

18 Nov 2010

Programme Director

Director-General of the Department of Military Veterans, Mr. Tsepe Motumi,
Members of the media and other officials of government who are part of this morning's media session

Let me start by welcoming all of you to this brief exchange session between the Department of Military Veterans and yourselves. It is a first official press briefing for the recently established department of military veterans, which resides and accounts to the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans.

As you may be aware, Cabinet on 10 November 2010, that is last week, approved the much anticipated 2010 Military Veterans Bill. This is a welcome development in our march to profile and restore the dignity of men and women who, at some stage of their lives, sacrificed their very being for the greater good of all, for future generations and prosperity in our country.

As I will elaborate later, the 2010 Military Veterans Bill is a culmination of an intensive process of research, consultations and international benchmarking that was led by the Ministry through a task team of eminent persons with varied areas of expertise and experience.

Background

By way of background; let me share with you some of the historical milestones that brought us to this stage.

Following the President's announcement of the reconfiguration of the Ministry of Defence to include the portfolio of Military Veterans, the Minister subsequently appointed a ministerial task team to develop recommendations on governance of Military Veterans' affairs in our country. The task team, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Defence and Military Veterans was also tasked to develop organisational machinery required to meet the policy imperatives in order to address the plight of veterans.

The task team concluded its assignment in six months and the report was subsequently processed through Cabinet Cluster Committees and eventually served in full cabinet wherein the recommended policy options were endorsed in June this year.

As matters stand, the Department of Military Veterans was proclaimed by the President as a separate and stand alone department, within the ministry, in December 2009. This was done in order to create a department within government, whose sole responsibility is to govern and cater for the affairs of all former members of military organisations before dawn of democracy and those who served in the current South African National Defence Force (SANDF) after 1994.

The Ministry then appointed a Director-General for the Department of Military Veterans, Mr. Tsepe Motumi, in February 2010. In April this year, we unveiled a new logo for the department and temporarily acquired office space at Denel in Centurion, Pretoria.

A submission for the organisational structure of the new department was presented to the Minister of Public Service and Administration and approval was granted in June. A total staff compliment of 141 posts was approved. We have advertised and are currently in the process of filling 28 (top level) management posts. The second batch of posts will be advertised early next year.

In line with the above, it pleases us therefore that Cabinet, during its meeting last week, approved the 2010 Military Veterans Bill, which in the main ushers in a new dispensation for

Military Veterans Affairs in our country. The bill repeals the Military Veterans Act of 1999 and attempts to streamline all other veterans' related legislation into one comprehensive set of legislation.

Definition

More importantly, the bill clarifies the definition of Military Veterans as "a South African citizen who rendered military service to any of the military organisations, which were involved on all sides of South Africa's liberation war from 1960 to 1994; those who served in the then Union Defence Force before 1961, and those who became members of the South African National Defence Force after 1994, and has completed his/her military training and no longer performs military duties and has not been dishonorably discharged from that military organisation".

Objectives

In our view, this bill represents a complete break with the past and forms part of ongoing efforts to position the historical role that military veterans have played in the democratisation of our country, in its appropriate station.

At another level, parts of our objectives include the reconstruction of our history and heritage of our journey to freedom, democracy, and peace building in Africa and beyond.

The bill therefore intends to enhance the well-being and quality of life for military veterans through a steady realisation of socio-economic opportunities and in recognition of their selfless efforts to bring about change.

It also accords government, across all spheres, an opportunity to streamline and promote national standards regarding services to military veterans and their dependants.

In summary, the overall objectives of the bill is to recognise and honor veterans, ensure a seamless transition from active military service to civilian life, restoring the capability of military veterans with disabilities, provide a comprehensive delivery machinery and system of benefits and services for military veterans, position military veterans as part of the overall workforce of the country in order to enhance its prosperity and development, and more importantly, to ensure military veterans contribute meaningfully towards reconciliation and nation building.

Benefits and support

In essence, the bill also identifies key benefits and support that constitute government's obligation towards military veterans. These include:

- * Healthcare support
- * Housing
- * Business opportunities
- * Educational opportunities
- * Military pensions
- * Access to public transport
- * Facilitation of empowerment
- * Burial and honour
- * Job placement
- * Counseling

All the above benefits will be accessed on the basis of each individual's eligibility and qualification through a means test.

Structures

In conclusion, the bill makes provision for the official recognition of a national umbrella body for veterans viz: South African National Military Veterans Association (SANMVA), the formation of an appeals board to serve as a recourse on declined membership or eligibility to a specific benefit, and finally, an independent Advisory Board whose primary role is to advise the ministry on any matter that they regard as relevant to the veterans affairs. More importantly, it also confers the President to be Patron-in-chief of all military veterans.

In reality, as we said earlier, this represents a new epoch for military veterans in the history of our country. It is in line with other nations of the world on how they value and treat those who are, and were, prepared to serve and at times pay the supreme sacrifice in pursuit of a better future for all.

And finally as I conclude, the bill will be referred to Parliament for further processing. We further urge South Africans of all persuasions to participate in public input forum in order to enrich the final product of the bill.

I thank you.

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