Message

By the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans

The publication of Strengthening Trust and Accountability: A Seven-Year Review (2019 to 2026) marks a significant milestone in the continued development of the Office of the Military Ombud and its contribution to South Africa's system of democratic governance. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the institution's journey, recognise its achievements and reaffirm the enduring importance of independent oversight within the defence environment.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa envisions public institutions that are accountable, transparent and responsive to the people they serve. Within the defence sector, these principles are fundamental to maintaining a disciplined, professional and ethical military that enjoys the confidence of both its members and the public. The Office of the Military Ombud plays an important role in advancing these values by providing an independent and impartial mechanism through which complaints may be considered fairly and objectively.

Over the past seven years, the Office has continued to mature as an institution, strengthening its capacity to investigate complaints, promote administrative fairness, improve accessibility and foster constructive engagement with stakeholders across the defence environment. Through its investigations and recommendations, the Office has not only addressed individual grievances but has also identified systemic administrative challenges and contributed to improvements in policies, processes and decision-making within the South African National Defence Force.

The Office's growing emphasis on accessibility has been equally significant. Through sustained outreach, public awareness initiatives, military engagements, stakeholder partnerships and participation in national platforms, the Office has taken its mandate closer to serving and former members of the SANDF and members of the public.

These engagements have provided opportunities to explain the role of the Military Ombud, while also listening to the concerns and experiences of those within the defence environment.

The Office has also strengthened its engagement beyond the immediate defence environment. Its participation in regional and international ombud platforms, academic partnerships and oversight networks has contributed to institutional learning and knowledge exchange.

The hosting of the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in South Africa in 2025 was a significant achievement and reflected the country's contribution to the international discourse on military oversight, accountability and civil-military relations.

This publication therefore reflects more than institutional accomplishments. It tells the story of an organisation that has sought to strengthen fairness, accountability and confidence in military administration while remaining responsive to the people it serves.

I wish to commend the Military Ombud, Lt Gen (Retired) Vusumuzi Masondo, the Deputy Military Ombud, management and staff of the Office, as well as the Department of Defence, Parliament, oversight structures and all stakeholders who have supported the institution's important work during this period. Their collective commitment has contributed to strengthening the Office's role within South Africa's defence governance framework.

As we reflect on the progress achieved, we must also look ahead with renewed determination.

The pursuit of fairness, accountability and excellence in public administration is a continuous endeavour.

The continued strengthening of independent oversight, institutional capacity and accessibility will remain important to ensuring that the defence establishment is grounded on integrity, professionalism, accountability and respect for the rule of law.

I congratulate the Office of the Military Ombud on this significant milestone and trust that this publication will serve both as a record of an important period in the institution's development and as a foundation for continued progress in the years ahead.



Honourable Ms M. A. Motshekga, MP
Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, MP

Message

By the Military Ombud

As I conclude my term as Military Ombud, I do so with profound gratitude for the privilege of serving the Republic of South Africa, the members of the South African National Defence Force and all those who have placed their trust in the Office of the Military Ombud over the past seven years.

This publication is more than a record of institutional milestones. It is a reflection of a journey shaped by purpose, guided by principle and sustained by the dedication of people committed to fairness, accountability and good governance. It captures a defining period in the evolution of the Office and the collective efforts that have strengthened its contribution to independent oversight within the defence environment.

Over the past seven years, I have come to appreciate that the true measure of this Office lies not only in the number of matters it considers or resolves, but also in the confidence it inspires and the institutional lessons that emerge from its work. Every complaint entrusted to us represents an individual seeking fairness, understanding and an impartial assessment of their concerns. That responsibility demands sound judgement, integrity and an unwavering commitment to independence and fairness.

During my tenure, the Office continued to strengthen its complaints resolution processes, investigative capacity and institutional systems while enhancing its responsiveness to stakeholders. Investigations increasingly demonstrated that individual complaints could reveal broader administrative and policy challenges. Through evidence-based findings and recommendations, the Office contributed not only to the resolution of individual matters, but also to improvements in administrative practice, policy implementation and accountability within the South African National Defence Force.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my tenure has been witnessing the Office become increasingly visible and accessible.

Through sustained outreach, stakeholder engagement, public awareness initiatives, military engagements and participation in national platforms, we took the mandate of the Military Ombud closer to the people we serve.

These engagements were not simply opportunities to explain our role and complaints processes; they were equally opportunities to listen, understand recurring concerns and gain first-hand insight into the experiences of serving members, former members and members of the public.

The Office's national and international relationships also expanded during this period. Collaboration with government institutions, Parliament and its oversight committees, military structures, academic institutions, ombud institutions and other strategic partners created valuable opportunities for cooperation, knowledge-sharing and institutional learning. Beyond South Africa's borders, the Office represented the country on regional and international platforms, sharing its experiences with counterparts committed to strengthening accountability, good governance and effective military oversight.

Hosting the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in 2025 marked a defining milestone in this journey. It affirmed the Office's growing international stature and provided an important platform for dialogue on military oversight, accountability, awareness, and outreach and civil-military relations.

The achievements reflected in these pages are the result of a collective effort. They belong to the dedicated men and women of the Office of the Military Ombud, whose professionalism, expertise, resilience and commitment have enabled the institution to fulfil its mandate. I extend my sincere appreciation to the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Parliament and its oversight committees, the leadership of the South African National Defence Force, the Department of Defence and the many stakeholders whose constructive engagement has strengthened the work of the Office.

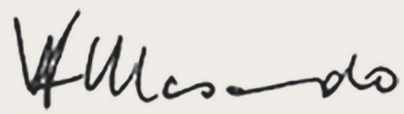
The journey has not been without challenges. Like any developing institution, the Office has had to navigate operational, resource and structural constraints while continuing to fulfil its statutory mandate. These experiences have reinforced the importance of strengthening the institutional foundations of the Office, protecting its independence and ensuring that it is adequately equipped to meet the demands of the future.

As one chapter closes, another begins. Institutions endure beyond individual terms of office because they are built on enduring values, sound systems and a commitment to the principles they were established to uphold. The next chapter will require continued commitment to independent and impartial investigations, accessibility, institutional capacity, accountability and the strengthening of the Office's independence. I am confident that the foundation established over the years provides a strong platform on which the incoming administration can build.

I leave this Office with immense pride in what has been achieved collectively, confidence in its future and gratitude to all who have walked this journey with me.

It has been the greatest honour of my professional life to serve as Military Ombud.

May this Seven-Year Review stand not only as a record of progress, but also as a reminder that trust is earned through service, accountability is strengthened through action, and lasting institutions are built through the unwavering commitment of dedicated people.



Lt Gen (Retired) **Vusumuzi Masondo**
Military Ombud

Message

By the Former Deputy Military Ombud

It was both an honour and a privilege to serve as Deputy Military Ombud during an important period in the development of the Office of the Military Ombud. I look back on this period with immense pride in the progress made and gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to an institution founded on fairness, accountability and impartiality.

The story captured in this publication is ultimately a story about people. Behind every complaint investigated, every recommendation made, every outreach engagement conducted and every institutional milestone achieved were people committed to ensuring that the mandate of the Military Ombud was fulfilled with integrity and professionalism.

The achievements reflected in these pages were made possible by the dedication of the people behind the institution. Investigators, legal practitioners, intake officials, communications professionals and support staff worked with commitment to ensure that complaints were received, assessed, investigated and resolved with diligence and fairness. Their professionalism, resilience and willingness to serve remain among the Office's greatest strengths.

The period also saw the Office become increasingly visible and accessible. Through military engagements, public awareness activations, Joint Operations induction programmes, exhibitions, stakeholder engagements and outreach activities across the country, the Office took its mandate closer to the people.

These engagements created opportunities not only to explain the complaints process, but also to listen to the experiences and concerns of serving members, former members and members of the public.

This shift was important. Accessibility is not achieved simply by establishing a complaints mechanism; people must know that the institution exists, understand its mandate and have confidence that their concerns will be received fairly.

The growth of the Outreach Programme reflected an increasing recognition that the Office needed to be present where its stakeholders work, live and gather.

The engagements also provided an important source of institutional learning. The concerns raised by stakeholders frequently reflected recurring issues relating to conditions of service, internal grievance mechanisms, benefits, career management and administrative processes.

These engagements complemented the formal complaints process by providing valuable insight into the experiences of stakeholders and the broader environment in which the Office exercised its mandate.

The Office's work was strengthened through collaboration. Partnerships with national, provincial and local government structures, military formations, academic institutions, oversight bodies and other stakeholders enabled the Office to extend its reach, strengthen knowledge-sharing and build relationships that supported its work. These relationships demonstrated the value of combining the specialised mandate of the Military Ombud with the knowledge, networks and reach of its partners.

The Office's engagement also extended beyond South Africa. Participation in regional and international Ombud platforms created opportunities to exchange experiences, benchmark practices and contribute to broader discussions on military oversight, accountability and good governance. The hosting of the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in 2025 was a particularly significant achievement, placing South Africa at the centre of international dialogue on military oversight, awareness and civil-military relations.

The Office's investigations during this period further demonstrated the importance of independent oversight in identifying more than individual administrative shortcomings. In a number of matters, investigations revealed recurring weaknesses in policy implementation, remuneration administration, personnel administration and decision-making. The resulting recommendations provided opportunities for corrective action and institutional learning, illustrating how individual complaints can contribute to broader improvements in administrative fairness and accountability.

I also wish to acknowledge the leadership of the Military Ombud, Lt Gen (Retired) Vusumuzi R. Masondo, whose commitment and direction contributed to the continued development of the institution during this period. I extend my appreciation to the Ministers of Defence and Military Veterans, Parliament and its oversight committees, the leadership of the SANDF, the Department of Defence and all our institutional and stakeholder partners for their engagement and cooperation.

The Office must continue to fulfil its mandate, even when its leadership changes. Its strength lies in the systems put in place, the relationships built and the values upheld by its staff. I am therefore encouraged by the progress made during this period and confident that the Office will continue to grow, become more accessible and strengthen its role.

May this publication preserve the record of an important chapter in the history of the Office while recognising the collective effort that made its achievements possible. I extend my best wishes to the Office of the Military Ombud and its incoming leadership as they continue the important work of advancing fairness, accountability, accessibility and public confidence within the defence environment.



