

Budget allocation beyond SANDF, says admiral

The SA National Defence Force (SANDF) has no say in national budget allocations, the Seriti Commission of Inquiry heard on Tuesday (27 August).



SA Navy Rear Admiral Derek Christian, the commission's fourth witness, was asked by evidence leader Simmy Lebala to explain the allocation of funds for national defence, against other competing socio-economic demands.

"Regarding the [national] budget, it's always a chicken and egg [debate]. Every department in this country has got demands to meet its mandate and argues why they should get a bigger budget," he said.

"It [the allocation] is not a decision that we, the defence force, make. It is government which makes the decision. The challenge that lies with us is to make sure we use the money as wisely as possible for the benefit of the country," he said.

Lebala asked Christian to explain how the navy would fare without the equipment acquired through the controversial arms procurement deal.

"What then would be the future of the SA Navy without these capabilities?" asked Lebala.

Christian told the commission, sitting in Pretoria, that without the arms deal vessels, the navy would be crippled.

Deterrent

"Without these capabilities we would not be able to execute our constitutional mandate. The navy and the rest of the defence force is there to protect the people of South Africa in times of any threat," he said.

"The frigates provide serious combat capability which you simply have to have if you are to provide a maritime service. The submarines, because of their stealth capabilities, are an essential major deterrent weapon system," he said.

Christian's sworn statement submitted to the commission stated that the operation of the SA Navy was a "complex business". "It must be highlighted that operating a modern, albeit small, navy such as the SA Navy is a complex business. In this we are no different to most of other navys, especially those of a similar size and nature," he said.

The previous witness, SA Navy Rear Admiral Philip Schoultz told the commission that South Africa needed the submarines, frigates and other military equipment acquired through the arms deal.

"[It is important to] provide sufficient credible deterrents that a would-be aggressor would look at from a maritime perspective and say there is risk in attacking," he said.

"I believe that the purchases were justified and necessary. I have no doubt that it was a good decision by government to give South Africa this capability," he said.

Witnesses from the SA Air Force are scheduled to take the stand when the commission resumes on Wednesday (28 August).

Source: Sapa via I-Net Bridge

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