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### **MILITARY VETERANS AFFAIRS IN SOUTH AFRICA\***

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

At the start of President Zuma's presidency it was announced that Minister Lindiwe Sisulu was appointed to head the Department of Defence and Military Veterans. The words "and Military Veterans" drew considerable interest since it was a new title for the Defence Department, placing more emphasis on military veteran's affairs. The Department already has an Office for Military Veteran's Affairs managed by a Director of Military Veteran's Affairs, which was established by the promulgation of the *Military Veteran's Affairs Act, 1999* (Act No 17 of 1999). The directorate has thus been functioning for some time, and has liaised with many other national and provincial government departments regarding military veteran's concerns. Defence consequently has been addressing matters of importance to veterans, and will have a running start, as it were.

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The *Umkhonto we Sizwe* Military Veterans Association (MKMVA), the Azanian Peoples Liberation Army Military Veterans Association (APLAMVA) and the Azanian National Liberation Army Military Veterans Association (AZANLAMVA) are categorised and known as the non-statutory forces veteran associations. They are generally led by the MKMVA who are the African National Congress' (ANC) military veterans, and who have by far the most members. The latter regard the name change of the defence department as a major gain for their members. The MKMVA general secretary, however, stated that they would have preferred to have a separate military veteran's ministry. Their second best option would be the re-organisation of the Department of Defence in such a way that the veteran's component would get its own budget vote and its own director general.<sup>1)</sup>

Other than having a Directorate of Military Veteran's Affairs, the Department of Defence is far from the organisational MKMVA ideals just mentioned. The Acting Secretary of Defence is reported to have said that the announcement by President Zuma that the department would be known as the Department of Defence and Military Veterans was a surprise. A task group of officials representing the Defence Department, the Department of Public Service and Administration, and the recently established South African National Military Veteran's Association (SANMVA), has been appointed to investigate and make recommendations regarding the Defence Department's expanded organisation best suited to manage military veteran's affairs.<sup>2)</sup> The Secretary added that the task group would hopefully complete their work before the end of the calendar or financial year.<sup>3)</sup>

A specific problem mentioned by the acting Secretary was that the Department's annual budget was to be presented to Parliament within a few weeks, and that no consideration had been given to a large increase in funds needed for the unplanned expansion of the Department. Money is urgently required for the MKMVA's call for pension and housing benefits for a "base membership of 46 000" *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) veterans.<sup>4)</sup> Since the ANC had already decided at its national conference in 2007 that a presidential commission on military veterans should be established to enable a "comprehensive social package" for all veterans of former liberation armies by end 2008, this is a matter of some importance to the party and the MKMVA.<sup>5)</sup>

## 2. DEFINING MILITARY VETERANS WHO SHOULD BE ADVANTAGED

The *Military Veteran's Affairs Act* was promulgated "to provide for the development of national standards regarding military veterans and their dependants, including their entitlements; for the President to be Patron-in-Chief of all military veterans; for relevant Cabinet Committees to perform certain functions for the purposes of this Act; for responsibilities of the Minister of Defence; for the establishment of an Advisory Board for Military Veteran's Affairs; for an Office for Military Veteran's Affairs; for the development, promotion and implementation of policy; and for matters incidental thereto".<sup>6)</sup>

Obviously the organisational change at the Department of Defence, and the MKMVA's call for "fair" pension entitlements, and for housing for their veterans and their dependants, will lead to changes in the Act or the promulgation of a new act. The chairperson of the MKMVA said that there were about 20 000 military veterans disadvantaged by the "unfair" pensions system.<sup>7)</sup> This figure probably includes all veterans who were members of all the non-statutory forces, who serve or have served in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) since 1994.

