

**President Jacob Zuma awarded 28 medals to SANDF members in celebration of the
Armed Forces Day**



SANDF members paraded in front of State President Jacob Zuma, Minister of Defence and Military Veterans Nosiviwe Maphisa-Nqakula and distinguished guests.

By More Matshediso

The South African President Jacob Zuma bestowed first battle honours to 28 members of the South African National Defence Force during the South African Armed Forces Day celebration held at Bloemspruit Air Force Base on Friday, February 21.

Amongst the recipients of decorations for bravery medals were families of soldiers who died in service of their country and people. The handing over of medals to SANDF members occurred for the first time in the past 20 years and the advent of democracy.

The medals symbolised different statuses and significance including the Silver Leopard (1), Bronze Leopard (8), Bronze Leopard Posthumous (3), Golden Protea (2), Silver Protea (1) and Silver Protea (12), as well as SANDF Commendation Certificate (1).

Addressing about 8 000 uniformed members of SANDF and distinguished guests before awarding medals to beneficiaries, President Zuma said South Africans had every reason to celebrate and a good story to tell.

“It was a defence force that enforced every apartheid law, terrorising our people in the townships in the hope of stopping the march to freedom. It is defence force that makes them proud as it participates in peacekeeping mission in our continent. It is a defence force that our people trust to protect the borders of our land, soldiers who stay awake at night so that they, the people, can sleep in peace,” said Zuma.

Speaking as the Commander-in Chief of Armed Forces, President Zuma said the SANDF recommitted to continue the walk it started under the able leadership of its very first Commander-in Chief of Armed Forces.

“Over the past 13 years South Africa has also deployed its forces as part of the peacekeeping mission of the UN in the DRC,” said Zuma.

“We have learned many lessons in the entire mission we have undertaken since Burundi, up until recently in the execution of our bilateral memorandum for post conflict re-integrated of warring factions in the Central African Republic,” he added.

The president said the SANDF mission to assist in the post conflict disarmament, reintegration and training of the CAR Army since the year 2007 has seen relative success.

He referred to the unfortunate incident where 15 members of SANDF were killed in a civil conflict in CAR March 2013.

“On that fateful morning, after being ambushed, our members had no choice but to defend their base and protect lives. Despite the sad and unfortunate loss of 15 of our members, our soldiers accounted well for themselves in military combat terms,” said Zuma.

All defence force members from SA Army, SA Navy, SA Air force and SA Military Health Services were represented on the parade that marched before the State President and guests. The honorary event coincided with the country's milestone celebration of 20 years of Democracy and freedom.

The President called on all citizens to learn to celebrate and stand behind their heroes.

“National Armed Forces Day is not a day for our soldiers, but for the whole nation. It must become an important day in the calendar of our government and our country,” said Zuma.

The President said he was pleased with the overall plan that has emerged to address the various limitations, including on the issues of budget, currently affecting government’s ability to take proper care of its soldiers.

“The long awaited Permanent Defence Force Services Commission has been appointed. It will look at the improving the conditions of the facilities in the bases. The Chief of the SANDF has also announced the establishment of an Education Trust to provide financial assistance for educational purposes to the dependents of SANDF who have died or severely injured in the execution of their duties,” said Zuma.

The event was also supported by Defence Ministers from Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo and Prime Minister of Lesotho amongst other.

The President led the convoy from the Air Force Base to Mangaung townships and the City, followed by SANDF members, guests and the public to complete the celebration, ending the convoy at Tempe Military Base, Bloemfontein.



President Jacob Zuma handing over a battle honours medal to the SANDF member at Bloemspruit Air Force Base.