

MEDIA RELEASE PSA calls for removal of Minister of Defence and Military Veterans amidst series of blunders and demonstration of lack of capacity

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EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) has noted with disgust the latest report regarding the Defence and Military Veterans Ministry allegedly spending more than R20 million on travel expenses where the Minister and her two deputies undertook 22 questionable trips.

The Department had budget cuts, resulting in inadequate resources to ensure its proper capacitation, which led to operational inefficiency. It is illogical that the Minister would prioritise these trips over providing basic resources to soldiers who put their lives on the line for the security of the country. The under-resourced Department shamefully resulted in operational failures where 14 soldiers lost their lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo owing to a lack of equipment and basic resources. Additionally, the Department is spending billions on unaccredited training in Cuba, whereas the South African Defence Force College can offer accredited courses at a fraction of the cost. The Auditor-General has also pointed out vast irregular expenditure on the same programme. Local and cost-effective alternatives were plainly ignored whilst the Department pleads poverty when it comes to addressing basic issues such as building maintenance.

The Department has also been questioned for irregular appointments, where unqualified persons are appointed in key roles, including an internal auditor without proper credentials. Although the Minister described the Department as a wrecked and sinking ship, she did not do much to change the situation. The Department of Military Veterans is facing a deep institutional crisis with a leadership vacuum, as the Department has failed to appoint a Director-General and the acting Director-General's contract repeatedly being extended beyond legal limits. This lack of stable leadership is undermining accountability, decision-making, and service delivery.

Corruption and mismanagement seem to be the order of the day with allegations of financial misconduct, benefit fraud, and political interference shielding corrupt officials from consequences. Veterans have been waiting for more than a year for promised benefits, including pensions and school-fee subsidies, whilst the Department returned unspent funds to the National Treasury owing to incompetence, poor planning and execution.

Members of Parliament have called for the Department of Military Veterans to be placed under administration, but it seems that the Ministry is under protection. The Department's organogram is dysfunctional, with key vacancies in internal audit, legal services, and senior management. The situation is exacerbated by the failure to review the organisational structure to ensure a fit-for-purpose structure, noting that the structure was last reviewed in 2013. The Minister is clearly not competent to deal with the demand and complexity of the Department of Defence and Military Veterans. Her removal will be in the best interest of the country.

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