trust in the Defence Force, a situation that can have dire consequences for the stability of the country.

Fortunately, despite the concerning scourge of crime, the country has since freedom in 1994 enjoyed peace and stability that obviated the need for our military forces to be called upon to assist the police on a frequent basis.

The Defence Force is also provided support to civilian authorities in the management of natural disasters, both at home and in the neighbouring countries.

This work is an essential part of the mandate of the Defence Force and is in desperate need for resourcing in order to continue rendering life saving assistance to communities in distress and to assist in rebuilding vital infrastructure.

Mr President, it is important to take full advantage of a wide spectrum of expertise and skills that resides in the military, and should be placed at the

disposal of the country. This is a resource that should be fully utilised to enhance economic growth and skills development.

Both the military and Defence Industry are repositories of scientific knowledge and technological innovation. This capacity directly contributes to the country's capacity for technological advancement and production to benefit the domestic economy and boost exports.

One of its recommendations of the Defence Review, in this regard, is the creation of the post of Chief Defence Scientist in the Department.

This will assist government, inter alia, to develop and harness expertise in the defence industry to create employment and produce products and technologies for domestic use and export.

These efforts will also require that the recruitment policy of the Department should seek to attract highly skilled young people, particularly in the area of science and engineering. These are skills urgently needed not only by the defence force but the country's economy as a whole.

Another opportunity in this regard exists in positioning our service systems to incorporate further education or training that helps prepare the member for a career outside the military. This approach can assist young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to obtain an education or training, while providing the Defence Force with its junior personnel.

We will also be expanding the current partnerships with institutions of higher learning to recruit more of our brightest young people for officer training into the Defence Force.

Mr Speaker, following Minister Nxesi's release of the report of the Task Team that investigated the process followed in effecting security upgrades at the President's residence, we decided to pay attention to those matters in the report in which the SANDF or the DOD has played a direct role.

We are of the view that those matters that are a subject of further investigation as recommended by the Task Team, including if any that involve the DOD, should continue to be dealt with through that process.

It is important that this investigation continues unhindered in order to ensure that we can account to the South African public about the corrective measures that are being taken in cases where any wrongdoing is established.

From an operational point of view, we have reviewed the work done in relation to the support that the SANDF provides to the President and made the following observations:

* A clinic facility has been built as part of the operational requirements of the Presidential Medical Unit under SA Military Health Services

* A helipad facility has been erected for the specific operational requirements of the South African Airforce

* Accommodation units for the various members of the SANDF who are required to perform duties in support of the President.

This work and the costs associated with it, is part of the operational requirements requested by various government departments involved in support of the President. Although the costs for these have are part of the total costs of the project, they should be seen as additional to the cost of the security upgrade on the residence.

The cost of these departmental requirements constituted the bulk of the total spend of the R206 m on the project, calculated at over R135 million. In terms of the report, the rest of the expenditure, just over R71 m was accounted as having being used for security upgrades as per the assessment of security agencies. These security requirements included physical security, evacuation systems and fire fighting capabilities.

The investigation found no evidence that any of these funds were used to build the actual houses of the President which were at completion level at the time of his appointment in 2009. There has also been no evidence suggesting that the conclusion of the Task team investigation was wrong, except general statements of painful accusations and baseless suspicion.

As I have indicated, the process of approval and procurement related to the operational requirements of departments, including the DOD, will also be subject of the same investigation announced by the Minister last month.

For now, it is our decision that the decision to increase the initial size of the medical facility in the residence to a bigger clinic outside given the perimeter of the residence was wrong and miscalculated. In this regard having assessed both the location and size of the clinic facility, it is our view that, save for minor adjustments, the clinic has adequate capacity to serve both the requirements of the President whenever necessary as well as provide a service for the community of Nkandla.

Discussion amongst the various role players, including the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health have started to effect this decision.

It is important for me to indicate that even with the pending investigation on these matters, government can already acknowledge lessons learnt from some of the mistakes as reported by the task team.

I must however indicate, in general terms, that the burden of “where the buck stops”, has meant for politicians that even in cases where you may not be directly responsible for certain matters associated with your work, you nevertheless are expected to take final responsibility.

I have commented to some of my colleagues about the extent to which they personally get involved or aware of various work that is done in their official residences through the Department of Public Works.

It is common cause that work such as upgrades and general maintenance on properties, including costing and acquisition of contractors, is entirely under the direct care of Public Works officials at national and regional offices. The Minister is on record about his concerns regarding the weaknesses and levels of collusion that have resulted in inflation costs and the poor financial controls in the department.

Speaking for all of us, including for you Honourable Members, who also live in state accommodation here in Cape Town, we can agree that none of us are ever consulted about the work done in any of the official residences where we live as well the costs and budgets associate therewith.

Yet, should there be an enquiry about such costs, the impression is easily created that since money was spent in the property where you live, you are therefore somehow responsible.

At times, therefore, I have found it unfair and unreasonable, given our own experiences, that there are some amongst us here who find it strange if a politician living in such a house says that they have not been aware of the nature of the work and costs done at their residences by relevant departments.

Honourable Members, Colleagues and friends

The responsibility entrusted on us as public representatives is too serious to be subjected to political whims and the usual temptation to gain advantage over one another.

The attainment of freedom and democracy by our people, following decades of bitter struggle, was not just for a section of society, but a national achievement embraced by us all.

What therefore is our leadership task as this House in sustaining such nationalism and pride that our people were denied for so long before that.

We yearned to be free. It was for this reason that leaders before us convened across political divide in 1955 at Kiltown, and declared unity in action for a future society our people yearned for. That was their leadership task then.

If we are to emulate the revolutionary maturity of those who drew the freedom charter, the basis of our constitution, then we should recognise that the task that history lays before us, is that of uniting our people.

For if there is a common future for our people, then our task is to lead them on a common journey to such a future.

I thank you all

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