



MEDIA RELEASE

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The South African Military Ombud 10th International Conference of Ombud Institutions for the Armed Forces (10ICOAF)

The 10ICOAF conference is underway at the Emperor's Palace in Johannesburg. Hosted by the SA Office of the Military Ombud and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the conference ends tomorrow with Africa Day celebrations in a form of a dialogue.

Speakers such as Dr Somadoda Fikeni, Dr Philani Mthembu, Prof Shadrack Gutto, Dr Benjamin Kunbour a visiting scholar at the University of Ghana Law School, Ms Patricia Myriam Isimat-Mirin, Special Advisor to the Ivory Coast Ombuds and Dr Hans Born, Director of Policy and Research Division DCAF amongst others will deliberate on advancing the narrative of the oversight over the armed forces in Africa.

Giving a key note address at the opening of the conference yesterday, the Minister of Defence Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa – Nqakula said that as they hold this 10th International Conference of Ombud Institutions, they need to reflect on the extent of involvement of the continent in these structures, and further how being members or participating in the activities of these will further enhance the countries' own oversight mechanisms with the evolving roles and responsibilities.

The conference attracted delegates from around the globe and is held annual in different DCAF members states.

The South African Military Ombud Lt Gen (Ret) Temba Matanzima said that the role of the armed forces is evolving from that of warfighting to, that of domestic security, crisis response, border security management and peacekeeping.

Matanzima said these roles present a new challenge in the arena of Human Rights and this will surely give rise to new problems and complaints.

Celebrated under the theme “The evolving roles and responsibilities of the armed forces and the implications for ombuds institutions”, ICOAF gathers representatives of ombuds institutions for the armed forces from over 50 countries around the world. It was established in 2009 with the aim of developing best practices relating to the mandate, powers and functioning of these institutions.

“This therefore compels one to ask if the ombudsman is well prepared to deal with such new complaints and whether their mandates allows for such. Are the new legal paradigms of the ombudsman adaptable to provide recommendations and rectify such problems,” asked Matanzima.

In his speech Matanzima said irrespective of different mandates, it is imperative that the ombudsman have a functioning system in place rather than singling out the “best practise”.

“Ombudspersons play a vital role when it comes to investigating and reporting misconduct of military personnel and problems faced by servicemen and women,” further said Matanzima.

Minister Nqakula said the SANDF is obliged to implement the recommendations of the Ombud or take them on review should it be deemed fit.

Nqakula said this being the 10th instalment of this conference should also give them an opportunity to reflect on lessons learnt. “This is especially as the nature of war has changed drastically from what it was two decades ago, and the characterization as asymmetric warfare and more and more intra state conflicts with the involvement of external players,” said Nqakula.

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