

Address by Chief of the SA Army, Lieutenant General L. Yam during the SA Army Capability Demonstration 2017 on 18 May 2017 at General de Wet Training Centre, De Brug, Bloemfontein, Free State

Our host - the Chief of the SA Army, Lt Gen Yam,

The Acting Member of the Executive Council for Police, Roads and Transport in the Free State Province, MEC D. Kotzee,

Chairperson of the Defence Force Service Commission, Prof Van Harte,

The Chief of Staff of the SANDF, Lt Gen Masondo,

Chief of the Zimbabwean National Army, Lt Gen Sibanda,

Chiefs of Services and Divisions,

Free State South African Police Service Provincial Commissioner, Lt Gen Tsumane,

Deputy Chief of the Army,

The Army Command Cadre,

Members of the Plenary Defence Staff Council,

Generals,

Senior Officers,

Members of the Military Attaché and Advisory Corps,

Officers,

Sergeant Major of the Army,

Service Warrant Officers present here, Warrant Officers,

Non-Commissioned Officers,

Our hard working soldiers and their civilian counterparts,

Captains of Industry,

Members of the Media,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted as the Chief of the SA Army, that you made time in your busy schedules to come join us as our army flexes its muscles in a fire power demonstration that showcases a level of combat readiness that speaks to our ground force's deployability in pursuance of domestic and continental peace and stability.

As the SA Army, we draw pleasure in the fact that you have joined us here during the Capability Demonstration in a special month of May; a month in which our continental body the African Union is turning 54 years since its establishment as the Organisation for African Unity on 25 May 1963 with the aim of fostering continental unity and the promotion of peace and economic integration.

As a continent we continue facing devastating drought in some Southern and Eastern African countries risking food shortages and social displacements which take us backwards instead of advancing our collective growth. All these are issues we grapple with as brothers and sisters and we need to rise to the occasion and collectively devise means to shield our people from more distress. There are on the other hand, continuing issues of conflict and instability in Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Somalia and the menacing operations of non-state actors across the continent but as a collective, we are turning a corner and gradually approaching a state of stability necessary for all of our peoples to prosper and enjoy the fruits of peace.

As an army and a people, we understand that human suffering in other parts of Africa cannot occur in isolation but is a phenomena that directly affects us if we are cognizant of and sensitive to issues that have a bearing on our national security and domestic stability.

As the SA Army, we understand that peace and stability are the vital prerequisites if the African continent is to adequately address the dehumanizing triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment, and are determined to collaborate with our peace loving counterparts on the continent to never rest until all of Africa attains peace. As we demonstrated our capabilities as an army, we want to reassure the downtrodden on our continent who are forever yearning for peace and lasting stability around them that we have joined hands with our African brothers and sisters and other partners from across the world, in pursuing the fight for just and universal human rights by seeking stability, peace and security for all, and will never leave them at the mercy of enemies of progress.

What our forces demonstrated here today does not however represent the whole employment spectrum of the SA Army but just a limited capability demonstration that we were able to stage based on the conceptualized scenario and the available time we had for execution.

As the SA Army, our manpower, hardware and combat capability covers a wide range of battle space competencies that ensure that we successfully prosecute our domestic border control duties and our standing force commitment towards peace and security operations on the continent under the United Nations and the African Union.

This year's Capability Demonstration takes place hot on the heels of a widely successful World Economic Forum on Africa held in Durban from 3 to 5 May 2017 under the theme; "Achieving inclusive growth through responsive and responsible leadership," where more than 1000 delegates from over 100 countries deliberated on economic opportunities and challenges facing the African continent, the outcomes of which would have an impact on our operations as militaries.

Speaking to delegates as the leader of the host country, the Commander-in-Chief of the South African National Defence Force and President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency, President Jacob Zuma highlighted the difficulties facing our continent and the world at large saying; "Critical challenges facing the world include weak economic growth, the management of migration, global security and terrorism as well as related international crimes."