The *Military Veteran's Affairs Act* specifies the meaning of the term 'military veteran' as any person who —<sup>8)</sup>

- (a) either voluntarily or under conscription or call-up served as a member of—
  - (i) the Union Defence Forces or any military force of a country allied to the former Union Government during the Great War of 1914 to 1919. World War II being the war which commenced on 6 September 1939, or the hostilities in Korea from 1950 to 1953; or
  - (ii) the South African Defence Force or any defence force of a territory which prior to the commencement of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993* (Act No 200 of 1993) enjoyed the status of an independent state in terms of a law of the Republic of South Africa; or
  - (iii) the South African National Defence Force, and has not been dishonourably discharged, is retired, or no longer

serves in the South African National Defence Force and is a citizen of the Republic; and irrespective of whether any such service envisaged in subparagraphs (i), (ii) or (iii) has been rendered in a permanent or in a part-time component or part-time capacity; or

- (b) is a "war veteran" as defined in section 1 of the *Social Assistance Act, 1992* (Act No 59 of 1992);
- (c) served as a member of any non-statutory force as defined in section 1 of the *Demobilisation Act, 1996* (Act No 99 of 1996); or
- (d) belongs to any other prescribed category of military veterans; ...

The *Social Assistance Act, 1992* specifies that a war veteran "means any person who has attained the age of 60 years or who is owing to any physical or mental disability, unable to provide for his or her maintenance" and "who served during the Great War of 1914 to 1918 in a Union or British force or who was a member of the protesting burgher forces between September 1914 to February 1915", or who performed any naval, military or air force service during the second world war, as a member of the Union Defence Force or as a South African national served in an allied force. It also includes members of the Union Defence Force who served in connection with hostilities in Korea.

The legal definition of "war veteran" in the South African context is important, hence the complete quotation of the legal meaning in the Act. The media sometimes gives the impression that there is doubt as to its South African meaning. Clearly there is no doubt about the legal meaning of the terms. The *Military Veteran's Affairs Act* also lists a number of fundamental principles of which one is specified as stating that unfair discrimination regarding the entitlements of military veterans and their dependants, must be identified, and where possible, remedied.<sup>9)</sup>

On studying MKMVA statements, the organisation contends that all the veterans of the non-statutory forces have been disadvantaged. Those who joined the SANDF, said to be close to 20 000, many of whom must already have retired, plus all the others, that is roughly 26 000 according to the MKMVA calculations of a "base membership"

of 46 000, have in their view been disadvantaged.

Firstly, there is the MKMVA demand that the pensions of non-statutory force members who joined the SANDF be reviewed to increase their value. The point is made that a soldier who joined the SANDF later in life has to buy back service to earn the same amount as a member who joined as a young man or woman, and that the ex-non-statutory force members do not have the finances to do so. The chairperson of APLA's veteran's organisation said that their veterans earned paltry salaries and were still expected to buy back service to get a better pension, and that the situation was unacceptable. This is of course a real problem since an older person with a short period of SANDF service will receive comparatively little pension. The non-statutory force veterans associations demand the same financial benefits for their members, as the benefits paid to regular force members of the former South African Defence Force (SADF) and the present SANDF.<sup>10)</sup>

It must be pointed out that regular or permanent force members of the SADF and the SANDF receive salaries and pensions equal to those received by civil servants. The part-time reserve members receive only pay of rank for actual time served. Even volunteer members of the reserves, many of whom serve their whole working lives or a large part of it, as members of the leader group, receive no pension at all.

This means that the non-statutory force veteran's associations are demanding benefits for some of their members which South African civil servants receive, for all the years they were members of their respective forces. Should the State remunerate as demanded, it would result in an added budget for defence, which is most probably simply unaffordable, considering the country's needs in respect of expenditure for education and infrastructure maintenance.

There are sure to be ex-members of the non-statutory forces who deserve better remuneration and pensions benefits than they have, and who have not been able to enrich themselves as many officials or businessmen in the post-1994 dispensation have done. The problem lies in establishing acceptable and just criteria to ascertain exactly who these people are. This will be an extremely complicated exercise, because the non-statutory forces were only able to keep reasonable control of the numbers of members they in fact had on strength prior to

1992, when the ANC was unbanned. After that date the externally based non-statutory forces returned to South Africa. At that stage and probably ever since, MK and other non-statutory forces have struggled to register who their genuine military veterans are, and which of those who claim membership are in fact interlopers seeking advantages not due to them.

