

MEDIA RELEASE PSA shocked by deployment of SANDF soldiers at #JusticeForCwecwe march

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), which represents a substantial number of employees at the Department of Defence is shocked by the South African National Defence Force's (SANDF) deployment of troops in Matatiele, in the Eastern Cape, during a peaceful march.

The peaceful #JusticeForCwecwe march demanded justice for a seven-year-old learner who was allegedly raped at school whilst waiting for transport in October 2024 at Bergview College. Footage emerged on media platforms on 8 April 2025 of SANDF soldiers providing security along with members of the police, drawing widespread condemnation. The PSA condemns this shameful and unwarranted deployment of soldiers by the SANDF as it is appalling and unacceptable for soldiers to be deployed for unarmed civilians seeking justice.

The Matatiele area has a border leading to Lesotho that should always be manned. Removing these soldiers from such critical duty to police a peaceful march is a dereliction of duty and further compromises South Africa's infamous porous borders. Whoever ordered the soldiers' deployment at the peaceful protest reduced the military to a militia, used to intimidate and militarise a civil-society protest whilst the Constitution guarantees South Africans the right to protest. There were no indications that this march would be anything but peaceful. The Department of Defence owes the public a clear explanation regarding the legality and necessity of this deployment.

The *Defence Web* online publication reported that the decision by the SANDF to support the police during the march was taken by a local military commander using his discretion, and that he will be investigated for his actions. The SANDF spokesperson indicated that there was no official deployment to Matatiele by stating: "*We wish to state that the SANDF has members in the area on border safeguarding duties and nothing else. We would like to express sincere regret regarding the incident where our soldiers were seen during the march against gender-based violence in Matatiele.*"

The PSA calls on the SANDF to conduct a thorough investigation, take remedial action, and ensure that soldiers will not again be deployed at peaceful community protests.

END