

Military Veterans are entitled to have access to Assistance Benefits

By **Maliyakhe Shelembe MP** – DA Shadow Minister of Defence and Military Veterans

Chairperson, the Democratic Alliance notes the budget allocation of R654 million to the Department of Military Veterans.

This budget is allocated to DMV to ensure that Administrative, Socio Economic Support, Empowerment and Stakeholder Management programmes are implemented. These programs are meant to ensure that the Department of Military Veterans is efficiently administered and military veterans have access to assistance benefits such as houses, education, health services, pensions, transport and employment opportunities.

Chairperson, it is very disappointing that the DMV under Minister Mapisa-Nqakula has yet to employ a Director-General. A post that hasn't been filled since 2015. DG's are critical in ensuring the implementation of the programs I have mentioned. Supply Chain Management is a mess. In 2015 the PTES Company was appointed to do a skills audit in the DMV. The company was paid R478 000, within 3 months, but the Department has yet to receive the Skills Audit Report 6 years later. The ANC must be ashamed.

Chairperson, the Democratic Alliance is deeply concerned that this the DMV has only set its sights on receiving an unqualified audit, instead of aiming to obtain a clean audit. The DA is here to ensure that taxpayers' money is protected from the corrupt officials. We want a clean audit.

The Department of Military Veterans derives its mandate from the Military Veterans Act no 18 of 2011 which requires the Department to ensure that the members of the Defence Force who risked physical or psychological injuries or death whilst in service of their country, may depend on a dedicated health service that is guaranteed, comprehensive and available at all the times.

Chairperson, despite having the Act in place military veterans are still struggling to access health services in rural areas and in some provinces where there are no offices to assist them when they need it. It is totally unacceptable that the DMV has failed to comply with the Military Veterans Act no 18 and its regulations, since its inception in 2011.

Due to the failure of the DMV to execute its mandate, the Presidential Task Team has had to take over. This is an indication that this Department is in the verge of collapse.

Rule 21 of the Military Veterans Benefits Regulations stipulates that *"The DMV must within 30 days from the date of applying for benefits notify the Applicant in writing of the outcome of the Application and notification of the outcome must be delivered by hand at the physical address furnished by the Applicant or by prepaid Registered Post furnished by the Applicant."* Chairperson, this yet to happen in the DMV.

There are number of instances where military veterans apply for assistance benefits but are not informed whether their applications were approved. When the DA followed-up on some of these applications we were to find many of them older than a year. Chairperson, assistance benefits are not a favour for military veterans; it is a requirement by law.

South Africa has been under lockdown for more than a year and a number of military veterans have suffered severely, especially those waiting for the outcomes of their applications. Why is Minister

Mapisa-Nqakula turning a blind eye whilst our military veterans who fought to protect the citizens of this country and its economy are neglected? The ANC should be ashamed.

Chairperson, the Appeals Board for Military Veterans was established five years ago to review appeals for rejected assistance benefits but was never funded by the DMV to execute its mandate. The Minister has offered no solutions to this dire situation. Instead, she ignored the fact that the Appeals Board has not processing a single appeal for an entire term in office. The Appeals Board was appointed by the Minister, but she never followed up to it see if it was working. Why did the Minister not ensure that Appeals Board receive their funding? It seems she doesn't take the crucial role played by Military Veterans seriously.

Had the DA been in charge, every single military veteran would have been assisted.