

Generals present here, officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers, members and representatives of the physical training, sport and recreation fraternity, friends from the business sector, members of the media, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am excited that we could all be here in Tlokwe as the SA Army steadfastly continues this noble initiative to help improve and maintain the fitness levels within our national defence force. We have gathered here to show our commitment to reclaim the position of the SA Army as an institution valuing physical training and wellness amongst its members. As an army that coined the phrase; "We train as we Fight", we sharply recognize the positive effects that a healthy lifestyle has on the force preparation levels of our soldiers. What we have all gathered here to participate in and witness, forms part of the critical conditioning that we need as soldiers to efficiently execute our mandate in battle.

It is for this reason that I commend all the ordinary members who, year-in and year-out, make sure that there are planners, supporters and competitors to shape, direct and add a human face to this noble undertaking towards the achievement of total fitness in the SA Army. With that said, allow me to categorically state that I am extremely proud of all of you who are here to compete in this annual fitness humdinger.

The success of this event depends largely on us who have gathered here today. Let us hold hands and build on the success of the previous installments of this competition. The bar has been set high with the SA Army Signal Formation having staged a well-attended competition in 2014. The Air Defence Artillery pulled out a massive event in 2015 and the expectation is now on the SA Army Intelligence Formation, supported by the Gunners from Artillery Formation, to ensure that a memorable competition takes place here and that our best athletes represent us at the 8th SANDF Fittest Soldier Competition taking place on 6 to 11 November this year.

This year the greatest event on the SA Army's fittest calendar marks ten years of making a difference in people's lives and by extension the life of our mighty army. As we come of age and mark a decade since the inception of this competition, we do so well aware that our efforts have not fallen far from the objectives we have set ourselves.

Over the years we have seen army soldiers reign supreme in SANDF Fittest Soldier Competition, thanks to the fact that we have always borne the torch of fitness here at home. Like our forebears once advised, it is of course true that charity begins at home.

We take our responsibility towards fitness to heart and our army has now for years been enjoying the fruits of its labour. Our fitness standards have transcended other fields and most importantly, the combat realm where our hardworking soldiers continue to gallantly acquit themselves in battle. All these gains in combat; being in the DRC or CAR are thanks to our efforts to inculcate a life of self-discipline and fitness in everything that our army undertakes.

And as we celebrate a decade since the establishment of this prestigious event, we are proud that our hardworking soldiers; both male and female, responded to the noble call to do away with an inactive lifestyle and rallied others to see the importance of a healthy lifestyle if our military was to fulfill what it was intended for.

Together, through the SA Army Fittest Soldier initiative, we waged a ten-year spirited campaign against the lack of willingness to challenge one's physical inadequacies and we are succeeding. This year we mark a decade of a concerted campaign to showcase ordinary army members' triumph over the temptation to sit idly and neglect their physical wellbeing.

Ladies and gentlemen, the past ten years have seen us emerge together stronger, from various rank groups to set an example for our fellow uniformed members that regardless of your appointment on the SA Army hierarchy, fitness remains the responsibility of an individual; a responsibility that is directly linked to whether our forces are combat ready to execute the mandate that the people of South Africa expects from their soldiers.

Last month – August - having been a momentous month in as far as the struggle for the emancipation of women is concerned, I have not been as sure about the greater prospects that willing and capable women in our military stand to realise like I do now. I have seen how our women in uniform have added their weight towards the total success of the SA Army. I have seen how dedicated female soldiers have carried themselves over the years in this Fittest Soldier Competition. It feels me with great pride knowing that our ladies have not taken a step back ever since we started this noble adventure that complements our force preparation interventions as an army.

This year's installment of the SA Army Fittest Soldier Competition has a whopping 350 competitors - a hundred of which are female entrants - and this is an encouraging statistic on its own. More than 100 female entrants have not only entered but excellently met the stringent fitness criteria that this prestigious competition set for all competitors regardless of gender.

As we mark 60-years since the historic women's march to Pretoria against injustices of the apartheid regime of years gone by, let us recognize that this marks 60-long years since upright, confident women of our country, united in their diversity, took the stance against injustices and I am glad to see our women in the military today emulate their strength by taking a stance and reclaiming their places in society and the workplace. I am prouder today that not only have our women paid lip service to the need to be counted as equals in society but they have also embraced the fitness challenge and entered the 2016 SA Army Fittest Soldier Competition in their numbers to prove their resilience and commitment to our national army's project for fitness transformation.

I stand here today proud that our sisters are standing shoulder to shoulder with their hardworking male counterparts to discard the myth that women, because of their work and household commitments cannot lead active, fitness-driven lifestyles. This year's

competition with over 100 female participants, and coming from August the month dedicated to women's struggles and triumph, we ought to be excited about such an achievement.

Ladies and gentlemen, this competition has grown from an inaugural participation of 120 athletes in 2007 to this year's whopping 350. Let it also be stated that the competition is very much in demand seeing that over 620 soldiers entered. As earlier alluded, there is a healthy spirit of competition amongst our members in uniform and the stringent criteria meant over 90 percent of the first batch of entrants did not make the grade to compete in this year's event. I am however proud of the sportsmanship between our soldiers who didn't make the list of final participants but are inspired to continue improving their points and push for inclusion in 2017.

Let me urge you to recommit to an active life and muster the courage and will-power to withstand the temptation to postpone fitness to another day. Fight on, fight the edge to remain inactive and soldier on towards total fitness because there are more benefits for our army when we embrace and take fitness seriously.

As I conclude, allow me to wish our committed sponsor the SA Army Foundation well as they celebrate 60 years of existence.

Let us now get into our active-wear and compete fairly in an environment of good sportsmanship and comradeship. To our 2015 top athletes; Bombadier R.J. Mashapu from Light Artillery Regiment and Private O.G. Morifi from 10 South African Infantry Battalion - holders of the best male and female categories respectively - I specially want to admit that I admire your work ethic and fitness excellence but in the same vein challenge fellow competitors to throw in a good fight and see if they cannot wrestle your hard-won trophies out of your grasps. With that said, let the games begin and may the best participant be generously rewarded at the end.

I thank you.