Advocate Simphiwe Damane-Mkosana
Former Deputy Military Ombud

Executive Summary

Seven Years of Strengthening Trust and Accountability

The period from 2019 to 2026 marked a significant chapter in the evolution of the Office of the Military Ombud. Building on the legislative and institutional foundations established during its first seven years, the Office entered its second term with a clear objective: to strengthen an already established institution and position it for greater operational effectiveness, accessibility, independence and impact.

When the Second Military Ombud assumed office on 1 November 2019, the Office had already established its statutory mandate, investigative authority and institutional presence. The challenge was therefore not to create a new institution, but to consolidate and strengthen what had been built. Over the subsequent seven years, the Office progressively refined its complaints resolution framework, strengthened governance and quality assurance, introduced more sophisticated performance management mechanisms, expanded its national outreach programme and deepened its engagement with stakeholders in South Africa and internationally.

At the centre of this institutional journey was the strengthening of the complaints-resolution process. The revision of the Complaints Handling Manual established a more structured and consistent framework for investigations, while the introduction of a Preliminary Report enhanced procedural fairness by giving interested parties an opportunity to respond before final findings were submitted to the Military Ombud. Quality assurance was progressively embedded throughout the lifecycle of each complaint, supported by supervisory review, operational oversight, structured quality-assurance meetings and legal scrutiny of substantive investigation reports.

Operational management evolved alongside these reforms. The institutionalisation of the weekly Intake Assessment Meeting established a multidisciplinary forum for assessing new complaints, identifying jurisdictional and evidential issues at an early stage and ensuring that matters entered the investigative process with greater clarity. Operational dashboards further transformed performance information from retrospective reporting into an active management tool. By monitoring complaint ageing, turnaround times, workflow progression, legal processes and the implementation of recommendations, management gained greater insight into emerging risks and operational bottlenecks.

The impact of these reforms was evident in the improved efficiency of the complaints resolution process. Investigation and intake turnaround times improved significantly over the review period, while a greater proportion of matters were concluded within the prescribed and targeted timeframes. These improvements reflected the cumulative effect of strengthened governance, quality assurance, operational management, legal oversight and evidence-based performance monitoring.

The Office's work also demonstrated that complaints extend beyond individual grievances. Collectively, they provide valuable insight into recurring administrative challenges within the defence environment. Throughout the review period, complaints continued to reflect concerns relating to conditions of service, career management, remuneration and benefits, separation from service, medical administration and other aspects of military administration. By analysing these trends, the Office was able to identify systemic concerns, inform stakeholder engagements and support recommendations aimed at strengthening administrative fairness and accountability.

Several landmark investigations illustrate this broader institutional contribution. Investigations concerning Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD) payments and officer appointment processes demonstrated how individual complaints could expose systemic weaknesses in remuneration administration, policy implementation and human resource decision-making. The resulting recommendations addressed issues such as administrative backlogs, coordination between personnel structures, record management, policy alignment, procedural fairness and individualised assessments. In this way, the Office's impact extended beyond the resolution of individual matters to contributing to structural and behavioural improvement within the Defence establishment.

The seven-year journey of the Second Military Ombud was therefore one of institutional strengthening. It was a period in which established foundations were transformed into more mature systems; in which complaints became a source of institutional insight; in which outreach became a mechanism for both awareness and listening; and in which individual investigations contributed to broader organisational learning and improvement.

Accessibility was another defining feature of the second term. The Office expanded its Outreach Programme from a traditional awareness function into a sustained national engagement platform. Military bases, operational units, public spaces, exhibitions, stakeholder forums and public participation platforms became avenues through which the Office could explain its mandate, clarify its complaints process and listen directly to serving members, former members and members of the public.

The programme developed a footprint across all nine provinces and was strengthened through partnerships with government structures and other stakeholders. These relationships extended the Office's reach while providing valuable insight into recurring concerns experienced by stakeholders. Outreach consequently became a two-way process through which the Office communicated its mandate while also listening to the experiences and concerns of those it serves.

The second term also strengthened the Office's position within the broader architecture of democratic oversight. Regular engagement with Parliament reinforced accountability and transparency, while participation in regional and international ombuds networks created opportunities for knowledge exchange, benchmarking and institutional learning. The hosting of the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in Johannesburg in 2025 represented a particularly significant milestone, placing South Africa at the centre of international dialogue on military oversight, awareness and outreach.

Across these developments, one principle remained constant: the credibility of an oversight institution depends not only on the number of complaints it resolves, but on the fairness, independence, consistency and integrity with which it performs its mandate.

As the Office looks beyond 2026, the systems, relationships, knowledge and institutional experience developed during the second term provide an important platform for the future. The enduring legacy is not defined by a single initiative or achievement, but by the strengthening of an institution capable of providing independent and impartial military oversight with greater consistency, accessibility, professionalism and accountability.

From establishment to strengthening. From complaints to insight. From presence to accessibility. From individual grievances to institutional improvement. These seven years strengthened the foundations for the next chapter of the Office of the Military Ombud. ■




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SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER

01

The Beginning

OF A NEW CHAPTER

2012 to 2019
FOUNDATION

2019 to 2026
STRENGTHENING



Building on the Foundations

A Concise Overview of the 2012 to 2019 Founding Principles

The period 2019 to 2026 represented an important stage in the development of the Office of the Military Ombud. By the beginning of the second statutory term, the Office was no longer a newly established institution. It had an established legislative mandate, investigative function, institutional identity and growing awareness within the defence environment and among the public.

The task before the Office was therefore one of consolidation, strengthening and continued development.

When Lt Gen (Retired) Vusumuzi R. Masondo assumed office as Military Ombud in 2019, the institution entered its second seven-year term with foundations established during its first term.

His appointment marked the beginning of a new phase in the Office's development. The second term focused on strengthening the institution's ability to fulfil its mandate, improving the management and resolution of complaints, developing institutional capacity, expanding accessibility and engagement, and strengthening relationships with stakeholders nationally, regionally and internationally.

At the centre of this work was the Office's statutory purpose: to investigate complaints and ensure that they are resolved fairly, economically and expeditiously. The Military Ombud Act provides for written complaints from serving and former members concerning their conditions of service, as well as complaints from members of the public regarding the official conduct of members of the Defence Force.

The Act further requires the Ombud to perform these functions independently and impartially.

From an Established Mandate to a Stronger Institution

The second term saw the gradual strengthening of the systems and practices through which the Office fulfilled its mandate.

Greater emphasis was placed on the quality and consistency of investigations, the management of complaints throughout their lifecycle, supervisory and legal oversight, quality assurance and the use of operational information to identify areas requiring attention.





The Office also strengthened its approach to performance management. Complaints were increasingly viewed not only as matters requiring individual resolution, but as sources of information that could reveal recurring administrative concerns and areas requiring broader institutional attention.

This Represented an Important Development in the Office's Evolution

An effective Military Ombud must provide redress to individuals, but its value extends further. Patterns emerging from complaints can provide insight into administrative practices, procedures and systems within the defence environment. The experience of the second term reinforced the importance of using this insight to support fairness, accountability and institutional improvement.

Expanding Accessibility and Engagement

Institutional maturity also required the Office to become increasingly accessible to those who might require its services.

During the second term, the Office expanded its outreach, awareness and stakeholder engagement activities. Engagements with serving members, former members, members of the public and institutional stakeholders provided opportunities to

explain the mandate, clarify the complaints process and listen to experiences arising within the defence environment.

The Office's engagement model consequently developed beyond simply creating awareness of its existence. It became an opportunity for dialogue.

Through military engagements, public awareness activations, exhibitions, stakeholder forums, operational engagements and other outreach platforms, the Office increasingly took its mandate closer to the people it serves.

This was particularly important because an oversight institution cannot be effective if its mandate is not understood or if potential complainants do not know how and when to approach it.

Strengthening Institutional Relationships

The second term also saw the continued development of relationships with institutions across South Africa and beyond its borders.

Engagement with Parliament and other oversight structures reinforced the Office's position within South Africa's broader accountability framework. Cooperation with other institutions created valuable opportunities for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and the appropriate referral of matters that fell outside the Office's jurisdiction.

The Office's statutory framework itself recognises the importance of institutional cooperation, requiring members and employees of the Department of Defence to cooperate with the Ombud and provide reasonable access to facilities, information and documents. Beyond South Africa's borders, participation in regional and international ombuds networks created opportunities to exchange knowledge and experience, benchmark good practices and contribute to discussions on military oversight, accountability, human rights and civil-military relations.



Hosting of the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in Johannesburg in 2025 marked one of the defining milestones of this period. It reflected the Office's growing international stature and provided a platform for South Africa to contribute to global discussions on military oversight, accountability, awareness and outreach.

A More Mature Institutional Identity

By the closing years of the second term, the Office had developed a stronger and more established institutional identity.

Its role was increasingly understood as extending beyond the receipt and investigation of complaints to form part of the broader accountability system within the defence environment.

The Office's work demonstrated the close relationship between the resolution of complaints, administrative fairness, independent oversight, stakeholder engagements and institutional learning.

The experience of the second term also reinforced an important reality: institutional development is an ongoing process. The Office continued to operate within an environment marked by operational, resource, structural and legislative challenges. These challenges highlighted the importance of strengthening the institutional foundations required for the Office to fulfil its mandate effectively and independently.

The progress made between 2019 and 2026 marked another stage in the Office's continuing institutional journey, rather than the completion of its development.

To understand the significance of the journey, it is necessary to return to where it began. ■



LOOKING BACK: THE FOUNDATIONS OF 2012-2019

The Story of the Military Ombud did not begin in 2019

The foundations of the institution were laid through a longstanding recognition that members of the armed forces require an independent avenue through which complaints concerning their conditions of service can be considered, while members of the public require an avenue to raise concerns regarding the official conduct of members of the Defence Force.

The concept of a dedicated Military Ombud had been considered in South Africa for several years before the institution was formally established. The development process included research, consultation and benchmarking against comparable institutions and models.

This work contributed to the development of an institutional framework suited to South Africa's constitutional democracy and its defence environment.

The process culminated in the enactment of the Military Ombud Act 4 of 2012, which provided for the establishment of an independent Office of the Military Ombud. The Act came into operation on 10 May 2012, and the Office was formally launched on 14 May 2012, with Lt Gen (Retired) Temba Matanzima appointed as South Africa's first Military Ombud.

The establishment of the Office marked an important development in South Africa's system of defence oversight. From the outset, the Military Ombud was intended to complement existing internal grievance mechanisms within the SANDF by providing an independent avenue for complaints outside the military command structure.

