

UNREVISED HANSARD

MINI PLENARY - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY, 9 JULY 2025

VOTE NO 23 & 26 - DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MINI PLENARY

Members of the mini-plenary session met at Good Hope Chamber at 10:00.

House Chairperson, Ms Z Majozi, took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Debate on Vote No 23 & 26 - Defence and Military Veterans:

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: House Chair, Deputy Ministers of Defence and Defence Military Veterans, chairpersons and members of the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans, the Joint Standing Committees of Defence, hon members, the acting Secretary of Defence, our Chief of the National Defence Force and the acting Secretary

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of the Department of Military Veterans, Chair, from the outset please join us to remember those members of the SA National Defence Force who fell in line of duty in the past year and specifically those who fell during the February this year in the Eastern DRC.

I would like also to take the opportunity to inform Parliament that all South Africans that since the announcement of the the Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, SAMIDRC phase withdrawal by our regional body the Southern African Development Community, SADC, all 2 250 members of the SA National Defence Force who were deployed in Operation Thiba, the mission part of SAMI DRC are all back home. On behalf of the Commander-In-Chief of our armed forces and the entire defence force family and the people of South Africa, I want to thank our men and women for their sacrifice and hard work in contributing to peace and stability in the region. Their efforts will never be forgotten and we welcome all of them back home.

Chair, meanwhile all our prime mission equipment has also been withdrawn from the Eastern DRC. It is currently in Tanzania being verified and will be loaded back by air and sea and will

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be back home. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the government of Rwanda for allowing us a safe passage through their territory into Tanzania and further wish to thank the government of Tanzania, Malawi and the parties involved in the safe withdrawal of our members.

Getting into the business of the day which is a debate on the Defence Budget 2025 Votes 23 and Vote 26 of the Military Veterans, we want to remind ourselves of our core business that the defense establishment is mandated by the Constitution to defend and protect the Republic of South Africa and its people, safeguarding South Africans' sovereignty, its people and constitutional order. The Department of Defence Budget is located within the Medium-Term Development Plan as approved on 26 February 2025 by the Government of National Unity and it continues to focus on the seventh administration. So, Budget 23 is also in alignment with adjusted the Budget of Defence strategic plan and the performance plan for 2025-26 Medium-Term Expenditure Framework as was Tabled by Parliament on 17 June 2025.

IsiZulu:

Ngicela lawo manzi. Lawo, ngiyabonga ... mina ngomile nje.

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English:

Chair, governance and accountability remain of importance in ensuring that defense that the defense utilizes scarce resources in the most effective and efficient manner in compliment in compliance with the regulatory requirements thus contributing to building a capable, ethical and developmental state. On 24 January 2024, the President did instruct the Department of Defence to develop a new set of policies and strategies that will articulate a long-term strategic trajectory that repositions SA National Defence force as a strong resilient force with enhanced military capabilities, firepower, combat readiness, capable of emerging strategic environment and specifically positioned the SA National Defence Force appropriating respect of emergent regional dynamics.

So, the above policy strategy review processes did culminate in three key documents. The Future Defence Capstone, the Military Capstone and the Future Military Capstone. These documents are currently under consideration. Meanwhile, the SA National Council directed its secretariat to develop a report on the SA Defence Review 2050 to make considerations for investing in sustainable modern defence force.

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Chairperson, now turning to the budget. This Department of Defence for the financial year 2025-26 has received a total budget of R157 billion, 103 million. At this budget R36 billions of has been set aside for compensation of employees which constitutes 64% of the defence allocation. Furthermore, in addition to this R36 billion, about R8,3 billion has been allocated as follows: More than R2,7 billion is for accommodation for leases and municipal services. More than R2,5 million is for peacekeeping. R1,4 billion is going to Armaments Corporation of South Africa, Armscor, as transfers.

Chair, R487 million goes to the Republic's assets contributing to SADC and peacekeeping processes. Also, R480 million is for the repair and maintenance of defense system. R300 million is for day-to-day maintenance and the emergency repairs and R200 million is for the procurement of vehicles and technology for border safeguarding, which leaves us only with R12 billion of the Defence Force to meet all our other constitutional mandates. In spite of our ongoing financial constraint, which badly affects our planning and operations, we will continue to reprioritise and do more with the little that we have received or which is at our disposal.

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This amongst others, we will include ensuring that our soldiers are properly equipped with uniforms, boots, protective gear, habitable facilities, catering for the needs of all including women soldiers and persons with disability, selected model units will receive priority upgrades ensuring safety and security, well maintained bases, sports and recreational facilities and the training areas, and soldiers that are deployed will also get priority support for all their needs during deployment.

Efforts are underway to rejuvenate our human resource capital profile by modernising it, maintaining and repairing also on our prime mission equipment, overhaul of our prime mission equipment. As the key National Defence partner we are also working hard to make sure that we resuscitate the SA Defence Force industry to readily partner with us. The Department of Defence expenditure resources expenditure and framework reflects a deliberate phase approach to sustaining a capable, young and cost-effective defense force within existing budgetary constraints.

The prioritised interventions are focused on aligning our organisational structure within the level of defence ambition,

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optimising the workforce composition through targeted recruitment and remastering strategies, managing the reserve force as a strategic search capability and restoring expenditure discipline to bring centre of excellence, COE, in line with physical realities. I cannot overemphasise the importance of ensuring effective governance and accountability of the entire defence force.

This priority reiterates the requirement for effective governance and accountability within the defence force to ensure departmental extensive compliance. This ensure a modern, effective, resilient and sustainable SA National Defence Force capacitated to execute mandated commitments. Procurement and human resources irregularities will be addressed through strengthen internal controls, transparent system regulatory oversight. The department recognises that effective resource management depends on the modernisation of our administrative departmental processes, hence the project that we have on digitising our systems within the department which is underway.

Chair, together with these efforts we wish to restore public trust, improve departmental effectiveness and ensure that the

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Department of Defence can fulfill its constitutional mandate to protect the Republic of South Africa while supporting the broader national strategic priorities to build a capable, ethical and developmental state. On the other hand, our primary focus of government is sustainable and rapid growth of the economy and removing all obstacles that stand on the way of growth. Concomitantly, defence will work hard to contribute to this objective by repositioning the SA National Defence Force industry to pursue strategic goal of economic growth and job creation.

In particular, Chairperson, the department will focus on the following interventions: To develop a defence industrial sector plan as a component of national industrial policy action, defence strategy that indicates how the department intends to maintain and develop industry capabilities that are essential to SA Defence Force Institute capital acquisition and also defend public private partnership policy and strategy in alignment with the national framework including developing the necessary nodal points and process thereof.

In this regard, South African Defence Force Institute, SADFI, must be positioned as a very important asset ready expansion

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to drive the national development and support government priorities for a capable state and becoming a strong local defence industry that creates jobs, develops technologies and ensures that SA National Defence Force is well equipped. So, co-operation with Denel, local companies and the international partners will be expanded to boost export and attract investment. The centrality of Denel is very critical in the maintenance and support of the SA National Defence Force.

Chair, again repositioning Armscor as an entity of the SA National Defence Force for equipment capability and modernisation will be intensified to make sure that maintenance repairs overhaul for midlife upgrades and modernisation of our prime equipment is guaranteed the longevity and mission effectiveness for our Defence Force ... and it has nothing to do with Mkhwanazi.

Chair, let me look at the military ombudsman. The military ombudsman continues to be an important instrument for civil military relations and civil oversight, as well as promoting good labour. We can announce that we will be hosting the conference on ombuds institutions on 8th and 9th October this year. Indeed, we are looking forward to receiving all other

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ombuds from other provinces landing and contributing towards them. The council control board also continues to excel on the global heritage and memorisation seeing utilising the Castle of Good Hope as a symbol of understanding, education, healing the nation building and it has instead been described as a world-renowned heritage site under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO.

We are looking at the mandate of the Defence Force Service Commission to make sure that we are compliant. In view of the new recognition of the unions in the defence force is also very important to relook at their mandate. Turning to the military veterans, this department derives its mandates from the Military Veterans Act which requires us to provide policy and standards on social economic support for military veterans and their dependents including benefits and entitlements to help realise the dignified, unified, empowered and self-sufficient committee of military veterans.