At a meeting in George in 2005, the then Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr Mluleki George, stated that the completion of registration of military veterans through a recognised organisation on a centralised database was of utmost importance. The issue was not negotiable and if a person was not registered he did not exist as a veteran.<sup>11)</sup> In spite of whatever efforts have been made since 2005 there are still claims by organisations such as the Struggle Veterans Action Committee that the definition of a veteran under current legislation is skewed and the result is that "unless you've been outside the country in some MK camp, you don't fall within the Veterans Affairs Act".<sup>12)</sup> This is of course inaccurate since the definitions make no such distinction, but the claim that many members of the committee receive no benefits because they were not all members of MK, the armed wing of the ANC during the struggle, and that persons who fought for other anti-apartheid groups, like APLA, are being marginalised, may harbour some truth.<sup>13)</sup>

In a country where poverty is commonplace, people will naturally claim membership of organisations which could advantage them no matter how vague or unfounded their claims may be. Since there was never a fully-fledged civil war in South Africa, proving military veteran-ship by anyone who did not serve abroad as part of a non-statutory force, is obviously difficult. Be that as it may, it is doubtful that the "base membership of 46 000" is realistic and the State is not likely to advantage them all financially.

Lastly, it must be understood that to be a military veteran one must have been a member of a military organisation as defined in the legislation. A veteran need not to have actually been in combat. Many members of the statutory forces served in supportive roles, and are still veterans without having been employed as combat soldiers, airmen or sailors. Most of the members of the non-statutory forces were never involved in combat, and thus their military veteranship need only be proved by virtue of their membership of the respective non-statutory forces.

### **3. THE DEFENCE BUDGET AND FINANCING MILITARY VETERAN'S AFFAIRS**

The defence budget for 2009/10 obviously has no financial allocation to cover the expenses for an expanded military veterans' affairs organisation, which will give credence to the title the Department of Defence and 'Military Veterans'. The task team to establish the most appropriate organisational structure for military veterans' affairs, and the costs involved, will probably require six to nine months to conclude its task. The work will have to be done step by step with approval by Parliament and the government departments directly involved, not the least of which will be the Treasury, Public Service and Defence itself.

#### **3.1 The role of Parliament and departments other than Defence**

The members of the Parliamentary Monitoring Group on Defence are reported to have considered in their discussions whether the task team should be given 60, 90 or 100 days to reach a conclusion on the organisation, the projects and the costs involved in the management of veterans' affairs by the Department of Defence and Military Veterans.<sup>14)</sup> Such considerations are clearly unrealistic. Experienced staff officers know that if the tasking authorities set short unrealistic target dates for complicated investigations, it merely leads to the work having to be repeated over and over again, with an eventual selection of poor options and weak solutions.

It is reported that the task team is biased to consist largely of MKMVA members. Hopefully they will set out to advantage all deserving military veterans irrespective of their affiliations. They have a large amount of staff work to do and are required to brief the Parliamentary Monitoring Group on Defence within 60 days. The parliamentary committee scheduled departmental briefings on the following:<sup>15)</sup>

- Timeframes for completion of the task.
- The results of the verification process to establish the number of military veterans.
- What the qualifications are to be classified as a military veteran.
- The range of support and services which are to be provided for

military veterans.

- The types of structures needed to provide the required support for military veterans.

