



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

PRESS STATEMENT IN REGARD OF COMPULSORY LEAVE GIVEN TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NAMIBIAN DEFENCE FORCE

The Namibian newspaper of Wednesday, the 31st January 2018 ran an article titled “Defence sends 1000s on leave”. The article reported that thousands of army personnel staying at the seven bases around the country will be forced to take leave with effect from next month, alleging that the army can no longer afford to feed them as well as foot the water and electricity bills. It further reported unverified information about the Ministry of Defence on equipment procurement, underspending and overspending, and recruitment of a certain Helena Julius. This press statement is however only going to concentrate on the compulsory leave for soldiers.

The members of the Namibian Defence Force, like all other government employees, are entitled to different types of Leave of Absence in accordance with the Public Service Staff Rules DI of 1998. The Chief of Defence Force may also, in terms of Regulation 68 in the Defence Act (Act 1 of 2002), in the interest of the Defence Force, at any given time order a member of the Defence Force to take vacation leave with full pay or sick leave with full or half pay for such period of time as the Chief of Defence may determine. In fulfilment of these provisions, the policy of the Namibian Defence Force is that only a third (33%) of the total strength of the Namibian Defence Force may be allowed to take leave at the same time.

As rightly reported in the referred article, the Ministry of Defence experienced budget cuts during 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 Financial Years. Indications are also that there may not be major improvements in the

budgetary allocations for 2018/2019. Most of the planned activities of the Ministry of Defence and the Namibian Defence Force could therefore not be adequately carried out due to financial constraints. The ministry had to employ some measures and improvise where necessary in order to ensure that the Defence Force remains focused and ready to fulfil its constitutional mandate. One of those measures was to identify areas which could be targeted to save costs in order to allocate those savings to priority areas such as training and transport. Utilities such as water, electricity and feeding were found to be the commodities on which savings could be made. It was thence on that basis that the Chief of Defence Force had to apply Regulation 68.

Due diligence and consideration was made on the impact such decision would have on operational preparedness and effectiveness of the Force. Hence compulsory leave targets mostly members who are advanced in age to allow them to prepare before their imminent retirements. Members with genuine social problems which affect their morale and performance are also considered. This undertaking has also enabled those who, in one way or another, have not been taking their annual vacation leaves to go and spend some time with their families.

The Ministry of Defence is heartened by the interest the general public has put in seeking clarity on this sensational report. Your contributions on social media and radio chat shows have been very interesting. Most of you have demonstrated your broad understanding of security issues and the value you attach to the defence and security of your motherland. You are equally stakeholders in the provision of security of our country; hence your vigilance and curiosity are highly welcome.

The Minister of Defence and the entire management of the Ministry of Defence and the Namibian Defence Force would therefore like to reassure the Public that, despite the economic crisis that our country is facing, measures have been put in place to ensure that the defence and security of our country is not compromised and national sovereignty is guaranteed. Further that the seventy percent (70%) troops who remain active throughout provides the necessary capacity for the Defence Force to respond robustly to any threat. Mechanisms and standard operating procedures are also in place to recall those who are on leave when the need arise. The measures taken are

temporary because we have hope that our economy will pick up gradually for the better.

The Public is however warned that there are private individuals and media houses that are hell bent to tarnish the good name of the Namibian government and its institutions. They want to cause unnecessary panic amongst the populace by spreading fake news. They seem to forget that if anything happens to this country because of their slander and anti-government rhetoric, they would equally be affected. You are therefore advised to remain vigilant and share timeously with the Ministry of Defence anything related to the defence and security of this country. Namibia belongs to all of us and it must take all of us to guarantee its sovereignty.

Hon. Penda Ya Ndakolo, MP
MINISTER OF DEFENCE