The budget for the department for this year amounts to R878 million. We wish to acknowledge the support that we are receiving from the presidency because of ongoing challenges in that sense. We want to take this opportunity to express our

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heartfelt condolences at the passing of the first Chairperson of the Presidential Task Team, former Deputy President, Mabuza, who gave a very valuable guidance in ensuring that pension benefits for military veterans are dispersed. We can say that since 2023, more than 437 military veterans have been provided at the cost of more than R217 million.

Through the Deputy Minister, we have established a transversal team to assist the department to unlock the ongoing challenges faced by the department. The database workstream of the presidential task team is currently in process of verifying military veterans across the country having zoomed to the Northwest they are currently in the Free State and there will be visiting all different provinces. Parallel to that process, is a verification on those that are already in the database to cleanse the database and ensure its integrity. In collaboration with sister departments, we have embarked on a project to repatriate the remains of fallen heroes and I can quickly run also to some of the benefits because I can see I have run out of time.

We have allocated money for the education benefits of veterans. We have allocated money also as we have indicated

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also for all the different socioeconomic needs of the veterans. The unaudited information of 2024 financial year indicates that 7 738 learners and students are provided with education support and continue their studies. To date, we have a number of them who have graduated. However, in terms of the overall budget, the national notes that the department tends to enter to intensify the rollout of military veterans' pension with the aim of reaching 9 600 deserving military veterans and who are dependent on this grant.

In accordance with section 3 of the Military Veterans Act, the means test will be applied to ensure that this benefit is directed only towards deserving veterans because of the financial threats that we are receiving. Let me take this opportunity to really thank the members of the portfolio committee for ongoing support, members of the department that also have been providing support. Chair I really want to thank you most sincerely for the engagements and the guidance and the support that we have been getting from yourself especially around issues of the budget.

I can say that the total allocation that has been given to the military veterans, 63% of it is allocated and earmarked for

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the disbursement of the benefits of the of military veterans so that, minus 100, only 27% will go to administration and staff but 63% of the money allocated to us does go to the benefits of the military veterans. Chair, let me take this opportunity by presenting the 2025 Defence and Military Veterans Budget of R58 billion for Votes 23 and 26. I want to thank you, Chair.

Mr M D LEGOETE: Hon House Chair, I would not go through the protocol but acknowledge it as acknowledged by the House Chair. Greetings to all hon members present here and the Chair. I'll start where I normally start that the state exists for three reasons. Any state loses legitimacy and credibility if it can't provide these three points. The first one is that the state must feed its people. The second one is that the state must develop its people. The third one is that the state must defend its people. All nations throughout the world are jacking up their budget to the GDP to defend their people because a state can lose legitimacy once it can't defend its people. That's the spirit that I want us to understand why we support this Budget Vote. We support it for the reason that we cannot allow or run a defenceless state or a defenceless country.

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I address you today with a sense of collective duty as South Africans to uplift, uphold and protect our gains as a nation work for us by a generation whose sacrifice all for justice and freedom through their unyielding faith in a better future for their children. They created the conditions that saw the Constitution take shape. Today, we enjoy freedoms, rights, protections under the law. Thanks to the Constitution and the sacrifice of this generation. Our Constitution rolled us together as a nation, and we must do everything we can to ensure that we retain an attitude of difference to it, valuing it, implementing it, and protecting it. It is in us protecting it that our National Defence Force plays an indispensable role. Without our Defence Force, we would not have the capabilities to back up our claims as a nation with force, if necessary, in a highly volatile world where the global geopolitics are at stable. This military backup must be in place as we advance in all other areas for without it all other areas could slip away in an instant, whether it's economic growth, whether it's education, whether it's health, whether it's peace and stability, all of it, you can't experience it, including job creation without the proper security, because nobody will bring their investment in a country which is not safe or which is defenceless. We stand

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for and do the pride of a sovereign nation. Our freedom has been hard won, and we are all bound to defend it.

The SA National Defence Force is impaired by section 200 (2) of the Constitution to be the guardians of our sovereignty, protecting it, including our territorial integrity. This is not an abstract mandate. It affects every aspect over development. We, therefore, need to ensure that as in all other areas of our progress as a nation, our Defence Force is kept up in a tiptop condition, well resourced, properly structured and fully prepared to navigate the complex security challenges that constantly arise in the world and in our region.

We cannot allow fiscal challenges to undermine capacity of this crucial institution in our democratic order. Whether you like it or not, the whole of Europe moves their budget from 2% of the GDP to 5% as a result of the developments in Tehran and Tel Aviv recently. It's only us here who have not kept up to our commitment. Our budget of the National Defence Force, it's still 0,7% to the GDP. Other nations have moved even up to 5% well most of the European Union nations.

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So, we need to do something as a nation now, leave any other allegiances or political affiliations and focus on national security. Therefore, hon members, let us view our Defence Force proposed budget for what it is, a strategic expenditure that protects our nation in the multitude of ways apart from defending our borders and thus the values of enshrined in the Constitution, it helps to ensure regional stability, without which there can be little internal stability. What happens across the borders directly affects us. It also offers a crucial backup for internal emergencies beyond our scope of other state departments.

The budget for 2025-26 financial year here is currently R57 billion. This represented a 1,6 real term decrease from our previous year, which is hardly ideal if you have to compare our budget with our counterparts globally.

The portfolio committee has engaged extensively with the National Treasury, the Department of Defence, Armaments Corporation of South Africa, Armscor, and Denel on the risk caused by underfunding in an agency of prioritizing Defence in our national budget so that the SA National Defence Force does

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not lose its capabilities. We cannot allow the Defence Force already under pressure on various kinds to decline.

Currently, the SA National Defence Force faces a challenge of aging equipment, limited funds to procure new equipment. These results in serious challenges. You could see recently with how we failed on the floods of Mthatha as a National Defence Force.

The SA National Defence Force requires long-term fiscal certainty to do the necessary strategic planning, especially given the complexity of the military procurement and development project. The SA National Defence is also rapidly aging force. And this has been identified by the committee as a key area of intervention, along with concerns around the high portfolio proportions of spending and compensation of employees. Concrete discussions are underway between the committee, National Treasury and the department to develop a rejuvenation plan that will give more young South Africans a chance to be in the SA National Defence Force while carefully managing the opportunities for aging soldiers.

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Hon members, as we have been in conflicts around the world, the modern battlefield has evolved. It is important that we have a SANDF that is agile and technologically advanced, so that we may respond effectively to cyber and informational warfare the complexities of technological battlefield and along a deal effectively with increasing number of climate induced crisis.

The committee has called for an urgent conclusion of the executive withdrawal, in all, reconsidering 2015 Defence review. The committee called for an urgent finalization of the Defence Capstone Policy Document. The committee has also called for Armscor and Denel to jack up their business. The committee is also calling for Armscor Denel and the Department of Defence to deal with issues of procurement so that we can properly armed the nation and be combat ready in terms of any attack of insurrection, of civil disobedience, or even a possible civil war. We must be combat ready and that can only be achieved once the Defence Force and Armscor and the Denel have jack up their business.

We also have to ensure that we finalise the database verification of the Military Veterans. It's now 14 years that

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we are doing the same thing without any progress. The committee is calling that we finalize that database verification so that all deserving Military Veterans can get their benefits and ensure that they live normally because any nation that cannot recognise those who sacrificed and contributed to its nationhood does not deserve a future because those Military Veterans can be turned into mercenaries that can attack our peace and stability if we're not going to take care of them. So, it's incumbent upon us as a nation to pay our allegiance respect to this hon Military Veterans. As the committee, we support the Budget Vote. Thank you very much. [Time expired.]

Mr E M NTSHINGILA: Hon House Chairperson, we would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to the family and comrades of former Deputy President, David Mabuza. As MK party, we once again express our neighbouring support to Lieutenant General Mkhwanazi for the selfless service that he is doing for this nation.

This Vote as presented is not aligned with the urgent development needs of our country. It fails to directly confront the critical issues of the welfare of former armed

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freedom fighters and our national security. And once again, it exposes systematic failure of a state in retreat from its constitutional obligations. The South African citizens are not simply demanding better service delivery, they are demanding a call to economic justice, dignity and inclusion. Yet, what is presented here is a plan of paralysis, not one of progress.

Our Defence Force stands on the brink, not due to external threats, but in the collapse of patriotic morality and consciousness. The Government of National Unity, GNU, continues to persist and illustrate an illusion while denying a reality where our soldiers are underfunded and the defence equipment are ... [Inaudible.] ... the navy and the air force. Therefore, we have observed that the SA National Defence Force spending has dropped to 0,7% of Gross Domestic Product, GDP, down from 1,5% in the late 1990s, haemorrhaging capacity while neighbouring states searched ahead. Of our four frigates, only one remains operational and have lost capacity in submarines, aircrafts and helicopters due to lack of maintenance and funding.