The 60-day target date for the first briefing, which may give some realistic target dates for the completion of the staff work, is probably achievable. However, the point where a holistic, funded and executable project can be put into practice, will very likely only be reached sometime in 2010. In the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans budget vote speech of 3 July 2009, after having been in office for a mere six weeks, she stated that the Department had set a target date for completion of the staff work as being sometime in October 2009. A good staff work team could achieve it if dedicated to the task. Frequent interim reporting to the Deputy Minister who has been tasked to oversee it and report to Parliament, will keep the team on track. The Minister foresaw a multi-pronged strategy resulting from thorough consultation with other departments and the private sector. Evidently preliminary considerations indicated that a separate Department of Military Veterans with a separate vote was the best option for the future.<sup>16)</sup>

Parliament will have to approve what the veterans funds are to be spent on, and how much is to be allocated to the defence budget over and above the funds already allocated to the budget. It will be wise to begin with the allocation from the 2010/11 budget, so as to consider all veterans affairs matters and their cost implications in detail. The *Military Veterans Affairs Act, 1999* specifies that "the costs and expenses connected with the administration and implementation" of the Act "must be defrayed from moneys appropriated by Parliament to the Department of Defence for that purpose".<sup>17)</sup> Although the Act is sure to be re-drafted sometime in the future, this section will most probably remain largely unchanged, although the words "and any other department involved", could be included after the words "Department of Defence". Many other departments will have to become involved in the social responsibilities and services to be supplied to the veterans by the state. They will also require funding, even if defence is tasked to be the leading department and main co-ordinator. Parliament will have to approve recommended options developed by the task team and allocate funds with great circumspection.

The members of Parliament must understand that the Depart-



ment of Defence never had the means, or the priority, or the task, to develop structures to assist military veterans into mainstream society on a large scale. If the latter is what the government envisages, then the organisation will have to be established and the funds allocated for it to be able to function. In view of the reported low state of readiness said to be a SANDF problem, the attention of the Department should not be diverted from its main task, namely military preparedness. The military veterans task and organisation should therefore be allocated to the Ministry and the Secretariat, and kept far from the responsibilities of the military.

### **3.2 The Service Corps**

An effort has been made to train veterans who were found to be unsuitable for service in the SANDF or who reached retiring age, for useful employment in the private sector. This was done by the Service Corps. Although some good results are said to have been attained, the Corps never received the financial and broad support for it to be a great success, and it should probably never have been situated in the Department of Defence, whose priority is defence and not social work.

### **3.3 Funding and health care**

In a briefing to the Portfolio Committee on Defence on 17 June 2009, the Department of Defence reported that it had made mid-term policy proposals to the national treasury for additional funding for the financial year 2010/11. This was clearly a prudent move even if the amount involved may later prove inaccurate. It was also mentioned that the Department was considering options for accommodating the military veterans within the military health system. The veterans referred to here, can only be non-statutory force members who did not serve in the SANDF, and thus did not contribute during full-time service towards the Permanent Force Medical Continuation Fund. Consequently the state will have to supply funds for such an option. The military medical service is short-funded as it is, and is expected to support the state civilian hospitals whenever there is a crisis. It is also short of staff and additional medical personnel required will also need more funding.

### **3.4 Departmental budget reductions**

In spite of the additional funding which would be required to pay for military veterans it has been announced that the South African Treasury reduced the defence budget by R1,98 billion over the next three financial years. The 2009/10 budget of R32.024 was cut by R740 469 000 while the 2010/11 allocation was reduced by R644 137 000 and the 2011/12 budget was reduced by a further R595 638 000. The 2009/10 budget amounts to 1,3 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Representatives of the Defence Department have said that a defence budget of two per cent is required to support government policies, peace support deployments in Africa and a credible force design.<sup>18)</sup>

As a result of the global recession and the consequent slowing down of the South African economy, the Minister of Finance has been forced to reduce the budgets of all the government departments. He has warned that the 2010/11 budget will be an austerity budget.<sup>19)</sup> It can thus be concluded that unless the world and South African economies show a dramatic change for the better, defence and any other department will probably not be allocated much more money in the near future, and will largely have to cover the costs of their functions and any costs accruing from military veterans' projects, out of the funds that have already been made available to them.