The Founding Principles

The institution was founded on principles that remain relevant more than a decade later:

Independence.

- The Ombud must be able to perform the oversight function without fear, favour, bias or prejudice.

Impartiality.

- Complaints must be considered objectively and fairly, with due regard to all relevant parties.

Fairness.

- The complaints process must provide an avenue through which concerns can be carefully considered and affected parties given an opportunity to respond.

Accountability.

- The existence of an independent complaints mechanism contributes to accountability within the defence environment.

Accessibility.

- The effectiveness of the Office depends on people knowing about its mandate and being able to approach it when appropriate.

Respect for rights and good administration.

- The Office contributes to the observance of fundamental rights and the promotion of sound administrative practices within the Defence Force.

These principles provided the foundation upon which the first seven years of the Office were built.

From Foundation to Continuity

The first term, from 2012 to 2019, was therefore fundamentally concerned with establishing the institution, developing its systems and introducing the Military Ombud to the defence environment and the South African public.

The second term, from 2019 to 2026, inherited that foundation and took the institution into a different phase.

The question was no longer whether an independent Military Ombud was necessary, but how the institution could become stronger, more accessible, more effective and more deeply integrated into the broader framework of accountability and civil–military relations.

That evolution is evident in the Office's complaints-resolution processes, institutional systems, outreach and awareness programmes, stakeholder relationships, international engagements and organisational development. The significance of the period 2019 to 2026 therefore lies not in replacing what came before, but in building upon it.

The Journey Continues

The history of the Office from 2012 to 2026 is ultimately a story of continuity.

- The legislation established the mandate of the office (i.e Military Ombud Act 4 of 2012).
- The first term established the institution.
- The second term strengthened its systems and reach.
- The experience gained across both periods provides the foundation for the next chapter.

The principles that gave rise to the Military Ombud remain as relevant today as they were at its establishment: fairness, impartiality, accountability, independence and trust.

What has changed is the institutional experience through which those principles are applied. That is the significance of the seven-year period under review.

Enhancing institutional resilience from 2012 to 2019

- From foundation to strengthening.
- From establishment to maturity.
- From presence to accessibility.
- From individual complaints to institutional insight.









THE CHANGE OF GUARD

The Appointment and Swearing-in of the Second Military Ombud in 2019

The completion of the Office of the Military Ombud's first seven-year term in 2019 marked the end of its founding chapter and the beginning of a new phase in its institutional development.

Following the retirement of Lt Gen (Retired) Temba Templeton Matanzima, the founding Military Ombud, Lt Gen (Retired) Vusumuzi Masondo was appointed by the President of the Republic of South Africa as the country's second Military Ombud, with effect from 1 November 2019. His formal swearing-in took place on 8 November 2019 at the South African Military Health Service Training Formation in Thaba-Tshwane.

The occasion represented more than a change of office bearer. It marked the institution's transition from its establishment and formative years into a second term focused on consolidation, institutional strengthening and greater impact.

The ceremony was preceded by a change-of-office parade, which also marked the appointment of Lieutenant General Lindile Yam as the new Chief of Staff of the South African National Defence Force. Before assuming his new role as Military Ombud, Lieutenant General Masondo delivered his final address as Chief of Staff, reflecting on the responsibilities of leadership and the importance of

providing the SANDF with the strategic direction and resources required to fulfil its constitutional responsibilities.

The transition held particular significance for Lieutenant General Masondo. He moved from a senior position within the military command structure to an oversight institution whose effectiveness depended on independence, impartiality and the confidence of those seeking its intervention. His appointment brought extensive military experience to an Office entering a new stage of institutional maturity.

The transition also included the appointment and swearing-in of Advocate Simphiwe Damane-Mkosana as Deputy Military Ombud, forming part of the leadership structure that would support the Office during its second seven-year term.

The swearing-in ceremony was presided over by High Court Judge, L. Molopa-Sethosa, while the then Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, delivered the keynote address. In addressing the new Military Ombud, the Minister emphasised the importance of protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of members of the armed forces and ensuring that the Office remained conscious of its independence and impartiality. She also underscored the responsibility of the institution to serve both serving and retired members of the SANDF, as well as members of the public who have complaints concerning the official conduct of SANDF members.

The Minister's remarks were significant because they situated the second term within the broader constitutional framework of civil oversight. The Military Ombud was assuming responsibility for more than an administrative office. He was taking the helm of an institution established to provide an independent avenue for complaints and strengthen accountability within the defence environment.

In accepting the responsibility, Lieutenant General Masondo affirmed his commitment to carrying out the mandate of the Office without fear, favour or prejudice. He recognised the relationship between the prevention of maladministration, the protection of rights and the existence of a defence environment founded on transparency and accountability.

The new Military Ombud entered office at a significant point in the institution's development. The first term had established the legislative framework, operational structures and public identity of the Office. The second term would require these foundations to be tested, refined and strengthened.

This transition was particularly important because the institutional independence of the Office was already under consideration. Shortly after the appointment of the new Military Ombud, the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans was briefed on the Office's institutional structure and the measures required to strengthen its independence. Parliament expressed concern that the Military Ombud Act did not expressly define the Office's legal status and that it operated within the Department of Defence, with its budget administered by the Department and the Secretary for Defence serving as its Accounting Officer.

These circumstances provided an important backdrop to the second term. The incoming leadership therefore faced a twofold task: preserving the principles upon which the Office had been established while strengthening the systems, processes, capabilities and relationships required to fulfil its mandate more effectively.

The change of guard in 2019 consequently became the bridge between two chapters of the institution's history. Lieutenant General Matanzima's term had established the Office and given practical expression to the Military Ombud model in South Africa. Lieutenant General Masondo's term would build on that foundation, with a focus on institutional maturity, complaints resolution, accessibility, stakeholder engagement, governance and the strengthening of the Office's contribution to democratic oversight.

The appointment of the second Military Ombud did not represent a departure from the founding vision. It carried that vision into a new phase: from establishment to consolidation, from creating the institution to strengthening its capacity, and from laying the foundation to building upon it. The seven years that followed would demonstrate how effectively the Office could translate the principles of fairness, accountability, impartiality and accessibility into the work of an increasingly mature institution. ■


MASONDO



BUILDING ON STRENGTHS
FRAMING THE 2019 STRATEGIC ROADMAP

Setting the Strategic Vision & Priorities
Baseline Priorities for the New Term

The appointment of the second Military Ombud in 2019 marked the beginning of a new phase in the development of the Office of the Military Ombud. By then the institution had moved beyond establishing its role and identity. Its foundations had been laid, the legislative mandate established and the first seven years had given practical expression to the Military Ombud model in South Africa.

The task of the second term was therefore different. It was to build on what had been established, strengthen the institution's capacity and systems, and position the Office to deliver its mandate with greater consistency, accessibility, efficiency and impact.

When Lt Gen (Retired) Vusumuzi Masondo assumed office, he inherited an institution with an established identity and a growing body of experience. Over the next seven years, that experience would be translated into stronger institutional systems, more effective complaints resolution, wider accessibility and deeper engagement with the defence community and the public.

The strategic direction adopted for the new term provided the framework for this work. The Strategic Plan for 2020–2025 reaffirmed the Office's ambition to become a "world-leading, independent and impartial Military Ombud Institution." The vision was significant because it placed institutional credibility at the centre of the Office's development. Independence and impartiality were not simply characteristics of the Office; they were fundamental to the confidence placed in its work.

The strategic roadmap consequently focused on several interconnected priorities: improving complaints resolution, strengthening institutional capacity and governance, increasing accessibility and public awareness, deepening stakeholder relationships, and advancing the Office's institutional independence.

These priorities would ultimately shape the work of the Office throughout its second seven-year term.

Strengthening the Core: Complaints Resolution

At the Centre of the Office's Mandate are the Complaint. Every complaint represents a person who has approached an external oversight mechanism because a concern has not been resolved, or because the complainant believes that fairness, administrative justice or proper procedure has not been observed. The credibility of the Office therefore depends fundamentally on how it receives, assesses, investigates and resolves those matters.



The second term placed renewed emphasis on strengthening the complaints-resolution process as an integrated system, rather than treating each investigation as an isolated matter.

This involved progressively refining the Complaints Handling Manual, strengthening supervisory and legal oversight, and embedding quality assurance throughout the investigation process. The introduction of Preliminary Reports provided interested parties with an opportunity to respond

before final findings were presented to the Military Ombud, reinforcing procedural fairness and the integrity of the investigative process.

The Office also strengthened the way new matters entered the investigative system. The institutionalisation of the weekly Intake Assessment Meeting (IAM) brought together relevant expertise to assess complaints at an early stage, identify jurisdictional and evidential considerations and determine the appropriate way forward.

Operational information became an increasingly important part of management. Dashboards and structured reporting provided greater visibility of complaint ageing, turnaround times, workflow progression, legal processes and the implementation of recommendations.

Together, these developments represented a shift towards a more disciplined and evidence-based complaints management environment.

The improvements achieved during the term reflected more than increased effort or a greater volume of completed cases. They resulted from the cumulative effect of stronger processes, embedded quality assurance, management oversight, legal scrutiny and a growing culture of performance.

The strategic ambition was translated into a practical objective: to build a complaints-resolution system that is fair, credible, consistent and increasingly responsive.

From Individual Complaints to Institutional Learning

As the Office strengthened its complaints-resolution processes, it also developed a deeper understanding of the broader value of complaints.

Although each complaint arises from an individual experience, its implications may extend beyond the person concerned.

Throughout the second term, matters brought before the Office continued to reflect concerns relating to conditions of service, career management, remuneration and benefits, separation from service, medical administration and other areas of military administration. Viewed collectively, these matters provided valuable insight into recurring administrative challenges within the defence environment.

This strengthened the Office's ability to look beyond the immediate circumstances of a complaint and identify patterns that could inform broader recommendations and engagements.

Landmark investigations during the period demonstrated the value of this approach. Investigations concerning Occupational Specific Dispensation payments and officer appointment processes, among others, illustrated how an individual complaint could reveal weaknesses involving administrative backlogs, policy implementation, record management, coordination between structures and procedural fairness.





The purpose of an Ombud investigation is to provide redress within the scope of its mandate. Where recurring weaknesses are identified, an investigation may also contribute to improvements that extend beyond the individual case.