The public refuses to ignore the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, disaster where the SA National Defence Force soldiers

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died in underprepared, under equipped missions, exposing diplomatic ambitions as hollow rhetoric. Denel was once our industrial backbone, in defence its bleeding. It received R3,4 billion in bailouts by March 2024, yet R900 million remains frozen, tied behind the unmet conditions. Most funds are serving debts, not renewal.

Project Hoffmeyer batch AFV initiative collapsed after scrapping delivery of 264 vehicles, only 88 are planned with no single unit delivered by the end of 2024. Let's call this Budget Vote what it is - a defence abandonment act, not new Defence Review, no White Paper Roadmap, just a rolling collapsed in real time. We will no longer stand by as our forces decay while the President's plane takes off and SA Air Force planes are grounded, and our frigates rust in dock. Our soldiers deserve respect - not excuses. They deserve maintenance - not misdirection. They deserve dignity - not diplomatic bureaucracy.

The Department of Military Veterans' failure to maintain a credible updated database of veterans is equally alarming. Without a clean database, fraud risk increases, benefits are delayed, and dignity is denied. Despite repeated promises, the

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department still has not fully digitised the verification of the veterans' registry. Even more concerning is that the department's failure to settle payments to educational institutions on time, putting the future of students at risk. One is of the belief that the DA-led GNU is adamant in making sure that South Africans suffer further humiliation through Budget allocations.

The Auditor-General's office has flagged fruitless and wasteful expenditure, weak internal controls, and delays in payments across the department. The Department of Military Veterans for instance, paid only 66% of legitimate invoices within 30 days in 2023-24 financial year. This contravenes the Public Financial Management Act. Where is the accountability and where is consequence management? These failures are not isolated incidents, they are part of a wider crisis of state capability where these departments are failing to spend efficiently, failing to meet targets, and failing to inspire trust, and evidently failing to deliver services to the people as enshrined in the Constitution of the republic.

One of the most unacceptable failures of this Vote is the continued exclusion of women and persons with disabilities.

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There is no dedicated gender responsive budget framework despite lofty language. Only a fraction of pensioners and beneficiaries are women. The representation of women at Senior management Service, SMS, level is set to decline to 50% rather than increasing as expected. The Defence department does not even desegregate key performance indicators by gender or disability status. It is as if these groups are invisible to the system. If this government is serious about transformation, then it must practice gender equality and inclusive delivery.

The Budget allocation indicates that the Department of Military Veterans will spend R149,5 million, nearly 17% of its total budget on compensation of employees, while it is failing to finalise a veterans database, deliver houses on time or improve audit outcomes. Meanwhile, the Department of Defence spends billions on international operations, external missions and Denel oversight, yet we see no integration with civilians' departmental priorities.

Why are we not retraining military personnel to participate in disaster response, school safety, rural infrastructure and climate mitigation efforts? This Budget could have been a

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vehicle for justice, dignity, and development. Instead, it is a missed opportunity bloated bureaucracy, starved of vision and blind to the suffering of the ordinary people. Military Veterans are not just beneficiaries, but they are symbols of sacrifice. What is crystal clear in this Budget is that it disrespects their selfless contribution. Our Defence Force is not just a military entity, rather a tool for peace, development and inclusion, which this Budget ignores blatantly.

We are on the same Chair. The Budget lacks meat. The Budget lacks hydrogen. That's why we are thirsty. Therefore, as the MK party, we reject this Budget in its current form, not because we do not support our soldiers and veterans. But we do so because we refuse to endorse a system that prides itself with failing our veterans and our people. South Africans deserve a better Budget that fights poverty - not just wars, a Budget that builds homes - not just barracks, and a Budget that restores hope - not bureaucracy. And I thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majози): Thank you very much, hon member. I hope that hon Shelembe you also have a bottle of

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water because members today seem to be very thirsty. Thank you. You can take the podium.

Mr M L SHELEMBE: Chairperson, the Department of Military Veterans derives its mandate from the Military Veterans Act 18 of 2011, which aims to provide fundamental principles recognised by the state as governing the affairs of Military Veterans and for policy objectives in this regard. After 14 years of having this Act in place, this department is yet to implement its mandate to deliver benefits to the deserving Military Veterans and their dependants. The Act clearly stipulates its aim of providing a national policy and standards on socio-economic support to Military Veterans and their dependants, including benefits and entitlements to help realise a dignified and self-sufficient community of Military Veterans.

Sadly, the Military Veterans are still not treated with dignity they deserve due to the failure by the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and President Ramaphosa, the Patron-in-Chief. It is disgraceful that both of them remain unserious in ensuring that a dignified and self-sufficient community of Military Veterans is achieved.

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The Minister's foreword highlighted that the history of the Department of Military Veterans is characterised by weak legislation and leadership instability. This itself tells us that the Department of Military Veterans is not ready to deliver dignified services to deserving Military Veterans. The question we ask ourselves is for how long has this department been in crisis plagued by leadership instability and operational inefficiencies? The simple answer is since 2011 - 14 years - yet no improvement.

As I speak now, Military Veterans are crying, they sleep in unsafe shacks, some have not had food in the last two days or more. Chairperson, imagine if your loved ones died because the Minister and the President, with the Presidential Task Team, are failing to realise a dignified life of Military Veterans. The Presidential Task Team, the Minister, and the Department of Military Veterans officials have food on their tables whilst our men and women who dedicated their lives protecting this country, and its citizens are starving to death.

IsiZulu:

Ukulambisa omakade bebona kuyisono esikhulu phambi kukaNkulunkulu.

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English:

These men and women left their families, dedicated their time and risked their lives to defend and protect the republic and its people in accordance with the Constitution of the country. Today, they are yet to receive a comprehensive support such as pensions, houses, access to health services, education, burial support, subsidised public transport, facilitation of employment placement and facilitation of business opportunities.

To date, this department has not finalised a national database for Military Veterans. Provincial offices are still not fully functional. The call centre is non-operational. Military Veterans received no reply within 30 days to acknowledge receipt of their applications.

In quarter three of 2024, the department only delivered 37 houses against a target of 225. As the DA, we fully recognise all Military Veterans who rendered their services to any of the recognised military organisations, former statutory forces and non-statutory forces who were involved on all sides of the South African Liberation War from 1960 to 1994.

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I am elated that pressure from the DA during the sixth administration led to the promulgation of the long-awaited pension regulations for the Military Veterans, resulting in pension payments now being rolled out. But we are still not happy about the slow pace of the Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Jipa, in verifying and paying to Military Veterans.

We remain unhappy about the budget allocated to pension payouts. This budget will be depleted before the financial year, which will have serious implications on the lives of Military Veterans and their dependents. The DA will -in this seventh administration - put pressure on the Minister to implement these benefits as we did on pension benefit.

Chairperson, while the challenges facing our Military Veterans are grave and dangerously undermines our nation's security, I stand here with hope and determination. The DA remains unwavering in its commitment to fight for the dignity, rights and wellbeing of every Military Veteran who made the ultimate sacrifice for the great nation.

IsiZulu:

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Ngifuna kucace kuthi bha ukuthi uma kungukuthi ke lolu daba uNgqongqoshe akalusukumeli ... Akalusukumeli. Ngiyabonga, Ngqongqoshe kodwa uzolisukumela. [Kwaphela isikhathi.]

Mr C G NIEHAUS: House Chairperson, hon members, the EFF rejects the 2025-26 budget for the Department of Defence and Military Veterans. Allocated 57 billion for Defence and a paltry 878 million for Military Veterans, this budget betrays our soldiers, veterans and national security. It prioritizes international debt repayments over the dignity of those who defend our sovereignty.

Where is our defence strategy? The 2015 Defence Review meant to modernize the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, lies unimplemented gathering dust a decade later. The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans keeps on promising Parliament the so-called journey to greatness strategy document, which remains conspicuously absent. One more reason alongside her overall incompetence, why she must be relieved of her duties by the president.

Denel, critical to defence is in administrative crisis, failing to present annual reports or financial statements,

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exposing systemic failures. Armaments Corporation of South Africa, ARMSCOR, continues to fail the SANDF, as its main service provider and procurement agency. The disaster at ARMSCOR at Simon's Town dockyard underscores this neglect.

