

SANDF says bulletproof vests were "worn correctly" in Bangui

The military has distanced itself from remarks by a senior officer on the use of bulletproof vests in a Central African Republic battle that left 15 South African soldiers dead.



"The SA National Defence Force (SANDF) reads with dismay the unfortunate comments attributed to Colonel Renier Doibi Coetzee at the Land Forces Africa conference," said SANDF spokesman Sphiwe Dlamini in a statement on Tuesday (23 July).

"The SANDF distances itself from the comments. The member did not speak on behalf of the SANDF nor was he assigned by the SANDF to present the paper," Dlamini said.

Last Friday (19 July), Beeld quoted Coetzee as saying the incorrect use of bulletproof vests during the battle in Bangui probably contributed to the South African death toll. Coetzee said soldiers who had worn their jackets correctly withstood several bullets and survived the ordeal.

He said that after the March battle, it emerged that some of the South African troops had not worn their jackets in the prescribed way.

"Some took out the bulletproofing plates, while others just wore breast plates, leaving their backs unprotected," he was quoted as saying.

Coetzee said the army was currently evaluating both instructions for wearing the jackets and the quality of items being issued to soldiers.

Wearing the jackets was optional and, especially when it was hot, soldiers tended to remove the plates.

"American and British soldiers in Afghanistan eat and sleep with their jackets on, and they would not dare move from camp without them. This is one of the things that after the current evaluation will probably become mandatory for our soldiers," Coetzee said.

Dlamini said during the SANDF debrief after the CAR incident, this matter was not raised in the military command council, where Coetzee was present.

"It is unfortunate that Coetzee made these irresponsible comments. Our members fought gallantly in the face of overwhelming opposition and contributed to the defence of peace on the continent," Dlamini said.

Source: Sapa via I-Net Bridge

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