This became an important dimension of the Office's second term: complaints were recognised not only as matters requiring resolution, but also as valuable sources of institutional insight.

Making the Office More Accessible

A strong oversight institution must be accessible to the people whose rights and interests fall within its mandate.

For the Office of the Military Ombud, accessibility meant ensuring that serving and former members of the SANDF, as well as members of the public falling within the Office's jurisdiction, understood the role of the Military Ombud, the matters it could investigate and the process for lodging a complaint.

During the second term, communication and outreach evolved into a sustained institutional function.

Military bases and operational units became important sites for direct engagement with serving members. Public awareness activations, exhibitions, stakeholder forums, national platforms and other engagements enabled the Office to extend its reach beyond its headquarters and into spaces where people could engage directly with its officials.

The Outreach Programme increasingly became more than an awareness exercise. It became a two-way mechanism.

The Office Explained its Mandate and Complaints Process, but it also Listened

Engagements with serving members, former members, public stakeholders and organisations provided valuable insight into their experiences and concerns, while also revealing where understanding of the Military Ombud's role remained limited. These engagements reinforced the importance of communication that is clear, practical and accessible.

The expansion of outreach increased the Office's visibility and created more opportunities for people to understand its role and access its services. Building Relationships That Extend the Mandate. Institutional effectiveness cannot be achieved in isolation.

The Military Ombud operates within a broader constitutional and administrative environment in which several institutions have complementary or overlapping responsibilities. During the second term, the Office therefore placed increasing emphasis on constructive engagement with Parliament, the Department of Defence, the SANDF, other oversight bodies, government structures, civil society and strategic partners.

Stakeholder Engagement became an Integral Part of the Office's Institutional Development

Relationships with institutions such as the Public Protector South Africa, the Health Ombud and the Commission for Gender Equality, among others, created opportunities for cooperation, knowledge-sharing and appropriate referral of matters falling outside the Military Ombud's jurisdiction.

Engagement within the defence environment was equally important. Effective investigations depend on access to relevant information, records and cooperation from structures responsible for responding to complaints. The relationship between oversight and the institution subject to oversight therefore remained an important aspect of the Office's operating environment.

The Office also strengthened its engagement with Parliament and its oversight structures, reinforcing the principle that an institution entrusted with independent oversight must itself operate within a framework of accountability and transparency.

These relationships did not diminish the independence of the Office. Rather, they demonstrated that independent oversight and institutional cooperation can coexist provided that the integrity and impartiality of the oversight function are preserved.



The Independence Imperative

Institutional independence remained a key strategic consideration from the outset of the second term. The Military Ombud Act provides the Office with its mandate and establishes the framework within which it operates. However, questions concerning the Office's institutional and financial position continued to feature in discussions about its future development.

The pursuit of greater institutional independence was therefore intricately linked to the Office's credibility and its ability to fulfil its mandate effectively.

An Ombud must be able to investigate impartially and make recommendations without fear, favour, or prejudice. Equally important is the public



perception that the institution is able to perform its oversight responsibilities independently. During the second term, the Office continued to engage on the legislative and institutional matters affecting its independence and operational position. The process was not without obstacles, and not all institutional reforms envisaged during the period were concluded.

Nevertheless, institutional independence remained firmly on the Office's strategic agenda.

The experience reinforced an important principle: institutional independence is not merely a structural condition; it is central to public confidence in the Ombud function.

Strengthening the Institution from Within

The strategic ambitions of the second term could be realised only through investment in the institution itself. The Office therefore strengthened internal governance, performance management, risk management, compliance, quality assurance, and operational oversight. These mechanisms provided a stronger foundation for managing resources, monitoring performance, and identifying operational risks.

The development of more structured management information was particularly important. Performance data increasingly became an active management resource rather than information produced only for reporting purposes. Operational dashboards, structured meetings, and quality assurance processes gave management greater visibility of pressures within the complaints system and supported earlier identification of emerging bottlenecks.

The experience of the seven-year period also demonstrated the central importance of the Office's people. Investigators, legal practitioners, intake officials, communications professionals, corporate support personnel, and management collectively carried the institutional mandate. Their knowledge, professionalism, and ability to adapt to changing demands were fundamental to the progress achieved during the second term. At the same time, resource constraints and vacancies placed pressure on institutional capacity.

These challenges reinforced the need for an organisation that is appropriately structured, adequately resourced and capable of retaining the skills required to sustain its mandate. Institutional strengthening was therefore both a systems challenge and a people challenge.

A Wider National and International Role

The strategic roadmap also recognised that the development of the Office could not be separated from the wider environment of democratic oversight.

Within South Africa, the Office's engagement with Parliament, government institutions, the defence establishment, and civil society strengthened its contribution to the broader architecture of accountability. Beyond South Africa, participation in regional and international Ombud networks provided opportunities to benchmark practices, exchange experiences, and contribute to international thinking on military oversight.

The Office's involvement in organisations and platforms such as the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA), the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) and the International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF) reflected the growing international dimension of its work.

The hosting of the 17th ICOAF in Johannesburg in October 2025, co-hosted with the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), represented a particularly significant milestone.



It brought together international counterparts around the theme of awareness and outreach and provided South Africa with an opportunity to contribute to global dialogue on how military Ombud institutions can strengthen awareness, accessibility, and trust.

This international engagement complemented, rather than replaced, the Office's domestic mandate. The exchange of experiences provided opportunities for institutional learning while allowing the South African Military Ombud model to contribute to wider discussions on accountability, human rights, and civil-military relations.


ELEVATOR

A Roadmap That Became a Journey

The 2019 strategic roadmap was a starting point, rather than a conclusion.

Over the next seven years, the Office operated in a continually changing environment. The nature and volume of complaints evolved, stakeholder expectations increased, new operational demands emerged and institutional constraints had to be managed. The Office also responded to lessons drawn from its own experience.

As a result, the strategic priorities established at the beginning of the term became increasingly interconnected.

- Effective complaints resolution required stronger governance and quality assurance.
- Accessibility depended on clear communication, sustained outreach and meaningful stakeholder engagement.
- Institutional credibility rested on both impartial investigations and confidence in the Office's independence.
- Improved performance required capable people, reliable systems and better management information.
- Meaningful oversight also required constructive engagement with the institutions and stakeholders across the broader defence and governance environment.



The second term was therefore extended beyond the implementation of a strategic plan. It became a period of institutional learning and adaptation.

The Office progressively shifted its focus from how to perform its functions to how those functions could be carried out more effectively, consistently and with greater institutional impact.

Looking Back from 2026

By the conclusion of the Office's second seven-year term, the Office had moved further along the path from establishment to institutional maturity.

The ambition of becoming a world-leading, independent, and impartial Military Ombud institution remained an ongoing objective. Nevertheless, the period demonstrated significant progress in the systems supporting complaints resolution, the Office's visibility and accessibility, the use of performance information, the strengthening of stakeholder relationships and the development of national and international partnerships.

The second term also showed that institutional development is seldom without challenge.

Resource pressures, capacity constraints, difficulties in securing cooperation, questions concerning institutional independence and the continuing need to strengthen the implementation of recommendations all formed part of the Office's experience.

These challenges do not diminish the progress achieved. Instead, they provide important context for understanding the work required to strengthen the institution and the priorities that remain relevant to its future development.

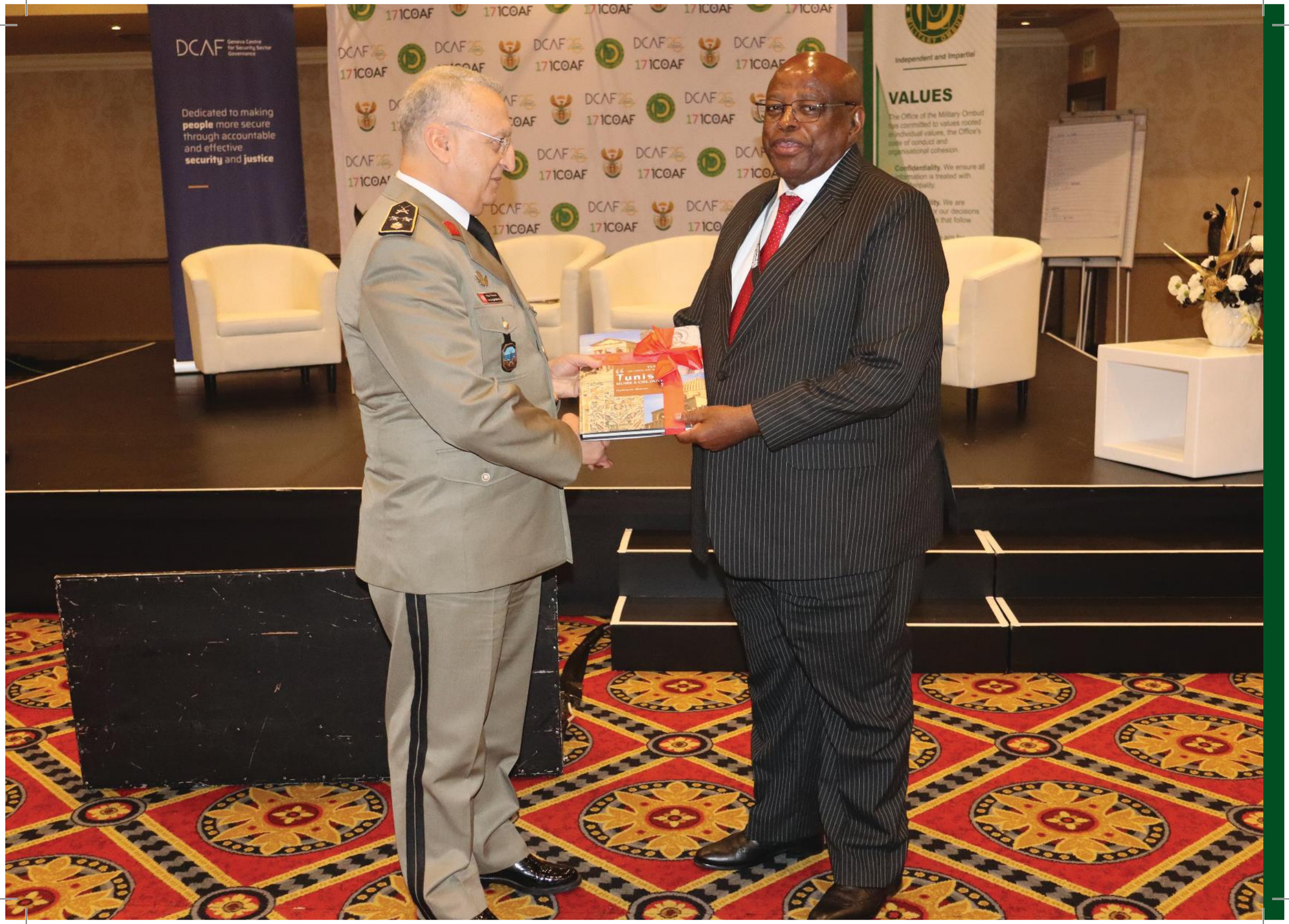
The 2019 strategic roadmap provided the framework for seven years of institutional strengthening.