The EFF demands a national defence summit to update the 2015 Defence Review and forge a 10-year plan for a capable defence force. The budget reveals neglect, defence has increased to 57 billion is a 717 million real cut, taking inflation into consideration.

Air defence, maritime capabilities and landward operations are critically underfunded. Our borders are exposed, our skies vulnerable, our seas open to piracy. When floods struck the Eastern Cape, our grounded Air Force couldn't respond, a dreadful symbol of decline and betrayal of the flood victims.

The return of 2 billion to the Treasury of the semi-Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, withdrawal is indefensible. This could have restored Air Force flight hours or border security drones. Instead, it now services international debt that was recklessly incurred by an irresponsible Minister of Finance leaving our soldiers with outdated gear.

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The semi-DRC mission that costed 23 lives since December 2023 due to inadequate resources, shows the peril of underfunded deployments. The EFF certainly supports peacekeeping, but only with proper funding and strategy.

The Military Veterans budget of 878 million is shameful, barely exceeding inflation, it serves only 20% of all military veterans, delivering 500 houses against what is actually a 2000 backlog and healthcare for refractation. Corruption, including millions of rands for an unnecessary and pathetically and embarrassingly incompetent Deputy Minister, Richard Hlophe, cripples this department.

The EFF demands a 2 billion budget for the DMV. But then it must be placed under Public Finance Management Act, PFMA, section 100 administration and the incompetent DMV acting Director General, Ms Nontobeko Mafu, who must be suspended and charged in order to eliminate corruption.

Our proposed budget will deliver a 1000 houses, 25,000 pensions, healthcare for 30,000 veterans and 4000 jobs. The EFF opposes any funding for the Castle Control Board, which maintains the colonial relic of the Castle of Good Hope. No

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overstretched defence budget should support such symbols of oppression, nor should the castle be proposed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, World Heritage site. We reject celebrating colonial legacies.

The EFF envisions a defence budget of 114 billion, allocating 30 billion to the army for border patrols, 20 billion to the Air Force for helicopters, 15 billion to the Navy for frigate upgrades and 10 billion to refurbish one military hospital altogether, creating 22,000 jobs. For veterans, 2 billion would clear backlogs and deliver benefits, restoring their dignity. This budget is a national disgrace. It fails our soldiers, veterans and our whole nation.

In addition, we continue to shamefully sell weapons and ammunition to North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, countries that transfer those arms on to apartheid Israel to continue to commit genocide in Gaza.

The EFF rejects all of this mess with the utter contempt that it deserves, demanding a defence summit, a strategic overall, urgent action to fix the Denels and arms cause failures. And

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1,5% of gross domestic product, GDP for defence. We owe those who serve and especially those liberation heroes who served a capable SANDF and the Department of Military Veterans that delivers justice and security to our nation. Thank you.

IsiZulu:

Inkosi R N CEBEKHULU: Ngibonge ithuba Sihlalo we Ndlu, simi lapha kulemihla kungenxa yamaphutha eminyaka engamashumi amathathu eyedlule lapho khona bangena emandleni. Bazitshela ukuthi azikho izitha eNingizimu Afrika, angeke sibenazo izinselelo. Ngaleyondlela kwancunzwa kwancunzwa kwehliswa isabelomali sombutho, okuholele kulezinselelo uMnyango olahlekelwe umkhondo osuke ukuzo.

Ukuvulwa kwemingcele yaseNingizimu Afrika ngenye yezinkinga noma yezinto ezibangele ukuba sibe nalezinselelo ezikhona. Kuyadabukisa nokho ukuthi kukho konke sekwenziwe uMnyango ungabinakho ukuzikhandla nokunakekela ube nonembeza wokubhekela abafowethu abanikela ngezimpilo zabo ukuzabalazela ukuba likhululeke izwe lakithi.

English:

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We remain deeply concerned about the deteriorating state of SA National Defence Force. Our naval capabilities are near collapse, helicopters and fighter jets are so old that they must be stripped for parts just to stay airworthy.

IsiZulu:

Inhlekelele yezimvula ezehle e-Eastern Cape ikubonakalisile lokhu. uMnyango wembulwe izinge ngokubamba uyeka ohlelweni lokuthi kusizakale abafowethu nodadewethu abahlelwe yinhlekelele yezukhukhula.

English:

Our naval submarines are inoperative. Our warships are immobilized; it is an open secret that our maritime borders from Mozambique to Namibia are largely unprotected. This negligence has allowed foreign vessels to over fish in our waters, suffocating the potential of local fishing companies, especially small and medium entrance in the fishing industry.

The reality is that our soldiers were left under resourced in the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, forced to surrender, not because of a lack of courage or will, but because they

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lack basic supplies. This is a national disgrace, and a direct result of poor planning and misplaced priorities.

A large share of the budget continues to go towards personal cost. While we must honour those in uniform, the current wage heavy structure is unsustainable. The department faces an urgent need to rejuvenate its leadership and ranks. An aging command must create space for younger entrants to bring in energy agility and modern warfare tactics, yet there is no clear succession on rejuvenation inside.

Furthermore, the living conditions of our soldiers, particularly in Pretoria, remain deplorable. A country that cannot house its soldiers with dignity is not one that values their sacrifice. We call for an urgent refurbishment of military residencies and acceleration of procurement processes to equip our forces adequately. The budget vote should reflect our national gratitude.

However, veterans still suffer from delayed benefits, limited access to health care and exclusion from economic opportunities.

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The IFP accepts the budget vote and will continue to monitor question and propose solutions. We stand not in opposition to the Department of Defence and Military Veterans, but as a voice demanding that this budget delivers real security, real dignity, and real outcome.

IsiZulu:

Mhlonishwa Ngqongqoshe kuyadabukisa la khona abakhulu bombuso noma eMnyangweni bahlale bafuthwe ama-aircon kumakhaza, kuyashisa emahhovisi abo. Kuyashisa phandle kuyabanda emahhovisi abo kodwa babe bengakwazi ukunakekela izidingo zezwe.

Izwe lakithi lisenhlekelelweni uma singahlaselwa noma yiliphi izwe namhlanje kulama-IS okukhulunywa ngawo ngokusobala bayofika balithathe izwe. Bonke labantu abalapha eNdlini, bonke labantu abangaphandle bayoba imihambuma ezweni laboyisemkhulu nokhokho babo. Kuhle ke sikugcizelele ukuthi siyayeseka ibhajethi ngoba siyafisa ukuthi ayenze okuhle okuyokwenza kusize izwe lakithi ukuthi likhululeke kulobu bugqila nokuzithwala. Asithokoze.

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Mr S H M VAN WYK: Hon House Chair, hon members, hon Minister, and fellow South Africans, today I'm not going to come and stand here, and repeat all ... the previous speakers before me have spoken here; even those that will come after me and ... say the same thing. No, I'm going to speak about the uncomfortable truth ... the military veterans that the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, did not want to take into the new army in 1996, because these men and women were taken in by the old apartheid government in 1982 to become the SA Cape Corps, which we call the ...

Afrikaans:

... SA Kaapse Korps, SAKK. Die coloured [kleurling] mans en vroue was ingeneem en hulle het aan die verkeerde kant van die oorlog gaan baklei. Hulle was die mans en vroue wat by die ou army [weermag] wat teen uMkhonto weSizwe binnekant baklei het, voorgestaan het ... nie uMkhonto weSizwe nie ... nie uMkhonto weSizwe nie. By the way [Terloops] die SAKK het daar gaan baklei en ...

English:

... ever since ... It's a debate, chief. It's a debate. House Chair, can you protect me here quickly?

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Afrikaans:

Die SAKK het daar gaan baklei en tot en met vandag toe het hulle nog nooit hul military benefits [militêre voordele] gekry nie.

Toe President Mandela in 1994 oorgevat het, het hy gepraat van reconciliation. [versoening.] uMkhonto weSizwe was ingeneem, die Azanian People's Liberation Army, Apla, was ingeneem, even [selfs] die blankes wat deel van die ou apartheid army [weermag] was, was ook ingeneem. Hulle wat met strategieë en taktieke gekom het om ons mense in exile [ballingskap] dood te maak, was ingeneem, maar nie die SAKK nie. Hoekom nie? Omdat hulle kleurlinge is. Daar is ...

English:

... a certain type of hatred towards coloureds in this country. They were never taken in. Even ...