### **3.5 Housing benefits for veterans**

As regards housing for military veterans of the non-statutory forces it must be pointed out that no other veterans receive housing allocations when they are no longer actually in the regular service of the Department of Defence. Housing for regular married soldiers is restricted to those entitled to it due to period of service, rank and some other factors according to a points system. In outlying bases it may be more available than in big towns, because frequent transfers make it impractical for soldiers to either rent or buy houses there. This is not to say that non-statutory force veterans who have received no benefits, and who served their cause well, should not be helped to housing. Those that are married, support a family, are cash strapped, and who are really accredited military veterans could be, and some are, advantaged above civilians in the allocation of government housing.

In 2008 it was announced that the South African government

had initiated a project through the Department of Housing, to assist and socially and economically integrate veterans into society by means of a housing assistance programme. All qualifying military veterans who had not registered for their housing subsidies had until 31 December 2008, to register with their respective military veteran's associations who would then confirm their status with the Department of Defence. All veterans earning less than R3 500 a month and who had not benefited from the government housing programme were advised to apply. They had to apply at their nearest provincial housing department showing a South African green bar-coded identification, and proof from the Department of Defence that they were military veterans. Evidently veterans are afforded the opportunity to apply for three forms of housing tenure which includes ownership, rental or institutional housing.<sup>20)</sup>

In a report emanating from a meeting of the SANMVA in 2008, from which the above information was initially gleaned, a social welfare and development commission called for a policy whereby military veterans should be given decent housing and that the benefits should be passed on to their dependants. Whether the civilian population will accept such a policy in the long term is not clear, but it will require good communication to motivate it, and to ensure that the civilian public and officials will approve the policy and co-operate in its execution.

#### **4. MILITARY VETERANS ASSOCIATIONS AND THEIR AIMS**

For years, and particularly since 1994, there have been calls for and meetings held, to establish an all encompassing South African Military Veteran's organisation. The country has many veterans' organisations which have an extremely diverse membership. The organisations or associations stemming from the Union Defence Force (UDF), SADF involvement in the First World War, the Second World War, Korea and the South West African/Angola Border War, are many. They aim largely to foster social interaction amongst their members, help members who are sick or run into financial difficulties, and to honour the war dead.

The associations which represent the non-statutory forces, due to the less formalised form of their forces, being the previous armed wings of political movements, have members of whom many are financially disadvantaged. Their aims are to a great extent to gain political

and bureaucratic influence in South Africa so as to advantage their members financially.

#### **4.1 The establishment of the South African National Military Veteran's Association**

In spite of the cultural and aims differences SANMVA was formally established, and a final draft constitution was tabled on 27 September 2008 in Johannesburg. The preamble to the constitution states that APLAMVA, AZANLAMVA, the Council of Military Veteran's Organisations (CMVO) and the MKMVA, as well as the Transkei Defence Force Military Veteran's Association (TDFMVA), the Bophuthatswana Defence Force Military Veteran's Association (BDFMVA), the Ciskei Defence Force Military Veteran's Association (CDFMVA) and the Venda Defence Force Military Veteran's Association (VDFMVA), on behalf of each of their respective member organisations, have a common desire to establish SANMVA in order to unite the Military Veterans Community of South Africa. The organisations mentioned will be the founder members.

It can be assumed and predicted that in time, most if not all the above organisations will cease to exist as their members decease. The SANDF veterans are sure to establish their own organisations, which will have the most members in the future. The CMVO consists of 23 military veteran's associations which include the Gunners Association, the South African Infantry Association, the Armour Association, the South African Legion and the Military Order of the Tin Hats (MOTHS), to name but a few. Some of the latter may continue to exist in future. Time will tell.