It established the direction, while the people of the Office gave practical effect to its priorities. Experience refined its implementation; stakeholder engagement tested its relevance and complaints provided evidence of where further improvement was required.

The Office entered its second term with an established foundation.

It concluded the term with stronger systems, deeper institutional experience, broader relationships, and a clearer understanding of what is required to sustain credible, accessible and impartial military oversight. ■




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CHAPTER

02

Leading

THROUGH CHANGE AND CRISIS



Times of National Crisis

Navigating Deployments during COVID-19 and Domestic Civil Unrest

The second term of the Office of the Military Ombud unfolded during a period of exceptional national disruption. The COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) during the July 2021 civil unrest, placed extraordinary demands on the Defence Force, government institutions and the broader system of democratic oversight.

These events tested not only the resilience of the SANDF, but also the ability of the Office of the Military Ombud to maintain its statutory mandate under circumstances that fundamentally altered normal working arrangements. The period demonstrated that effective oversight must remain functional and accessible, particularly when institutions and the personnel they oversee are operating under exceptional pressure.

Keeping the Office Operational

The declaration of the national state of disaster in March 2020 brought significant changes to the way public institutions operated. Restrictions on movement, physical gatherings and access to workplaces required the Office to rapidly adapt its working arrangements.

For staff, this required a transition from an established office-based environment to remote working arrangements during periods of the lockdown. Investigators, legal practitioners, intake officials, communications personnel, management and support staff continued to perform their duties under unfamiliar and often challenging conditions. The transition involved more than working from a different location. Staff had to manage limited access to information and documentation, as well as constraints on communication and collaboration, while continuing to process sensitive complaints and investigations.

Virtual meetings and remote communication became part of the institution's daily operations, while personnel simultaneously navigated the personal and professional pressures created by the pandemic.

Particular challenges arose for functions requiring access to confidential information, investigative records and direct engagement with complainants and respondents.



Maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of the complaints process while adapting to remote working arrangements required careful management, flexibility and a high level of commitment from staff.

The Office therefore had to balance the health and safety of its employees with the need to remain accessible and continue performing its statutory responsibilities. Operational resources were adapted and reprioritised to support business continuity, including the requirements associated with remote working and the continuation of essential functions.

Despite difficult working conditions and considerable uncertainty, staff continued to receive and assess complaints, progress investigations, provide legal support, communicate with stakeholders and perform the administrative functions necessary to keep the institution operational. The experience demonstrated the importance of adequate human resources, appropriate technology, reliable information systems and sufficient operational support in sustaining an oversight institution during periods of disruption.

Oversight During National Emergencies

The COVID-19 pandemic and the civil unrest of July 2021 placed the SANDF in an extraordinary domestic operational environment. Military personnel were required to support government and law-enforcement efforts while operating in civilian spaces and under heightened public scrutiny.

For the Office of the Military Ombud, these circumstances brought the public-facing dimension of its mandate into sharper focus. Members of the public could lodge complaints concerning the official conduct of SANDF members on duty, while serving and former members remained able to approach the Office on matters falling within its jurisdiction.

The investigation into the death of Collins Khosa during the national lockdown was a significant example of this oversight responsibility. The matter highlighted the importance of lawful conduct, adherence to operational requirements, accountability and respect for fundamental rights when military personnel exercise authority in exceptional circumstances.





It also demonstrated how an individual case can raise broader questions about conduct, accountability and the protection of constitutional rights.

The subsequent deployment of the SANDF during the July 2021 unrest presented a different but equally demanding environment. The scale and circumstances of the deployment reinforced the importance of professional and lawful conduct when members of the Defence Force operate in support of civilian authorities.

Together, these events affirmed a fundamental principle of military oversight: exceptional circumstances do not remove the obligation to act lawfully, professionally and with due regard for fundamental rights.

The Human Dimension

Behind the institutional response to these crises were the people responsible for keeping the Office functioning.

The pandemic placed considerable pressure on staff working conditions. Employees had to adapt to remote working, changing operational requirements, technological limitations and uncertainty while continuing to deal with sensitive complaints and matters requiring careful consideration.

Investigative and legal work could not simply stop because normal office arrangements had been suspended. Complaints still had to be received, information assessed, investigations progressed and reports prepared. Complainants continued to expect a response, while staff had to perform these responsibilities within the practical limitations imposed by the national emergency.

The period demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of employees across the Office. It also exposed the extent to which organisational effectiveness depends on people, systems and resources working together. These experiences reinforced the importance of institutional capacity and adaptability, priorities that remained relevant throughout the second term.



Strengthening Public Communication

The changing circumstances also required the Office to adapt and intensify its communication strategy. With physical outreach and face-to-face engagements significantly restricted during the pandemic, traditional and digital media platforms became important channels for maintaining public awareness and accessibility.

The Office participated in media interviews and used various communication platforms to educate the public about its mandate, role and complaints processes. These engagements were particularly important at a time when the increased visibility of SANDF members in civilian spaces generated public concern and questions about military conduct and where complaints could be directed.

Communication also provided an opportunity to explain the distinction between the mandate of the Military Ombud and the responsibilities of other institutions. By maintaining a visible public presence despite restrictions on physical engagement, the Office continued to inform serving and former SANDF members, members of the public and other stakeholders about the mechanisms available to them.

The experience reinforced an important lesson: accessibility extends beyond the ability to receive a complaint. It also depends on whether people understand the institution, its mandate and how to approach it. During a period of uncertainty and heightened public concern, communication became an important part of the Office's oversight function, helping to maintain visibility, clarify its role and ensure that those requiring its intervention remained aware of the avenue available to them. ■

STRENGTHENING INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

Achieving Administrative Excellence, Clean Audits and Staff Capacity Building

The strengthening of the Office of the Military Ombud during the second term extended beyond its core complaints and investigative mandate. As the institution matured, equal attention was given to the systems, people and governance arrangements required to support an effective and credible oversight institution.

From 2019 to 2026, the Office continued to strengthen its internal governance, performance management, financial administration, human resource capacity, risk management and quality assurance practices. These functions are integral to the Office's mandate; they provide the institutional foundation necessary for its effective fulfilment.




Gen (RET) Vusumuzi Masondo
Military Ombud
Maj Gen (Ret) Bantu H
Deputy Minister of Defence and Mili

Building a Stronger Administrative Foundation

The second term brought a deliberate focus on strengthening the internal systems that supported the Office's operations. Governance and administrative processes were progressively formalised, with greater emphasis on accountability, planning, monitoring, risk management and compliance with applicable legislation and government prescripts.

The Office operated within the broader public-sector accountability framework, including the Public Finance Management Act, National Treasury requirements, human resource regulations and other applicable governance and compliance obligations. Annual Activity Reports provided a formal account of the Office's performance, financial affairs, human resources and institutional activities, and were submitted through the prescribed parliamentary oversight process.

This emphasis on sound administration was important for an institution whose credibility depends not only on the independence and impartiality of its investigations, but also on the manner in which it manages public resources and conducts its own affairs.



Financial Stewardship and Accountability

Financial management remained an important component of institutional governance throughout the second term. The Office sought to ensure that available resources were directed towards the achievement of its strategic priorities and the delivery of its statutory mandate.

Parliamentary oversight during the period acknowledged the Office's progress while also drawing attention to the financial and administrative constraints under which it operated. In particular, the procurement arrangements through the Department of Defence affected the Office's ability to procure goods and services independently and contributed to challenges in the timely utilisation of its operational budget. Parliament called for workable solutions to these procurement constraints and for the Office to be adequately resourced to fulfil its mandate.

These challenges placed an additional responsibility on management to strengthen internal planning, expenditure monitoring and resource prioritisation. The Office therefore had to balance the demands of an expanding mandate and operational programme with the realities of constrained resources and complex administrative processes.

This was particularly significant in an institution where resources have a direct bearing on investigative capacity, outreach, information systems, staff development and the accessibility of the complaints mechanism.

Performance Management as a Management Tool

A significant development during the second term was the strengthening of performance management and the use of information to support decision-making. Performance information increasingly became more than a reporting requirement. Operational monitoring enabled management to track workload, complaint progression, turnaround times, outstanding matters and areas requiring intervention. This supported a more proactive approach to identifying bottlenecks and managing performance.

The evolution of the Office's operational dashboards and regular management processes reflected this shift towards evidence-based management. Performance information could be used to identify emerging pressures, assess progress against planned objectives and inform corrective action. The Office's Annual Activity Reports reflect this growing emphasis on measurable performance and accountability. In 2024/25, for example, the Office managed a substantial active caseload and finalised most of the matters handled during the financial year, demonstrating its continued focus on improving the efficiency of complaints resolution.

Strengthening performance management therefore became closely aligned with the broader institutional objective of improving complainants' experiences and ensuring that the Office remained responsive to the matters brought before it.

Strengthening People and Professional Capacity

Institutional systems can only be effective when supported by capable people. Staff capacity building therefore remained an important part of the Office's development during the second term.

The work of the Office requires a combination of investigative, legal, administrative, communications, financial, human resource and management expertise. Strengthening these capabilities was essential to ensuring that the institution could respond to increasingly complex complaints while maintaining high professional standards.

Training, skills development, knowledge-sharing and exposure to developments across the broader ombud and oversight environment contributed to the professional development of staff. Internal learning was further supported through the Office's engagement with peer institutions, oversight bodies and international ombud networks.