Afrikaans:

... die mense in Platfontein. Hulle was die sporsnyers van die SAKK in die ou army. [weermag.] Hulle sit nou nog in Platfontein. Daar was net huise vir hulle gebou. Daar was nie service delivery [dienslewering] aan hulle gegee nie.

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Minister, u weet daarvan. Ons military veterans [militêre veterane] van die SAKK geniet nie aandag in dié land nie.

Die DA se hon member [agb lid] kom staan hier en sê dat die DA is baie committed [verbind] om vir die military veteran [militêre veteraan] te kan veg. Julle, as die DA ... is nou al seker 19 of 20 jaar in die Parlement. Julle het nog nooit niks van die SAKK gesê nie. Die DA is sleg.

Die ANC ... Basil February, Ashley Kriel, Coline Williams, Anton Fransch was almal deel van uMkhonto weSizwe. Basil February was die eerste sogenaamde kleurling wat in combat ['n geveg] doodgeskiet was, maar nou nog ... u het nog nooit na hul families gegaan nie. Waar is hulle families? Moet hulle dan nie na gekyk word nie? Moet hulle dan nie ...

Jy lieg, Minister! Minister, jy lieg! Jy lieg! Jy soek nie die SAKK nie, Minister.

English:

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majosi): Hon Van Wyk? Hon Van Wyk?

Mr S H M VAN WYK: The PA supports Vote No 23 and 26 ...

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Afrikaans:

... maar ons gaan vir julle dophou. Ons baiza nie. Dankie.

English:

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon Van Wyk, don't leave. Yes, I've been calling your name because I want you to withdraw ... that hon members are lying. It is unparliamentary to say that. It is in the Rule Book that we were all given. It is unparliamentary to call hon members liars. So, please withdraw that.

Mr S H M VAN WYK: Hon House Chairperson, I was called a liar here. You did not hear.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): No, hon Van Wyk ...

Mr S H M VAN WYK: I withdraw unconditionally, House Chairperson. I withdraw.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Thank you very much.

Mr S H M VAN WYK: ... [Inaudible.]

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): No, you were done. You were moving.

Mr S H M VAN WYK: No, I was not done. I have 25 seconds left, Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): But I called you back. You were done, unless you still want to speak. You can proceed. You still have 25 seconds.

Mr S H M VAN WYK: House Chairperson, the hon Minister came and stood here, and said that there is a budget for military veterans, and that they will focus on the North West and the Free State. Hon Minister, the majority of SAKK military veterans are based in the Western Cape and the Northern Cape.

Afrikaans:

Vir wie gaan soek jy daar in die Noordwes?

English:

The PA supports Budget Vote No 23 and 26 ...

Afrikaans:

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... maar ons baiza nie. Ons gaan vir julle dophou. Saluut!

Mr W W WESSELS: Hon House Chairperson, the hon Legoete is correct that a state's legitimacy depends on its ability to defend its people and that we cannot allow a defenceless state.

The Minister, with all due respect, stood here today and used a lot of buzzwords. ... beautiful words like accountability, sustainable and effective Defence Force, regulatory oversight, removing all obstacles, repositioning, restoring trust and a Defence Review. We've heard a lot of that last one.

However, to articulate the reality of the South African military is ... not using buzzwords. Those words ... are the reality out there are ill-discipline, misconduct, unpaid troops, underresourced, missing billions, missing firearms, luxury vehicles procured, incapable, disaster, fiscal dumping, incompetence, outdated, mess, failure, rogue units, rogue generals, lack of leadership and a downward spiral.

The Minister is correct that there's severe financial constraints, that there's a shortage in this budget to

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actually resource the military to be able to defend South Africa and her people effectively. However, whilst that is the case, it does not currently occur that these little resources and these little funds are ... utilised effectively. ... the contrary.

If the hon Minister wants to effect a turnaround of the South African military and the SANDF, the only thing that should be done and that should have been said here today is that the Minister takes responsibility, that she condones those efforts to instil consequence management and that she condemns there where generals are misusing funds, where luxury vehicles are procured whilst troops do not have uniforms, whilst there's no equipment and a shortage of the necessary resources. That is what the political head of the Defence Force should do ... is stand here and condemn the procurement of unnecessary luxuries. However, we never hear that, hon Chairperson. To restore trust requires transparency.

Then the hon Minister must release the Moorhouse Report. That will restore trust in the South African military and Defence Force. Without doing that, it will remain an ineffective, failed entity and it will remain a Defence Force which is and

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will remain the laughing stock of the world. We cannot defend our borders, our integrity and our sovereignty whilst that is what is occurring in the Defence Force ... money that is misused. We call on you, hon Minister, to act and to instil consequences and to condemn those actions.

Ms L M NGOBENI: I think before I start, I want to salute the men and women who we see there at the back. We want to salute you because you are brave. We want to salute you because you deserve our full support and you deserve a budget that is worthy of your sacrifices. You remain a source of our national pride. Unfortunately, this is a budget of betrayal and Action SA rejects the defence surrender.

I warned the Minister during the July 2024 budget deliberations that without urgent reforms, South Africa's defence capability was at risk. The Deputy Minister confirmed our worst fears, admitting that we may not be able to defend our nation against real threats. This is a budget of betrayal and Action SA rejects the defence surrender.

We're told that this budget increases by 3%, yet in real terms it shrinks by 1,6% after inflation. What is good about a

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bigger number if its buying power is eroded? Our air force's Gripens stand stripped for parts. Waterkloof's Hercules aircraft gather dust. This is a budget of betrayal and Action SA rejects the defence surrender.

Force employment, which is the backbone of operations, is slashed by over R1,5 billion, a 20% cut, while troops guard borders at Musina and face violent threats in Mozambique. The withdrawal from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC, is painted as realignment, but in reality it's a retreat dressed up as strategy. This is a budget of betrayal and Action SA rejects the defence surrender. Meanwhile, our navy ships sit docked, unable to protect vital sea lanes. Illegal fishing and piracy thrive unchecked.

Cyber defences, critical today, remain only a theory because there is no money to fund them. Yet, R101 million will be wasted on travel and R60 million on advertising. The real enemy is within - misallocation, mismanagement, ministerial vanity.

The department's strategic plan offers no real answers, no bold reforms to fix the bloated wage bill, strangling

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operations. Young recruits, drone pilots, cyber specialists are shut out while the old soldier for life doctrine drags us down. The long ignored 2015 Defence Review gathers dust. The so-called journey to greatness remains secret. Soldiers guard border fences with rusted rifles and dry fuel tanks, while leadership hides behind paperwork, far from the front line.

Let us be clear, this budget does not secure South Africa. It signals surrender. It does not reform. It delays collapse. This is a budget of betrayal and Action SA rejects the defence surrender.

Before I step down, let me close as I began, by saluting the men and women of the Defence Force. You stand as a source of national pride and discipline, and yet you are often left to fend for yourselves by those who stand behind you. May we find the courage to match your sacrifices with real action. Action SA rejects this budget. Thank you.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS (Mr B H Holomisa): Hon House Chair, hon Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, my colleague, Deputy Minister Mkhungo, hon members of the Portfolio Committee and Joint Standing

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Committee on Defence, leadership of the Department of Defence and SA National Defence Force, SANDF, distinguished guests and fellow South Africans.

There is no doubt that when we entered this department as the executive, alongside the new members of the Portfolio Committee and Joint Standing Committee on Defence and Military Veterans respectively, we hit the ground running.

The common denominator of our engagements has been our collective determination to confront the negative legacies we all inherited. In doing so, we have taken time to understand the depth of the challenges.

This journey has not been about assigning blame but about reclaiming direction. That is why we are actively engaging with the audit committee on the Auditor-General's, AG, report and its recommendations, particularly in addressing the adverse audit outcomes of the past four years.

Our focus includes resolving procurement irregularities, establishing a credible and verifiable asset register in line with the audit action plans and tackling several other

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longstanding issues that have hampered effective governance across our communities.

The people of this country have grown increasingly concerned about the state of our national security. Many have questioned why our soldiers are deployed on external missions while internal threats continue to escalate.

In this financial year, we must, in partnership with Parliament, take a strategic decision on how our military can enhance internal security in line the constitutional mandate of the Republic of South Africa.

Part of that decision must involve a thorough assessment of whether we have appropriate equipment and capabilities to respond effectively to emerging threats, including those posed by natural disasters.