As progressive defence industry and military leaders interested in making a valuable contribution towards the attainment of lasting peace and stability and the creation of an enabling environment for economic growth on the continent, it is important that we fully grasp the extent of the challenges our countries face as outlined above by President Zuma, so that we are better able to realign our operations and efficiently execute our mandates and support our principals and peoples. Weak economic growth, the management of migration, global security and terrorism are issues that drive closer to home especially to us as military officers, and that demands a clearer concerted focus from us to advise our principals on ways to tackle them.

As the SA Army, together with our peace-loving African counterparts, we will be using the constitutional mandates given to us by our respective governments, the United Nations and African Union to advance the achievement of peace and stability that helps stimulate economic growth.

This Capability Demonstration shows that as the SA Army we stand by our constitutional principals in government whose orders we patriotically execute to make our continent a better place for all our people to live in.

The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula is on record saying that the entire leadership of the Defence Force, and its dedicated women and men, are committed to the effort of fostering stability and peace, not only here at home, but in the entire continent, and as the SA Army and the entire services and divisions making up the SANDF, we are committed to the advancement of the African Union's Agenda 2063 which seeks to deliver a peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa that is at peace with herself and affords her hardworking citizens the opportunities to peacefully co-exist.

Our principals in government understand the pressing financial constraints we operate under as a military and have made it known that they want to increase the defence budget - with the fiscus allowing - from approximately 1.05% allocated for the FY 2016/17 to at least 2% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a development that we heartily welcome, and as an army we shall continue striving under a limiting economic climate to ensure that exercises like the Capability Demonstration we staged today, continue taking place to ensure that our soldiers are well prepared for the demanding tasks that lie ahead.

As South Africa's ground forces, we have been fortunate that even during trying economic times such as the one we currently find ourselves, we have always been in a position to stage force preparation interventions like this Capability Demonstration, albeit in a small scale, to prepare our soldiers for peace missions on the continent.

The SA Army is ready and willing to be deployed in domestic and continental duties to advance the AU's Agenda 2063 and work towards a peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa in concert with our brothers and sisters.

We pledge to avail ourselves to serve for the betterment of our people both here at home and on the continent emboldened by our Commander-in-Chief and President of the Republic of South Africa, President Jacob Zuma, when he committed that "South Africa will continue to support regional and continental processes to respond to and resolve crises, promote peace and security, strengthen regional integration, significantly increase intra-African trade and champion sustainable development in Africa. This role will continue and government is looking into the resourcing of the SANDF mandate in line with the recently concluded Defence Review."

Our principals' commitment has since translated into action with progress already seen on the implementation of the recommendations of the Defence Review 2015, and the SA Army welcomes this good news.

And in the spirit of fostering intra-Africa and international trade on military technology and other commodities, allow me to urge the Captains of Industry present here to network with our colleagues from the Military Attaché and Advisory Corps – whose comradeship and support our country greatly values - and see how best to advance the aspirations of our principals and delegates who attended the recently concluded World Economic Forum on Africa conference in Durban, in as far as the stimulation of economic growth on the continent is concerned.

On the military technology front, our colleagues from the South African Aerospace, Maritime and Defence Industry Association (AMD) are also at liberty to showcase their vast military hardware catalogue to our friends and pursue possible transactions that would go a long way into economic integration and improvement of trade relations amongst us.

As I conclude, allow me to extend the SA Army's appreciation of the great body of work and collaboration between our Technical Services Corps and the Cuban Defence Force in Operation Thusano which resulted in the repair and revitalization of a fleet of SA Army soft and hard-skinned vehicles which were deemed beyond repair but are today back in service, and thus saved us millions of rands which have now been pumped into much needed operations. Some of the vehicles you saw in action today were thanks to Operation Thusano and its incredible turnaround and skills transfer capabilities.

On behalf of the Army Command Cadre, let me thank all the men and women who made this Capability Demonstration a success and also extend the SA Army's appreciation that our guests took time off their schedules to come down to Bloemfontein – the City of Roses - and be part of this year's C Army Capability Demonstration. We wish you well and hope you have a safe trip home to your loved ones.

I thank you.