The second term nevertheless demonstrated that capacity building must be considered alongside the availability of sufficient human resources. The Office experienced periods of staff shortages and resource constraints, placing additional demands on existing personnel. Parliamentary and independent assessments also highlighted the relationship between staffing capacity and the Office's ability to manage its workload effectively. These circumstances reinforced an important institutional lesson: a capable institution requires not only

sound systems, but sufficient personnel with the appropriate skills to operate them effectively

Quality Assurance and Internal Controls

As the complaints-handling system matured, quality assurance became increasingly embedded within the Office's operational practices.

Supervisory review, legal scrutiny, management oversight and structured consideration of investigative work provided multiple layers of review before matters were finalised. Strengthening these processes promoted greater consistency, procedural fairness and quality in the handling of complaints.

More structured internal processes also complemented developments in the complaints-handling framework, including the introduction of Preliminary Reports and more systematic assessment of matters entering the investigative process.

These mechanisms reflected a broader shift from relying primarily on individual professional judgement to an institutional system in which established processes, review and accountability collectively supported quality.

Governance Under Constraint

The strengthening of internal governance took place within a broader structural context: the Office continued to operate within an institutional framework that limited aspects of its administrative and financial autonomy.

Parliament repeatedly raised the question about the Office's independence, including its financial relationship with the Department of Defence and the procurement arrangements affecting its operations. In 2024, the Joint Standing Committee on Defence specifically expressed concerns about the Office's financial dependence on the Department and the impact of procurement processes on its ability to utilise its budget effectively.

These challenges did not diminish the importance of internal governance. Rather, they made sound internal planning, prioritisation, compliance and resource management even more critical.

The Office's institutional development therefore progressed on two interconnected fronts: strengthening the areas within its internal control while continuing to engage government and Parliament on the broader structural conditions required to support its independence and effectiveness.

An Institution Built to Last

By the end of the second term, the Office had developed a deeper appreciation of the relationship between governance and mandate delivery.

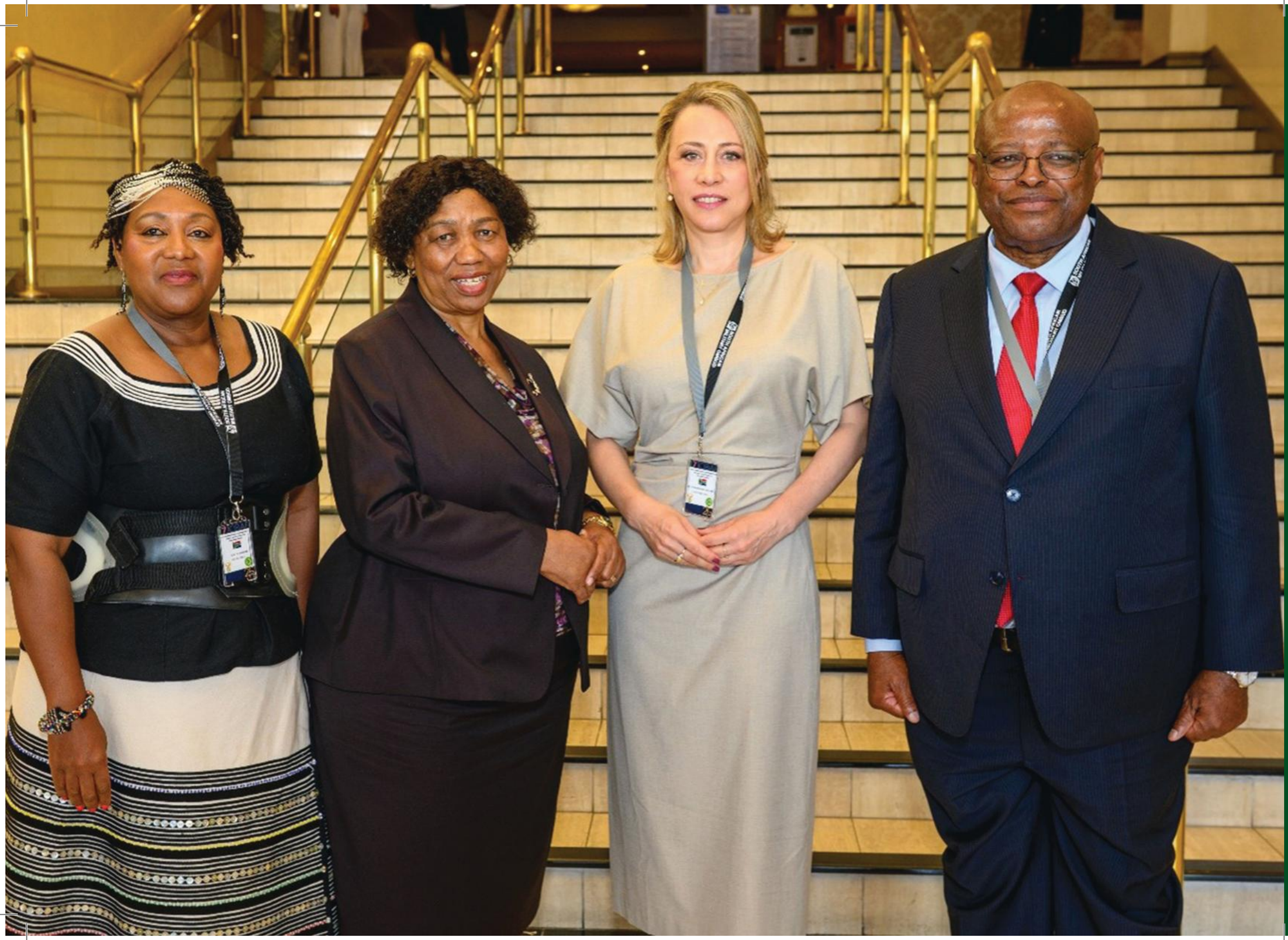
Effective investigations require sound administration. Accessibility depends on adequate resources and functioning systems. Performance relies on capable people and reliable information. Independence requires both institutional credibility and appropriate structural arrangements.

The strengthening of internal governance during 2019 to 2026 was therefore not an administrative exercise conducted alongside the Office's core work. It was integral to building an institution capable of sustaining that work.

The second term resulted in stronger management practices, more structured performance monitoring, greater emphasis on quality assurance, continued investment in staff capability and a clearer understanding of the systems required to support independent oversight.

The journey was not without constraints. Financial pressures, staffing limitations, procurement challenges and questions surrounding institutional autonomy remained part of the Office's operating environment. Yet these challenges also reinforced the importance of building an institution that uses its resources responsibly, administers its affairs accountably and remains committed to continuous improvement.

Strong oversight requires a strong institution behind it. The systems strengthened during the second term provided an important foundation for the Office's continued evolution beyond 2026. ■





CHAPTER

03

Strengthening TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Enhancing the Complaints Resolution Process

Establishment to Institutional Strengthening

Upon assuming office on 1 November 2019, the Second Military Ombud inherited an institution with an established legislative mandate, recognised investigative authority and a growing reputation as South Africa's independent military oversight body. During the preceding seven years, the Office had successfully transitioned from establishment to full operation. It had developed its distinct institutional identity, established relationships with key stakeholders, and implemented the systems required to fulfil its mandate under the Military Ombud Act, 2012 (Act No. 4 of 2012).

The focus of the next seven years was therefore fundamentally different. The challenge was no longer to establish the institution, but to strengthen it. Attention shifted towards enhancing operational effectiveness, improving governance, refining investigative methodologies, and ensuring that complaints were resolved more consistently, more efficiently and with greater procedural fairness. The objective extended beyond resolving individual complaints. It was to build an institution capable of delivering independent military oversight and inspiring confidence among serving and former members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), members of the public and Parliament. This period of institutional strengthening recognised an important reality: the credibility of an oversight institution depends not only on the quality of its findings, but equally on the integrity of the processes through which those findings are reached. Fairness, consistency, legal compliance, and timeliness are essential components of public confidence. Throughout the Second Military Ombud's tenure, the Office therefore pursued a philosophy of continuous operational improvement, progressively refining every stage of the complaints'-resolution process.

Rather than relying on a single intervention, these improvements formed part of an integrated programme of organisational development. Investigative procedures were standardised, governance structures strengthened, quality assurance embed-

ded, performance management enhanced and cooperation with key stakeholders reinforced. Collectively, these initiatives transformed complaints resolution into a mature, quality-driven operational system capable of responding effectively to an increasingly diverse and complex caseload.

Although many of these refinements occurred incrementally, their cumulative effect became increasingly evident. Complaints moved through the system more consistent, and management gained greater insight into organisational performance. The measurable improvement in turnaround times during the latter years of the second term reflected not a single reform, but the combined effect of sustained institutional development.

Refining the Complaints Resolution Framework

A significant milestone in this process of institutional strengthening was the comprehensive revision of the Office's Complaints Handling Manual shortly after the Second Military Ombud assumed office. The original manual, introduced during the tenure of the First Military Ombud, had established an important procedural foundation. However, experience gained during" the Office's formative years highlighted opportunities to strengthen investigative practice and improve organisational consistency.

The revised Complaints Handling Manual, confirmed by the Military Ombud in November 2019, represented far more than an administrative update. It reflected the Office's evolution from an emerging institution into a mature organisation committed to standardising investigative practice, reinforcing procedural fairness and improving the quality of its investigative outputs.

The revised framework clarified roles and responsibilities throughout the complaints' resolution process, standardised investigative methodology and established a more structured approach to preparing reports. Greater emphasis was placed on consistency in legal reasoning, the assessment of evidence and the formulation of remedial recommendations. This helped ensure that complaints of a similar nature would be approached according to common investigative standards while preserving the flexibility required to address the unique circumstances of each individual matter.

One of the most significant procedural enhancements was the introduction of Preliminary Reports as a formal stage in the investigative process. Prior to the submission of a Final Report to the Military Ombud, interested parties were given an opportunity to consider the preliminary findings and recommendations arising from the investigation. This process strengthened procedural fairness by allowing factual inaccuracies to be corrected, additional representations to be made and relevant information to be considered before a final determination was reached.

The introduction of Preliminary Reports also improved the overall quality of investigations. Issues that might previously have emerged only after publication of a Final Report could now be addressed earlier in the investigative process. This not only enhanced the accuracy and defensibility of final findings but also promoted transparency and confidence in the fairness of the Office's investigative procedures.

The revised Complaints Handling Manual further strengthened report writing by providing greater consistency in the structure and presentation of investigative findings. Standardised reporting formats improved readability, facilitated quality assurance, and ensured that recommendations were supported by clear factual and legal reasoning. Collectively, these refinements enhanced the professionalism of investigative outputs while reducing unnecessary variation between individual investigators and analysts.