South Africa continues to receive many people who come in search of better opportunities, education and improved livelihoods. While we remain committed to regional solidarity, the ease with which people move across borders within the

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Southern African Development Communities, SADC, region demands our collective attention.

This is not a challenge South Africa can address alone. The South African government must elevate this issue with SADC structures to promote a coordinated and regionally aligned approach to immigration.

People from Europe, Asia and the broader African diaspora also move freely across our borders. And increasingly, we find ourselves sharing limited resources without harmonised policy framework. This matter must be addressed, not in isolation, but through regional co-operation that ensures migration is managed fairly.

Yes, the security of this country has not been sufficiently prioritised in the past and this poses a threat not only to our national safety, but also to our economy. That era must come to an end. The time has come to place security and the fight against corruption at the heart of our national agenda.

The Defence Department, itself, has not escaped the tentacles of state capture. Some individuals are already before the

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courts, the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, is investigating others, even a former Minister stands accused in this department.

But we must be clear, fighting corruption is not the sole responsibility of the SA Police Service, SAPS, it is a collective obligation for all of us who still believe in a safe, ethical and democratic South Africa.

Let us be honest, the allocation of R57 billion is not a symbol of national generosity, it is a strategic lifeline, a signal to our people and to the world that South Africa still values the defence of its people and the preservation of its democratic order.

Chairperson, the integration of ... [Time expired.] ...

IsiXhosa:

Kulungile, uyakundipha ngenye imini sana.

Mr S N SWART: House Chair, the ACDP believes that blessed be the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Peace-

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making and peace enforcement are important mandates of the SANDF.

We are, thus, grateful that our troops have returned safely from the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, deployment, whilst still mourning the loss of 23 brave soldiers since 2023.

We, too, wish to thank and salute all members of the Defence Force, the generals that are here, who are prepared to pay the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives for the constitutional cause of defending South Africa and defending their fellow troops.

At the same time, we also believe that the art of diplomacy is an iron fist in a velvet glove. Do we still have that iron fist to be effective as a Defence Force and to be effective in our efforts at diplomacy?

The ACDP has consistently called for additional funding for the Defence Force. Underfunding contributed to the debacle in the DRC. And it is disgraceful that defence spending stands at a paltry 0,7% of Gross Domestic Product, GDP.

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The hon Deputy Minister warned that the Defence Force would be hard pressed to meet a conventional threat, which is, thankfully, unlikely. What is more alarming is his assertion that the Defence Force will be even hard pressed to deal with large-scale civil unrest in the country.

Let us be reminded and thankful that the Defence Force stabilised the country during the 2021 widespread civil unrest in KwaZulu-Natal and parts of Gauteng.

What is deeply alarming is today's reports of social media fuelling possible unrest in KwaZulu-Natal. This, following provincial Commissioner Mkhwanazi's explosive allegations.

We see media reporting about #Julyriot201, similar to that which fuelled the 2021 unrest.

It is crucial that crime intelligence and military intelligence closely monitor the situation, and that a rapid deployment force is on standby to assist SAPS, should the need arise. This will serve as a deterrent to repeat what occurred in 2021, which caused the loss of many, many lives.

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Now, Chairperson, Members of Parliament, MPs, stand here and we say we reject the budget. But we have the power to amend the budget.

And we as the ACDP welcomes the fact that the portfolio committee is approaching the Appropriations Committee to increase the funding for the Defence Force.

Let us use the powers that are entrusted to us. It is not helpful to wring our hands and say there is nothing we can do. The Defence Force requires additional funding. I thank you.

Ms C T NONTENJA: Hon Chair, the UDM is deeply concerned about the state of our Defence and Military Veterans Department.

The low levels of defence funding is of great concern.

Starting with Budget Vote 23, the committee has stated clearly that the budget is underfunded.

Compared to the adjustment budget of 2024-25 the Department of Defence's budget increased by 3% in nominal terms, which results in a decrease of 1,6% in real terms when adjusted for inflation for 2024-25 and 2025-26.

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The Defence allocation for 2025-26 represents a mere 2,2% of the country's total expenditure.

For a department that has obsolete equipment in all its units, where spending on key areas like cyberdefence, border protection and equipment remains too low, this begs a question about the nation's seriousness about the safety of the citizens.

Underfunding of the Department of Defence needs a serious reconsideration ... taking into consideration the global norms. The same applies to the modernisation and cyberdefence.

Notably, on Budget Vote 26, the budget has gone up by R63 million and more funds are promised to veterans' pensions and housing.

However, the delay in finalising the database is disadvantaging the military veterans. Travel and subsistence is affecting the budget as the veterans have to travel long distances to access their benefits.

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The UDM calls for the department to piggyback on municipalities instead of Premiers' Offices, which are far from most of the veterans.

The department doesn't seem to have enough money to roll out pensions for the full year and that honesty must be respected. This also shows the bigger problem, poor planning, slow progress and the department that is still stuck with an old structure.

On the other hand, there is no permanent director-general for years. Too many top positions are vacant and veterans in rural areas are struggling to access support and benefits.

The department's call centre is not working. The list goes on.

Chairperson, our veterans deserve better, they served this country. Now, the system is failing them.

And hon Chair, three minutes is not enough.

The UDM, nevertheless, supports the budget.

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Mr S S ZIBI: Hon Chair, firstly, let me salute the men and women in uniform, especially those who served under very difficult conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. South Africa has 2 600 kilometres along the coastline straddling two oceans the Indian and Atlantic.

That coastline is a border. it is poorly defended because our Navy and Air Force cannot keep their most important equipment in service. The same is true for the one and a half million square kilometres of ocean that is supposed to be an exclusive economic zone of ours for them to patrol and protect.

We have pilots who should be flying but are not. We have sailors who should be at sea but are instead on land. Our overall force equipment is old, obsolete and a complete mismatch compared to the national security threats we face.

The obsolescence does not end with equipment, I'm afraid, hon Minister, that most of the leadership of the armed forces does need a generational change. This is to say nothing personal to the people in charge. There is a pervasive view among younger officers that appointments to leadership roles are determined by loyalty rather than talent.

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But we have an even bigger problem, which is the absence of a coherent national security strategy that we can look at and therefore back additional funding for. As much as I agree that our armed forces are chronically underfunded, it is also difficult to back significantly additional funding when the armed forces and the Department of Military Veterans, DMV do not manage the little money they get in accordance with the basic governance and the law.

Rise Mzanzi's views that will back a significant increase in the Defence budget when the security cluster tables a coherent national security strategy before Parliament. It has long been promised but non materialises.

The revelations by General Mkhwanazi over the weekend demonstrate that throughout our security system, we are likely severely compromised, infiltrated and captured by criminal elements. We must see progress in the cleanup of the poor governance and corruption in the defence environment and military veterans.

Part of this Minister is retiring people who have overseen the rot. We need new blood. Minister, please table the armed

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forces mandate that reflects the asymmetric threats we face. We need a younger, smarter, better trained and more mobile defence force with regional deterrent capability. So, our support for this budget, rather than rejecting it in favour of a bigger budget, reflects our view that bigger financing needs a coherent plan. Otherwise, we are throwing good money after bad.

Ultimately, hon members, it is the Commander in Chief, the President, who must show seriousness about national security. Absent that, I'm afraid, hon Minister, you will continue to walk away with budgets that are too small compared to mandate and barely keep us safe. I thank you, hon Chair.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS (Mr C R Hlophe): Chairperson of the House, hon members, the focus of my narrative will be on the challenges faced by the Department of Military Veterans in the implementation of its mandate and proposes the way forward in the mitigation of the challenges

Over the past 15 years the department has encountered several challenges, including lack of human capacity to deliver on its

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mandate, legislative gaps, and high level of vacant posts in senior management levels leading to leadership instability.

The lack of automated system remains a challenge. Moreover, the other challenges that we face relate to the implementation of military veterans' benefits. Way forward, as approved by the Presidential Task Team, PTT, the transversal team will be in place as soon as possible to work out the modalities to assist the department in specific areas pertaining to improvement of capacity and capabilities with respect to the organogram and structure of the department's legislative review and service delivery model.

We will continue making efforts to implement the benefits of military veterans by ensuring that the verification panel continues to do its work of both the verification and cleansing as well as applying the means test.

We should endeavour to ensure that the budget allocated to us is fully utilised and engage with the National Treasury to properly fund these benefits. While we are focusing on reforms, the department will fast-track the process of

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automation of systems which will assist in providing timeous services of clients.

