Member: Hon. Lerato Ngobeni – Parliamentary Chief Whip, ActionSA

Date: 15 July 2024

Subject: Budget Vote 23& 26 Debate: Department of Defence and Military Veterans

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Thank you, Chairperson,

Minister, let me cut straight to the chase. You have inherited a department that has been so severely mismanaged and underfunded for decades that, as a consequence of this negligence, the safety and security of our country is at perilous risk!

The 2024/2025 Budget as proposed, a meagre 0.7% of GDP, marks the continuation of declining defence spending that, without question, has hollowed out our defence capability to the point where our capacity to respond to threats to our peace and sovereignty is severely compromised.

What is apparent is that, with this proposed budget, this government is frankly committed to maintaining this shameful and dangerous status quo, which, if left unchanged, will have - and already does have - serious consequences!

Honourable Speaker,

Global and regional threats to peace and security continue to escalate, demanding that we not only strengthen our deterrence to mitigate these threats but also possess the ability to respond to them.

Minister, with the current defunct and desperate state of the SANDF, I fear that this fundamental responsibility, which this budget must give effect to, is simply misaligned.

This misalignment is apparent in our deployment to the SADC mission in the DRC.

Over 3000 kilometres from home, our men and women have been sent to fight a fierce militant insurgency while being negligibly ill-equipped, overstretched, underfunded and without sufficient combat and intelligence support.

Sadly, the resulting consequence is that casualties are inevitable, as evidenced by the numerous deaths and severe injuries that have characterised our deployment to this conflict.

And again,

With the deployment in Northern Mozambique, which has now concluded, to combat a terrorist insurgency under the SADC Mission, where these same conditions endangered the lives of our servicemen!

So, where do we draw the line? What greater threat will it take or how many lives of patriotic service members must be lost before we recognise the urgent need to review and overhaul the state of our national defence?

Or will we wait until it's too late and our nation's security is irreparably compromised?

Minister, my challenge to you, if you are serious about reversing the destruction that previous administrations have led our defence forces into:

1. Advise the President to stop deploying the SANDF on ill-planned and uncosted missions.
2. Either urgently ensure sufficient capacitation of the mission in the DRC or bring our servicemen and women home immediately.
3. Purge the department of corrupt and incompetent officials and officers.
4. Eliminate the bloated and costly top management structure and invest more into equipping our frontline.
5. Commission a Defence Review that is instead led by independent experts.
6. And lastly Minister, DON'T ACCEPT BRIBES! (Place emphasis on this one)

Chairperson, Honourable Members and Minister, it goes without saying that ActionSA rejects this budget!

I thank you!

ENDS