Importantly, the revised manual also recognised that quality investigations depend upon more than sound investigative methodology alone. Effective governance requires structured oversight throughout the complaints resolution process to ensure that investigations remain legally compliant, procedurally fair and operationally consistent.


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Embedding Quality Assurance Throughout the Complaints Resolution Process

Institutional maturity is measured not only by how quickly work is completed, but by the consistency and quality of the work produced. Recognising this, the Office progressively embedded quality assurance throughout the complaints resolution process, transforming it from a single review activity into a continuous system of governance supporting every significant operational decision.

Quality assurance was no longer regarded as a final inspection undertaken immediately before a report reached the Military Ombud. Instead, multiple review mechanisms were progressively integrated throughout the lifecycle of a complaint, ensuring that investigative decisions were tested, evidence evaluated and legal considerations addressed before complaints progressed to the next stage.

Within the Directorate: Intake and Analysis, newly received complaints were subjected to supervisory review before being presented to the weekly Intake Assessment Meeting. This ensured that jurisdictional issues, documentary requirements, and investigative considerations were identified at the earliest possible opportunity, reducing delays and promoting consistent decision-making. Once matters progressed beyond Intake, additional quality assurance mechanisms were introduced throughout the investigative process. Directors reviewed investigative work to ensure that enquiries had been conducted comprehensively and that findings were supported by the available evidence. Thereafter, Preliminary and Final Reports were subjected to structured Quality Assurance meetings convened by the Chief Directorate: Operations, where investigations were assessed against agreed standards before progressing further.

An equally significant enhancement was the formal integration of the Directorate: Legal Services into the operational workflow. All substantive investigation reports were submitted for legal review before being presented to the Military Ombud for consideration. This independent legal scrutiny strengthened procedural compliance, promoted consistency in the interpretation of legislation and military policy, and reduced the risk of legal or procedural deficiencies within investigative reports. These complementary review mechanisms did more than improve individual reports. They fostered a culture of professional learning and continuous improvement. Investigators, analysts, operational managers and legal practitioners worked collectively to refine investigative practices, sharing experience and promoting organisational consistency. Quality assurance therefore became not merely a control mechanism; it became an important contributor to institutional development.

By embedding governance throughout the lifecycle of a complaint, the Office established a complaints resolution process in which quality, accountability and legal integrity were considered at every significant decision point rather than only at its conclusion.



Figure 3.1 illustrates the integrated complaints resolution framework that evolved during the Second Military Ombud's tenure, demonstrating how governance, quality assurance, legal oversight and operational management became entrenched throughout the lifecycle of every complaint.

FIGURE 3.1

Integrated Complaints Resolution Framework

Four stages of the complaints-resolution process



Quality assurance, legal review and management oversight apply across the process.



Strengthening Operational Management

While the revised Complaints Handling Manual established a robust procedural framework, the Office recognised that effective procedures alone do not guarantee effective outcomes. The successful implementation of any complaints resolution system depends on disciplined operational management, continuous oversight, and the ability to identify emerging challenges before they affect service delivery.

Throughout the Second Military Ombud's tenure, the Office progressively strengthened the management of complaints by introducing structured operational forums, clarifying management responsibilities, and implementing performance monitoring mechanisms that provided greater visibility across the complaints resolution process. These initiatives were not introduced as isolated interventions, but as complementary components of an integrated management approach that sought to improve accountability, consistency, and organisational responsiveness.

Strengthening the Intake Function

The Intake Section represents the first substantive point of engagement between the Office and a complainant. During this phase, complaints are assessed for jurisdiction, supporting information is evaluated, procedural requirements are considered and decisions are made regarding the appropriate course of action. Decisions made at the intake stage frequently determine how efficiently complaints progress through the remainder of the investigative process. Recognising the strategic importance of this function, the Office progressively strengthened operational oversight within the Directorate: Intake and Analysis. The appointment of an Intake Manager represented an important organisational refinement. Although it was not a separate establishment post, the function provided dedicated operational leadership over a multidisciplinary team comprising Intake Officers and administrative personnel. The role enhanced supervisory capacity, improved workload distribution, and created an additional level of operational coordination that had previously been difficult to achieve given the Directorate's span of control.

The introduction of this management layer also strengthened mentoring and peer support within the Directorate. Analysts, whose investigative responsibilities mirror those of Senior Investigators, rotated through the Intake Manager function. This promoted shared organisational knowledge and leadership development while ensuring continuity in management practices. The result was a more structured and responsive intake environment in which complaints progressed through clearly defined decision points supported by consistent management oversight.

Institutionalising the Intake Assessment Meeting

One of the most significant operational developments during the reporting period was the formalisation of the Weekly Intake Assessment Meeting (IAM).

Although new complaints had previously been discussed collaboratively on an ad hoc basis, the introduction of a structured weekly forum during 2019 transformed the way in which they were evaluated. Rather than relying solely on individual decision-making, complaints were collectively considered within a multidisciplinary environment where jurisdiction, admissibility, investigative complexity, evidential requirements, and appropriate courses of action could be assessed before recommendations were submitted to the Military Ombud.

The Intake Assessment Meeting quickly evolved into far more than an allocation meeting. It became the Office's principal operational gateway, ensuring that complaints entered the investigative system only after structured consideration of the legal, operational and administrative issues relevant to each matter.

This collaborative approach produced several important benefits. It promoted consistency in jurisdictional decisions, encouraged early identification of evidential gaps, improved the quality of submissions presented to the Military Ombud and reduced the likelihood that investigations would require significant redirection at a later stage. Equally important, the forum created an opportunity for organisational learning, providing a platform to share experience, discuss emerging complaint trends and develop common approaches to increasingly complex matters. The Intake Assessment Meeting represents an important operational innovation introduced during the second Military Ombud's tenure and has become an integral part of the Office's complaints-resolution framework.



Operational Efficiency, Compliance and Quality Assurance

The Office strengthened operational efficiency, accountability, compliance, and quality assurance through standardised procedures, performance monitoring, effective case management, and continuous capacity building. These interventions contributed to improved investigative quality, timely case finalisation, reduced delays, and fairer complaint resolution.

From Reporting to Managing Performance

As operational processes matured, so too did the Office's approach to performance management.During the institution's early years, performance reporting focused primarily on traditional organisational indicators such as complaints received, complaints finalised and matters carried over into the following


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reporting period. Although these measures provided an overview of organisational activity, they offered limited insight into the underlying factors influencing complaint resolution.

During the reporting period, the Office deliberately expanded its performance measurement framework to support operational management rather than retrospective reporting alone. New indicators were progressively introduced to monitor complaint ageing, investigation turnaround times, intake performance, workflow progression and the implementation of remedial recommendations. This evolution reflected a broader organisational philosophy: performance information should inform management decisions rather than merely record past outcomes.

The development of more sophisticated performance indicators also enabled management to distinguish between workload and productivity. Rather than simply asking how many complaints had been received or finalised, attention increasingly focused on how efficiently complaints moved through the system, where delays were occurring and what interventions were required to improve operational performance.

The Evolution of Operational Dashboards

The introduction and progressive refinement of operational dashboards became one of the most significant management innovations during the Second Military Ombud's tenure.

Initially conceived as a mechanism for reporting operational statistics, the Military Ombud Dashboard evolved into the Office's principal strategic management tool. Presented monthly to the Military Ombud and senior management, the Dashboard provided a comprehensive overview of organisational performance, enabling informed discussion of operational priorities, resource allocation and emerging risks.

The Dashboard extended well beyond complaint statistics. It monitored the status of active investigations, implementation of recommendations accepted by the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, legal review processes, litigation, research initiatives, and other strategic operational matters requiring executive attention.

Regular review of Dashboard information transformed performance management from a reactive reporting exercise into a proactive management process. Emerging delays could be identified before they became entrenched, investigations requiring additional management attention could be prioritised, and organisational resources could be directed to areas of greatest operational need.

Building on this foundation, the Office introduced a dedicated Intake Dashboard to monitor compliance with the timeframes prescribed by the Military Ombud Complaints Regulations, 2015. Particular attention was given to complaints approaching or exceeding the prescribed periods for acknowledgement, jurisdictional assessment, and condonation rulings. Importantly, the Dashboard did more than identify overdue matters; it also required the recording of reasons for delay, enabling management to distinguish between unavoidable operational complexities and process inefficiencies requiring intervention. Together, these dashboards fostered transparency and accountability by making operational performance visible throughout the management structure. They also provided objective evidence to support management decisions, reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement rather than one of periodic corrective action.

Strengthening Institutional Cooperation

Independent oversight cannot function effectively in isolation. While the Military Ombud's independence remains fundamental to its statutory mandate, the timely resolution of complaints depends upon constructive engagement with the institutions responsible for providing information, implementing recommendations, and addressing systemic concerns.

Throughout the reporting period, the Office therefore continued to strengthen institutional cooperation with the South African National Defence Force, while carefully preserving its independence and impartiality.

A cornerstone of this engagement was the Military Ombud & Chief of the SANDF Liaison Forum, formally recognised in the revised Memorandum of Understanding concluded between the Military Ombud, the Secretary for Defence and the Chief



of the SANDF. The Forum provided a structured platform through which senior representatives could discuss matters affecting the administration of complaints, including outstanding requests for information, applications for condonation, progress with investigations, implementation of recommendations and broader issues affecting institutional cooperation.

Importantly, the Liaison Forum was not intended to influence investigative outcomes. Its purpose was to facilitate communication, resolve procedural impediments and strengthen cooperation in the implementation of the Military Ombud's recommendations. By regularly bringing together representatives of the Services, Divisions and the Office of the Military Ombud, the Forum contributed significantly to reducing unnecessary delays and improving mutual understanding of operational expectations.

Where institutional engagement at operational level proved insufficient, the Military Ombud personally engaged with the Chief of the SANDF and Service or Divisional Chiefs. Investigations experiencing prolonged delays because of a failure to respond were escalated after established follow-up procedures had been exhausted. These engagements reflected the Office's commitment to ensuring that complaints received the attention they deserved while reinforcing accountability throughout the military chain of command.

Measuring What Matters

The operational reforms introduced during the Second Military Ombud's tenure were accompanied by an equally important evolution in the way organisational performance was measured.