We are emphasising on the current administrations aimed to build a capable, ethical and developmental state. Efforts are being made to enhance the organisational structure of the department by prioritising the filling of identified critical posts within the medium-term period.

The Ministry will provide adequate support to the department and the necessary political counselling to stakeholders in response to governance issues facing the national umbrella body responsible for the advancement of the military veterans' affairs. I thank you.

Mr C HATTINGH: Hon House Chair, the words are of a former American President, Benjamin Franklin, *Lost time is never found again*, echoes with chilling relevance. Decades of lost time have left cracks in our nation shield, the SA National Defence Force, SANDF. Cracks born out of financial neglect, incompetence and a collapse of leadership.

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The 2015 Defence Review warned without immediate and directed interventions; critical capabilities would be lost. That warning was ignored. Many critical capabilities were lost and the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC fiasco and the tragic Kommetjie incidents come to mind.

The SANDF is crippled. Our Navy has crippled. Our submarines designed for a thirty-year ... [Unintelligible.] ... were done, have missed critical maintenance and are effectively dead in the water. Sharlotte Maxeke has been stripped and has been in the Dockyard since 2016, while Manthatisi was rushed back into service without a proper refit, compromising the safety and future availability and Queen Modjadji waits for Manthatisi to come out of the Dockyard.

Our maritime domain awareness and the ability to monitor and control our waters as disintegrated, leaving our seas vulnerable to poaching, smuggling and foreign incursions. This is largely shocking for a country dependent on maritime trade.

Our economic weakness, to an extent, lies in our inability to secure our shipping routes. South Africa's patrol and surveillance capability has collapsed. Last year Minister

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Motshekga promised R441 million for repairs. One year later nothing has happened. Our Air Force is for all practical purposes grounded, bleeding pilots and technical expertise.

The Gripens and Hawks are moth ... [Inaudible.] ... for lack of spares and expired contracts. The C-130 fleet, once the backbone of airlift is down to a single airworthy aircraft. The Oryx and AW109 helicopters are largely unserviceable, leaving the Air Force is unable to conduct even basic troop transport or medical evacuations.

The Rooivalk attack helicopters are sidelined by underfunded support and lack of funded upgrades. Training hours have collapsed, even very very important person, VVIP transport is prioritised above combat readiness. The military health service is failing those it was meant to support. The 1 Military Hospital remains an uncompleted construction site after more than a decade. Soldiers and their families rely on overburdened provincial hospitals or pay out of pocket and unforgivable betrayal.

The situation on our borders is equally dire. Soldiers patrol with obsolete vehicles, broken equipment and no advanced

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surveillance systems. While the world deploys drones and smart census to secure their borders, our troops are stranded in the twentieth century and this decline has cascaded down to our most important battle assets, our troops.

In the DRC as part of the summit DRC deployment out through suffered a humiliating defeat overrun by M23 with no close air support they were forced into a chaotic withdrawal that exposed South Africa's hollowed out military capability. Stripped of support and equipment, they were left vulnerable and demoralised. Soldiers even had to buy their own tents. A damning indictment of an abandoned SANDF.

The inability to provide even boots and closing sustainable to our soldiers at the South African National Defence Union launching a Boots for Troops campaign to step in where the state has failed. Last year the Minister stood here pledging a soldier first principle and promising an interim force design. A year later, there is no design, no strategy, and no alignment of resources.

The R500 million pledged for border vehicles and technology has vanished. Yet, Minister Motshekga continues to repeat

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slogans like *Journey to greatness* while failing to deliver a credible plan and cost framework based on South Africa's needs and a national security strategy.

A year after promising the 2015 Defence Review, there is still no roadmap, no plan only recycled rhetoric as the SANDEF slice deeper into crisis. Defence planning requires discipline and courage. Also, the courage to tell the Commander in Chief and Cabinet what this country can and cannot afford.

During the past year there has been nothing but drift in decay. Meanwhile, very important people, VIP perks are protected, generals enjoy luxury vehicles, exorbitant protection and offices fly business class all over the world, costly overseas trips, including two Russian military parades, are funded while frontline soldiers lack boots, rations and morale.

Despite desperate financial pressures and extreme difficulties, our soldiers remain committed to safeguarding our borders and our country. This makes it all more urgent to prioritise a clear force design, align forces with South

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Africa's defence needs and secure the funding required to maintain its core capabilities.

Minister, we will support you in achieving this, but if the Minister and her military leadership cannot put boots on our soldiers' feet, hon House Chair, then they must step aside for those who can and will.

South Africa needs a credible force design, an honest strategy and leaders with integrity to balance South Africa's defence needs with fiscal reality, because South Africa and the SANDF needs more than rhetoric, more than blue lights and red carpets and boots for troops campaigns. We need leadership, strong professional, principled leadership. I thank you, House Chair.

Ms T SOKANYILE: Greetings to the House Chairperson. Let me observe the protocol that has been observed by the speakers before me. Today honoured members, we've gathered not to debate abstract figures on a page, but to decide on our commitment to a secure and stable country, fully able to defend its Constitution and values when under threat. To respond appropriately to crisis within and beyond our borders,

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and to offer co-ordinated assistance in times of natural disasters.

We are also here to consider the needs of our veterans who have so ably served the country and deserve adequate pension when they are no longer able to do so. That is why as the ANC we support this budget. The budget we're debating today for the Department of Defence and Military Veterans is both a policy instrument and a mirror of our commitment to support the national values enshrined in our Constitution. This Constitution was hard-won, and we must defend it.

In addition, we must implement its values, one of which is respect for the work of every human being, including those no longer able to play an active role as public servants. Hon members, the SA National Defence Force is crucial to our sovereignty and enable us to protect the gains of our democratic dispensation. Section 200 of our Constitution clearly states that our Defence Force has an obligation to protect the Republic and keep our citizens safe. The defence environment is continuously evolving, and as a nation we need the stability to evolve with it and meet the threats of today and tomorrow.

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The Defence Force of today has quite different issues to deal with than that of two decades ago. Our needs are greater because our threats have multiplied and broadened. Extreme weather events displace communities and increase humanitarian needs. Our Defence Force needs to be able, equipped and set to deal with these events swiftly, effectively and compassionately. For this, our forces need functioning technology, more advanced and focused training and upgrades to our military bases.

Our military bases were not designed with climate threats in mind and are in dire need of appropriate adjustment. By preparing our Defence Force for the realities of the climate change, we ensure national stability and safety of our people during the most difficult days. Hon members, it cannot be disputed that the SA National Defence Force, SANDF is under severe strain owing to the persistent low funding which has lowered morale and is in danger of hampering our efficacy as a force and a vital instrument of nation building.

Floods that occurred sometime in KwaZulu-Natal and the recent floods in the Eastern Cape underscore the urgency of modernising our procurement processes, so that we can acquire

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systems that will enable swifter responses. The state-of-the-art drones, for instance, would enable us to survey the extent of the problem within hours or minutes. In addition, hon members, we need to maintain and improve our prime mission equipment so that we can defend ourselves against cyberattacks and electronic warfare.

The modernisation of the SANDF is no longer an option but an imperative. If we fail to modernise, we risk losing the edge in dealing with emerging security realities. As this House, we need to encourage the engagement that the Department of Defence and Military Veterans is having with National Treasury and the Presidency and all our security structures ...

IsiXhosa:

... siyeke aba bantu bathi balwela amagqala omkhosi ...

English:

... who are here in this House, yet they reject everything that is being put here. We cannot allow it.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Order, hon members, don't drown the speaker. Order hon members!

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Ms T SOKANYILE: Let us consider hon members that our soldiers and veterans endure significant psychological strain. With the little money that we have, we are going to assist them. The Department of Military Veterans needs funding to expand health and other programmes. In order to ensure that all veterans receive the support and care they deserve, a Defence Force that contributes to the well-being of their forces is a stronger Defence Force more equipped to carry out its mandate.

Hon members as we conclude this important debate on Budget Vote 23 and 26, we must think about the great variety of demands on the military budget. The SANDF is the safety net underlying all our progress in development. For without their ability to keep our country safe, all our progress can be undone in an instant. Our forces need upgrade to facilities and existing equipment, new equipment and system. Training in a number of key areas and the security of pension and health care when there are days of serving are over.

The global task today reveals the critical need of modernised Defence Force, able to deal with great variety of threat. We must fix the logistics and overhaul our procurement processes, making sure that every cent we spend leads to a better,

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stronger and more cohesive Defence Force, not for getting the needs of our veterans.