The stated vision of SANMVA is "a United Military Veterans Community in South Africa" and its motto "United We Serve With Pride". Its mission and objectives are clearly spelt out as well as its membership in a legally formalised document. In order to function at all levels of government a National Conference (NC), a National General Council (NGC) and a National Executive Committee (NEC) have been established. The same bodies are to be established at provincial and regional levels. The latter's area of responsibility is to strictly correspond to district and metropolitan municipal boundaries in each province.

At all the levels and for each organisation its tasks have been

spelt out, as well as the responsibilities of the office bearers and selected officials. The conferences, councils and committees have to meet at regular specified intervals to ensure ongoing management of SANMVA. The establishment of all the above bodies will require many individuals to manage the organisation. It will also require time to find and appoint suitable officials to manage all the above bodies effectively.

The National Office Bearers (NOBS) were selected by over 500 delegates at the 27 September 2008 meeting. The following NOBS were appointed: President, Kebby Mapatsoe (MKMVA); First Deputy President, Mbulelo Fihla (APLAMVA); Second Deputy President, Godfrey Giles (CMVO); Secretary General, Dudu Phama (APLAMVA); Deputy Secretary General, George Biya (AZANLAMVA); and Treasurer General, Sparks Motseke (MKMVA). The rest of the 16 strong NEC selected were Andile Ntabeni (APLAMVA); Frazer Smith (APLAMVA); Dudu Mbanjwa (MKMVA); Thembi Mvelase (MKMVA); Vuyisile Wauchope (AZANLAMVA); Mxolisi Nxiweni (AZANLAMVA); Lusapho Bhengu (TDFMVA); General Ramushwana (VDFMVA); Dennis Winter (CMVO); and Loyiso Mantambo (BDFMVA).<sup>21)</sup> The importance of the above selections and representations are obvious, and in view of the SANMVA aims, logical.

## **4.2 The South African National Military Veteran's Association aims and activities**

Five commissions were appointed at the SANMVA inaugural conference showing what its main aims and activities in the near future will be. The commissions are appointed as follows:<sup>22)</sup>

- A social welfare and development commission, which set as a goal changes in the *Social Assistance Act* to advantage all military veterans irrespective of age. Military veterans are to be seen as a special group with advantaged access to socio-economic benefits, such as health care, housing and pensions.
- An economic development commission, which aims at the development of a comprehensive economic empowerment policy mechanism, through which veterans will be economically empowered.
- An ordering and prioritisation commission, which envisions that

SANMVA should assist the Department of Defence to establish an all-encompassing and verified database of military veterans and their dependants. A top priority is seen as the identification of about 20 000 of the most vulnerable veterans and their dependants.

- A commission involved with legal amendments which envisages a review of current legislation to include the *Military Veterans Act*, the *Special Pensions Act*, the *Social Assistance Act*, and that a separate Ministry of Military Veteran's Affairs should be given priority.
- An international relations commission. In spite of the fact that SANMVA activities are stated in the constitution to be centred in South Africa, it was stated that the association should be represented on international military veterans' bodies. It should specifically play a role in Africa in resolving conflicts.

### **4.3 Membership of the World Veteran Foundation and the nature of the South African National Military Veterans Association**

With reference to the aims of the international relations commission, it is of interest that Lt Gen Niel Knobel, a former SADF Surgeon General, has been a leading influence in maintaining South African Military Veteran membership of the World Veteran Foundation (WVF). Serving as a vice president of the WVF he has promoted the idea that South Africa should have one unified military veteran's organisation which should be a paid up member of the WVF. The WVF has three 'aspirations' namely firstly, to establish a social and legal framework at national levels in order to advance the material interests of veterans and victims of war; secondly, to register and commemorate the memories of war dead on all sides in all countries; and thirdly to promote the reintegration and reconciliation between communities who have been involved in hostilities.<sup>23)</sup>

The WVF has reportedly got 180 veteran organisations in 89 countries representing about 30 million veterans worldwide. This represents as many as 92 per cent of the countries who are members of the United Nations (UN).<sup>24)</sup> The UN evidently stipulates that military

veteran's organisations which are members of the WVF must be non-governmental and non-partisan.

