

MEDIA RELEASE

PSA calls for immediate resourcing or withdrawal of SANDF after demise of 13 soldiers in DRC peacekeeping missions

DATE

28 January 2025

EMBARGO

None

ENQUIRIES

Reuben Maleka
082 903 6808 / 082 428 5734

Claude Naiker
082 880 8950

The Public Servants Association (PSA) extends condolences to the families of 13 members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) who were killed in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

These soldiers were part of the group that was deployed in the peacekeeping mission. The PSA is shocked about reports indicating that South African soldiers who were sent to this peacekeeping mission lacked necessities required for armed forces. The PSA is disturbed by this tragic incident and calls on government to assess all other missions where soldiers are sent. The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans visited the DRC to assess the operational conditions and welfare of SANDF personnel deployed in the region but flew back in a military jet, leaving the deceased and wounded soldiers in Goma.

The South African casualties come after repeated concerns by civil organisations, unions, and political organisations about the preparedness of the SANDF after years of throttled budgets, which resulted in cutbacks in training, failure to modernise equipment, reduced serviceability of equipment, including main battle equipment, and the withdrawal of air support. The SANDF experienced budget cuts of some R9 billion over the last five years.

The PSA calls upon the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans to assess all missions where soldiers are deployed to ensure the adequacy of the resources and their safety. Soldiers cannot be deployed without a proper analysis of the ability to respond equally to the demands of that mission. Where necessary, soldiers must be withdrawn as South Africa cannot afford to be everyone's hero to the detriment of the country. The Ministry must put measures in place to prevent a recurrence of this kind of painful and embarrassing scenery for the country. The PSA previously warned government about constant cutting of budgets across all departments and public entities, which compromise service and expose employees to danger owing to lack of appropriate equipment to execute their mandates.

The PSA hopes that the death of these soldiers will not be in vain and will be a wake-up call to government to reassess its attitude towards the capacitation of the public service. Budget cuts have an adverse effect on the ability of same government to respond to challenges facing the country and the continent.

The image of SANDF is currently in tatters with soldiers trending on social media waving the white flag and accepting defeat. The PSA calls on government to restore the honour and integrity of the SANDF to its former glory.

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