In closing, pause and consider the lives of our veterans.

Those people ...

IsiXhosa:

... ekudlalwa ngabo ...

English:

... by some of the members here going around to say, we'll fight for you, and yet they're not fighting for them when they are on this platform. Although some receive pensions ...

IsiXhosa:

... akwaba bayeva phaya emakhaya.

English:

Although some receive pensions, many more are not yet so supported. After serving their country so able for 30 to 40 years or more, some find them themselves without decent housing, reliant on health services that is already under

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pressure and often afflicted by quite serious health mental issues.

To alleviate their problem, we need the SANDF equipped to take care of their needs. One that is able to use technology, better, work together with other groups and ensure that no military veteran falls between the cracks. All of us must stay focused after today, checking progress and pushing for concrete results in the coming year. Let us show we are serious about our Defence Force and its members, both while they are in active service and once, they have retired, A country that looks after its Defence Force is a stronger and secure a country, able to protect its people and its development gains.

Hon members as the ANC, I repeat, we support this budget, because we are supporting the goal of a secure country that defends its borders, responds effectively in natural disasters and can deal with threat such as international terrorism and cyberattacks, and support the health of the welfare of its military veterans.

IsiXhosa:

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Bantu abasemakhaya, aba bantu bangxolayo bathi masinganincedisi.

English:

Thank you.

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Thank you very much, Chairperson. Let me also thank the members who participated in the debate, and I can assure them that we have taken copious notes on some of the points that they raised. I say some because I agree with members that for us to avoid war, we have to be ready for war. Defence is very important for our safety as a people, our sovereignty, but it is also contributing towards world peace regionally, especially in our SADC region and our continent.

Indeed, I was happy that most members acknowledged the challenges that we are confronted with as a department. That indeed underfunding is actually an existential problem or challenge for us, and we do need to speak in one voice in ensuring that the Department of Defence gets more resources and more importantly, its baseline is increased.

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So, I won't respond. As I said, we have been taking copious notes about some of the points that you have made that we should be able to attend to. But I also want to emphasise, especially on military veterans, that we are not only verifying in Northwest and the Free State. However, it is a national programme which runs parallel also with cleansing the database to make sure that we protect the integrity of the information that we have.

Chairperson, I won't respond to other things because coming here I knew ...

IsiZulu:

...ukuthi obani abo ...

English:

... finder, finder, which mistake ...

IsiZulu:

...odlala i...

English:

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... finder finder. So, they will really look for reasons not to support. So, we knew they were not going to support. They have to find reasons and use big words to say they are not supporting. It's a betrayal. I knew those things, ... just use different ways to do so.

IsiZulu:

Ngakho ke abo-'finder finder' angeke ngibaphendule.

English:

It's an old game ...

IsiZulu:

... yethu yakudala.

English:

So, they will always find mistakes and refuse to really see the bigger picture. As I said, some of them we all know well that a claim to fame ...

IsiZulu:

... ukuphikisa yonke into ekhulunywayo, ngakho ayikho into esingazihlupha ngayo ...

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English:

... because we expected it.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Don't drown the speaker, hon members. Don't drown the speaker.

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: So, as others ...

IsiZulu:

... uyazibuza ukuthi hhawu, i-DA seyithini nge ...

English:

... military veterans. Because these military veterans ...

IsiZulu:

... ubuholi esiphuma kubo.

English:

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Minister, can you take your seat. Hon Nkuna, you are recognised.

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Ms N V MENTE-NKUNA: Chairperson, is it parliamentary to say Members of Parliament are doing finder-finder from a Minister who was in Basic Education and left 30%, as a pass rate?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon member, I switched off that mic because you were supposed to raise your point of order and not give a speech. So, giving a speech is equally unparliamentary, and it is out of order from your side. But I will allow the Minister to continue because it is well within her right as a person who is debating. Hon Minister, continue.

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Thank Chairperson, also in terms of responding to the IFP, I can assure you, ...

IsiZulu:

... lungu ukuthi o-IEC sebake bazama kodwa ungabatshela ukuthi bangaqali.

English:

We are ready to defend. So, it's not as if ...

IsiZulu:

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... sesilele ngesisu asikwazi ukuzivikela. Bayazi ukuthi bangawukhomba umuzi onotshwala, kodwa angeke basondele ...

English:

... and we are sure about that. To the member of the PA, I really have to say, with due respect, I fear a racist debate using race, colour, hating. I just find it a very dangerous political issue. So, I just thought I should express that. I think it is in bad taste. I did indicate that verification is happening nationally, not only in the Free State and Northwest.

An HON MEMBER: There's a hand, Chairperson.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Minister, take your seat. Hon Van Wyk, I recognise you.

Mr S H M VAN Wyk: On a point of order, Chairperson. I would like to raise a point of privilege here.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Yes, you may proceed.

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Mr S H M VAN Wyk: I want to tell the Minister I am not being racial here. She doesn't want ... [Interjections.]

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon member, listen to me. Hon member, listen to me, I am presiding here, you will listen to the Chairperson. This is a point of debate. It's not a point of privilege, nor a point of order.

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Thank you very much, Chairperson, and to hon member Wessels. I agree and I can indicate that where we must discipline people - we do. We may not perhaps ... in terms of culture of discipline ...

IsiZulu:

... sikhwele phezu kwendlu sibatshele.

English:

We do work with people where we can. I think we can share with you where we have done disciplinary processes. As I say, I really appreciate the fact that the debate does accept that, and which is what we accept that underfunding is an existential problem, and other things which are presented

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because member Zibi said exactly what we need and then says he'll support if ...

IsiZulu:

... kodwa ushilo ukuthi ama-free-gate, yonke into iphansi.

English:

Again, as I say, this question of really finding excuses ... for not supporting and also to clarify that emi-DRC, it's a SADC mission where participating countries commit themselves to what they can contribute. On what we committed ourselves, I can promise you that we have contributed. I fully agree with hon member Swart from the ACDP that the problem is that we are presenting a budget that has been given to us. So, it is the Parliament, Cabinet and everybody and I think, we all agree that the department, the baseline needs to be done. The Appropriation Committee ...

IsiZulu:

...ekuyiyona ephasise ...

English:

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... the zero per cent should also come to the party to say, yes. This is a serious problem, so we are not expected to spend what we don't have. To say we are going to increase 10 000 soldiers when they are not in the budget, we will be misleading the House, because we don't have the resources to do it. So, we have to be honest to the House to say these are the things we want to do.

IsiZulu:

Kodwa baba uZibi iphi imali yokwenza? Uma ingekho ...

English:

... we can't do it, and that's what we are saying. I also said to hon member Hattingh ... I think sometimes ... some of the things that you say, I said. I said, I don't remember saying them, but I will accept that. You are saying those are things that have to be done. As I said, I won't respond to member, by member, by member to say, we are said we must do the following ...

IsiZulu:

...ngani? Ngani?

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English:

What we are doing is we are giving you the plans of what we have. It is not as if we don't know what needs to be done, what plans need to come in place, but we can in all honesty say we have R57 billion. This is what our plans are on that R57 billion

To go to R80 billion of the EFF member is another story for another day. Now we are talking about R57 billion, not something that is not there. That's what we are presenting to you. So, I would really urge members to say they support the budget. Don't praise the men in uniform to say you honour them, you respect them.

IsiZulu:

Basebenze ngani...

English:

... if you don't support that which is in front of you? So, you honour them to do what? You say they must go home. You say they must go home; you honour ...

IsiZulu:

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... ukuthi benzeni, ngani?

English:

So, honour them ...

IsiZulu:

... kahle, nibahloniphe kahle, ngokuthi nayi into encanyana qhubani umsebenzi ...

English:

... ourselves, as Parliament, as government, we will make sure that we fight for a bigger budget of finance because ... it doesn't help to praise people in uniform ...

[Interjections.] ... [Time expired.]

IsiZulu:

Ngiyabonga.

English:

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Minister, unfortunately your time has expired. Order, hon members! Order, hon members! Hon members, you are reminded of the two debates that are continuing at 14:00 simultaneously in Public Works, which will

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be debated in this Good Hope Chamber and Health, which will be debated in Committee Room 46. Hon members, that concludes the debate and the business of this Mini plenary. The mini plenary may rise.

Debate concluded.

The mini-plenary session rose at 11:53.

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