The SANMVA aims are largely in line with the WVF aspirations and the SANMVA constitution stipulates that the "nature of the association shall be non-governmental, non-sectarian, non-racial, non-sexist and non-partisan". Now that South Africa has one unified veterans association the SANMVA could join the WVF to its advantage. The nature of the SANMVA as being non-governmental and non-partisan must somehow be maintained in spite of the fact that the association is calling for government financial aid for many of its members, and that the Department of Defence as well as other departments are involved in veterans' affairs.

## **5. MILITARY VETERANS ORGANISATIONS ACTIVE IN NATIONAL POLITICS**

In spite of the principle laid down in the SANMVA constitution that SANMVA will be non-governmental and non-partisan, there have been consistent reports in the media of MK involvement in South African internal politics. This is no surprise since MK was the ANC's military wing during the struggle, but the president and the treasurer of SANMVA are MKMVA members, and they should ensure that the constitution is upheld.

The president of SANMVA and the chairperson of the MKMVA are evidently one and the same person. As chairperson of the MKMVA he was reported many times as having made politically threatening statements in support of President Zuma's candidature prior to the elections in 2009. For example, he expressed regret at the ANC being "at war with itself" and whose leadership was only interested in material benefits. A statement interpreted as possibly motivating violence followed, namely "we are saddened to once more feel the smell of blood in our nostrils urging us to take our combat uniforms to correct what is being destroyed by our own comrades".<sup>25)</sup> He later said that the MKMVA would campaign in areas where the ANC was being challenged and that MKMVA members were highly trained and experienced in the art of mobilisation.<sup>26)</sup> An added earlier comment by the chairperson of the MKMVA was that the MKMVA would never allow a new order to take hold "while signs are emerging that our revolution is under threat". This

followed a statement by the MKMVA's deputy national secretary that there would be no country if the ANC president was charged with corruption.<sup>27)</sup>

In reaction to such statements, Tokyo Sexwale, who has subsequently become the Minister of Human Settlements, wisely warned against attacks on national institutions such as the judiciary, arguing that such attacks were a threat to a democratic South Africa. Although wild statements are often made prior to elections, even in old mature democratic states, they should be made, if at all, by politicians not by persons filling senior posts in what should be an a-political military veterans' organisation.

After the elections in May 2009, MK military veterans in a military field type uniform marched on the office of the Western Cape Premier, to demand that she should apologise for a critical statement she had made aimed at the South African President. Since she was not in the Cape and was attending the President's meeting with amongst others, the provincial premiers, she could not accept the memorandum the crowd wanted to give her. The MKMVA chairperson then read the memorandum out loud, accusing the Cape Premier of disrespect for, and undermining the South African President.<sup>28)</sup> About four days later he was reported as having said that if the Cape Premier did not refrain from her anti-African racist behaviour, the MKMVA would not hesitate to launch a political programme aimed at making the Western Cape un-governable.<sup>29)</sup>

Not much came of these threats but it sent a very negative message to the world. It would seem that the ANC told its military veterans to back off and the Minister of Human Settlements evidently said that all parties should calm down. The national chairperson of the South African Infantry Association, one of the 23 associations which are included in the CMVO and thus a member of SANMVA, made a press statement in which he stated that the activities of the MKMVA were leading to the rumour, which was widely circulating, that the MK military veterans were busy degenerating into a feared Mugabe type veteran's association. He mentioned also that the MK political activities were an embarrassment to other military veterans' associations who were members of the newly established SANMVA.

It should be added that the wearing of a military type uniform by veterans attempting to threaten elected politicians, is unacceptable be-



haviour in a democratic country. It could lead to other associations objecting to the process and physically engaging their opposition, as a member of the South African Cape Corps Regimental Association said they would do, should MK attempt to destabilise the Western Cape. This statement was made on a South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) radio channel.

## **6. THE ACTIVITIES OF MILITARY VETERANS IN ZIMBABWE**

In contrast to South Africa a true insurgency and counter-insurgency was fought in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. As a result, the military wing of the government led by President Robert Mugabe, has a considerable amount of influence in matters of policy and overall governance. They fill all the top posts in the military and the police, and it has been reported that the generals refuse to salute the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Morgan Tsvangirai, who is the Prime Minister, because he played no role in the insurgency.

Since the coming to power of the Mugabe ZANU-PF government, Zimbabwe's economy has been in decline. However, the rapid decline of the last roughly 12 years is reported to have begun in August 1997, when war veterans forced the government to pay compensations and pensions estimated at Z\$7 billion, worth US\$700 million at the time. This amount had not been budgeted for, consequently the government had to borrow heavily in the domestic money market. This in turn led to hyperinflation in 2003.<sup>30)</sup>

The military veterans have also been widely reported as having played a leading role in the execution of the policy of accelerated land reform. By mid-2003 about 98 per cent of white-owned commercial farmland had been taken, mostly by force. This was another major factor which sparked the economic decline so evident in Zimbabwe today.

After the 2008 elections in which the MDC actually defeated ZANU-PF, Mugabe clung onto power by employing the military and the police, together with 'war veterans' to punish the people who lived in the traditional strongholds of the ZANU-PF government. This was reported by the New York based Human Rights Watch who had had observers in Zimbabwe. One observer reported that senior military

officials had been seen arming civilians and working with 'war veterans' to direct well organised and targeted violence. The war veterans increasingly included militants who were most probably too young to have been involved in the pre-1980 insurgency, although the veterans groups loyal to Mugabe obviously have their roots in the ZANU-PF military wing.<sup>31)</sup>

Media reports in mid-2009 still tell of farm invasions after the MDC joined the Zimbabwe government. Ten farms until recently farmed by white commercial farmers when the Government of National Unity took office, have been targeted and five farmers have been driven off the land, while 500 farm labourers lost their jobs. The Zimbabwe Republican Police (ZRP) are used to lay siege to the farms and drive the owners off the land. They then are reported to be seen standing guard at homesteads taken over by the government.<sup>32)</sup> Whether they are only police, or veterans in police uniforms as well, is not clear, but it is cunning to use police since it makes reporting to the ZRP superfluous.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

It is clear that President Zuma's government has every intention of advantaging the non-statutory forces' military veterans financially, hence the prioritisation of the matter, and by adding the words 'military veterans' to the Department of Defence's name. It is not clear how the inclusion process into the Department will be executed in terms of finance and organisation, but it will be wise to tackle the problem with a realistic time allocation for the planning to be done properly. The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans' statement that a separate Department of Military Veterans Affairs with its own budget vote should be established in time is probably the best solution. In the long run it is most likely the best option to ensure success, and to allow the Defence Department to concentrate on its military task.

Although the training of young soldiers, many of whom rejoin civilian life after a period of military service, has the side effect of increasing their technical and social skills, the main task of the military is to ensure a high standard of combat readiness. It is difficult enough to achieve it without having to supply social services to umpteen military veterans, who need specific aid and attention in a country racked

by high levels of poverty. The co-ordination with other departments and the procuring of the necessary finances will require a tremendous effort. The money for veterans' affairs should not be taken out of the already allocated defence budget, which is already limited.

The government, and initially the Department of Defence, while military veterans' affairs falls under its jurisdiction, must propagate the unity of all military veterans organisations in SANMVA, irrespective of their previous force affiliations. The a-political nature of SANMVA must truly be inculcated to ensure that democratic principles enshrined in the national and SANMVA constitutions are upheld. This will lay a sound foundation for SANDF military veteran organisations of the future, and can only be good for nation building. Needless to say SANMVA, with its member veteran organisations, must now become an a-political and mature blanket organisation, able to represent all South African military veterans nationally and internationally.

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