Performance management progressively shifted from counting activity to evaluating effectiveness. Earlier measures, while appropriate during the institution's establishment phase, were supplemented by indicators capable of measuring operational efficiency, complaint ageing, investigation turnaround, intake performance, implementation monitoring, and overall organisational responsiveness.

This evolution fundamentally changed the manner in which performance information was used. Rather than serving annual reporting alone, performance data became an active management tool supporting evidence-based decision-making, early intervention, and continuous organisational improvement. In this way, the Office strengthened not only its ability to report on performance, but also its capacity to manage performance proactively.

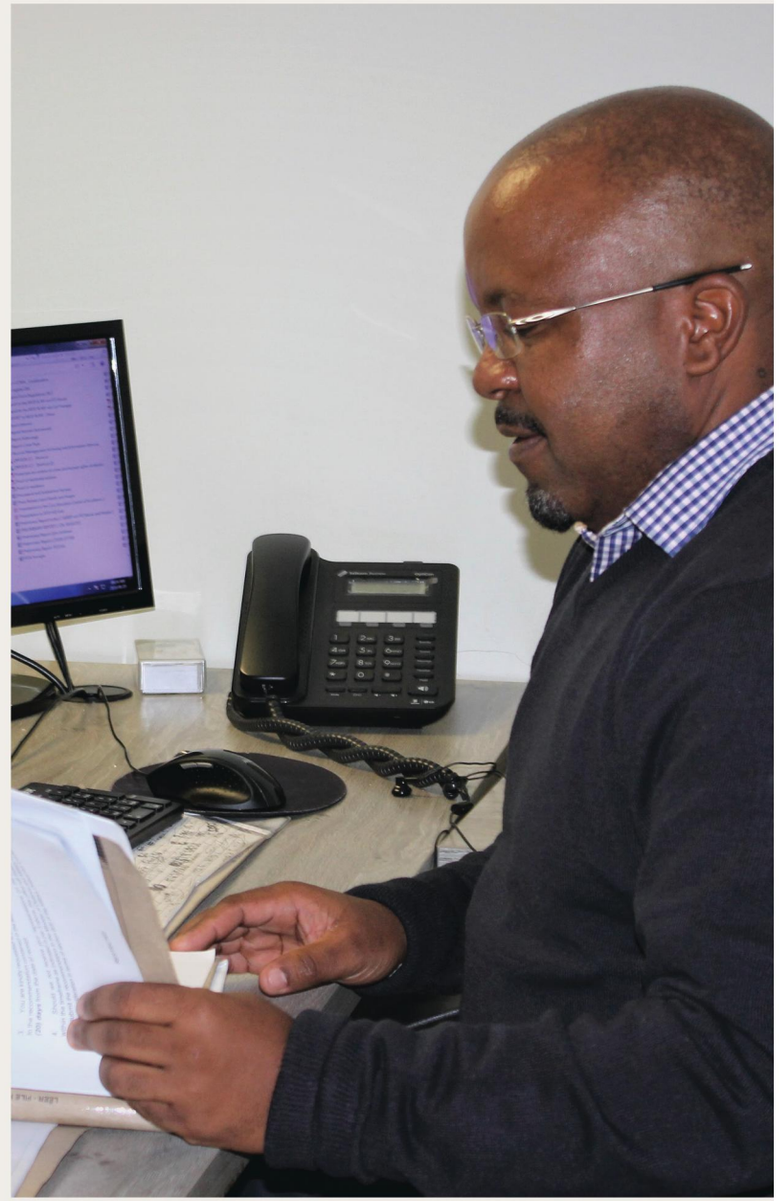
By the conclusion of the second term, the Office had developed a mature performance management framework capable of measuring far more than the number of complaints received or finalised. It provided meaningful insight into the effectiveness of the complaints' resolution process itself, reinforcing the principle that operational excellence depends upon continuous measurement, informed management, and an unwavering commitment to improvement.

Measuring the Impact: From Operational Refinement to Improved Outcomes

The operational improvements introduced during the Second Military Ombud's tenure were not implemented as isolated administrative reforms. Collectively, they form part of a deliberate strategy to strengthen the effectiveness, consistency, and credibility of the Office's complaints resolution function. Although many of these initiatives were introduced progressively over several years, their cumulative impact became increasingly evident through measurable improvements in operational performance.

The most tangible indicator of this institutional development was the significant reduction in complaint resolution times. During the early years of the Office, complex investigations frequently remained active for extended periods, with some matters requiring more than three years before reaching finalisation. As the organisation matured and operational refinements became embedded, complaint turnaround improved steadily across both intake and investigative functions.

This improvement cannot be attributed to any single initiative. Rather, it reflects the cumulative effect of a more structured complaints resolution framework supported by strengthened governance, enhanced quality assurance, legal oversight, and improved operational management and more effective performance monitoring. Together, these initiatives enabled complaints to progress through the investigative process more efficiently without




MILITARY OMBUD
IMPARTIAL AND INDEPENDENT
ABOUT THE OFFICE
Established under the Military Ombud Act 4 of
ctive of the Office is to investigate
s lodged in writing and to ensure that
are resolved in a fair, economical and
s manner.
UD)
ADV S.T.B. DAMANE-MKOSANA
DEPUTY MILITARY OMBUD
LT GEN (RET) V.R. MASONDO
MILITARY OMBUD

compromising the independence, fairness, or quality of investigations.

The most significant improvements were evident within the Intake function. Structured supervisory oversight, weekly Intake Assessment Meetings, dedicated operational management and performance dashboards resulted in a marked reduction in the time required to assess newly received complaints and determine an appropriate course of action. Matters suitable for resolution through desktop investigation were concluded more efficiently, while complaints requiring formal investigation entered the investigative process with greater clarity regarding jurisdiction, evidential requirements, and investigative direction.

A similar trend emerged within the Directorates during formal investigations. Although investigations often involve complex factual disputes, multiple interested parties and extensive documentary evidence, the progressive refinement of investigative methodology, together with strengthened quality assurance and legal review, contributed to a sustained improvement in investi-gation turnaround. Importantly, these improvements were achieved while simultaneously enhancing the quality and consistency of investigative reports.

Operational performance data demonstrates this progression clearly. Average investigation turnaround times decreased substantially during the reporting period, while the average time required to finalise matters at intake showed an even more pronounced improvement. Equally significant was the



changing profile of completed investigations. During the establishment phase of the Office, a considerable proportion of investigations extended beyond one year before completion. By the conclusion of the reporting period, the proportion of matters finalised within twelve months had increased significantly, reflecting the cumulative impact of sustained operational refinement. The improvement becomes even more apparent when complaints are considered according to completion timeframes rather than averages alone. Increasing proportions of complaints were finalised within three months, six months and one year, while the proportion of matters taking more than 12 months progressively declined. These trends provide clear evidence of an organisation that became increasingly effective in managing both routine and complex investigations while maintaining appropriate procedural safeguards.

FIGURE 3.2

From Foundation to Maturity

Operational improvements in complaints resolution

INVESTIGATION TURNAROUND

456 days → **304 days**

33% faster

INTAKE TURNAROUND

120 days → **33 days**

72.5% faster

INVESTIGATIONS WITHIN ONE YEAR

45% → **66%**

+21 percentage points

INTAKE MATTERS WITHIN 90 DAYS

58% → **98%**

+40 percentage points

Turnaround reductions are calculated from the actual day counts. Changes in completion rates are expressed in percentage points.

MAPPING THE GRIEVANCES

Performance, Data Visualisations and Infographics

Every complaint received by the Office of the Military Ombud represents the experience of an individual who believed that a military administrative action, omission, or condition of service or act of official conduct had resulted in unfairness. Although each complaint is unique, collectively they provide valuable insight into the administrative realities experienced by members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the broader defence community. During the Second Military Ombud's term of office, complaint trends revealed recurring themes, emerging challenges and systemic issues that not only informed individual investigations but also highlighted opportunities for organisational learning and continuous improvement within the defence establishment.

The Office of the Military Ombud performs a specialised statutory function within South Africa's military justice and administrative accountability framework. The Office derives its jurisdiction from the Military Ombud Act, 2012 (Act No. 4 of 2012), which empowers the Military Ombud to investigate complaints lodged by current members of the SANDF, including members of the Reserve Force, and by former members concerning their conditions of service while serving. Members of the public may also lodge complaints concerning the official conduct of SANDF members.

In addition, a duly authorised representative may submit a complaint on behalf of any person entitled to do so. For the purposes of this chapter, the term 'former members' refers exclusively to former members of the SANDF whose complaints relate to their conditions of service during military service. It should not be interpreted as synonymous with the statutory definition of a military veteran contained in other legislation.

This distinction is important to understanding both the Office's jurisdiction and the complaint profile presented in this chapter.

The complaint data accumulated during the seven-year review period provides considerably more than a measure of organisational workload. It offers a unique perspective on the concerns affecting members of the Defence community, identifies recurring administrative challenges and assists the Office in directing investigative resources, stakeholder engagement and systemic interventions. Although each complaint concerns an individual grievance, collectively they provide an evidence base from which broader trends and institutional challenges can be identified.

Complaint patterns also reflect the changing operational environment in which the SANDF functions. Organisational restructuring, changing operational commitments, evolving human resource policies and broader national events all influenced the matters brought before the Office.



Some complaints concerned individual administrative decisions, while others revealed recurring issues affecting groups of members and highlighted opportunities for improvements in policy, administrative practice and organisational accountability.

Importantly, complaint statistics should never be viewed merely as measures of institutional performance. Behind every statistic is an individual seeking an independent, impartial assessment of an administrative action or omission that they believe resulted in unfairness. The significance of the Office therefore lies not only in resolving individual complaints, but also in identifying recurring issues capable of informing broader institutional improvement.

The sections that follow examine the complaint landscape that emerged during the Second Military Ombud's term of office through a narrative analysis, statistical summaries and visual representations. Together, they illustrate who approached the Office and why, as well as how complaint trends informed operational priorities, stakeholder engagement and systemic recommendations aimed at strengthening fairness, accountability and good military administration.



The Nature of the Grievances

While the profile of complainants provides insight into who approached the Office of the Military Ombud, the nature of their complaints reveals the issues affecting the South African National Defence Force over time. Individually, complaints concern specific administrative actions or omissions. Collectively, however, they identify recurring themes that extend beyond individual circumstances and provide valuable insight into the areas of military administration most frequently giving rise to grievances.

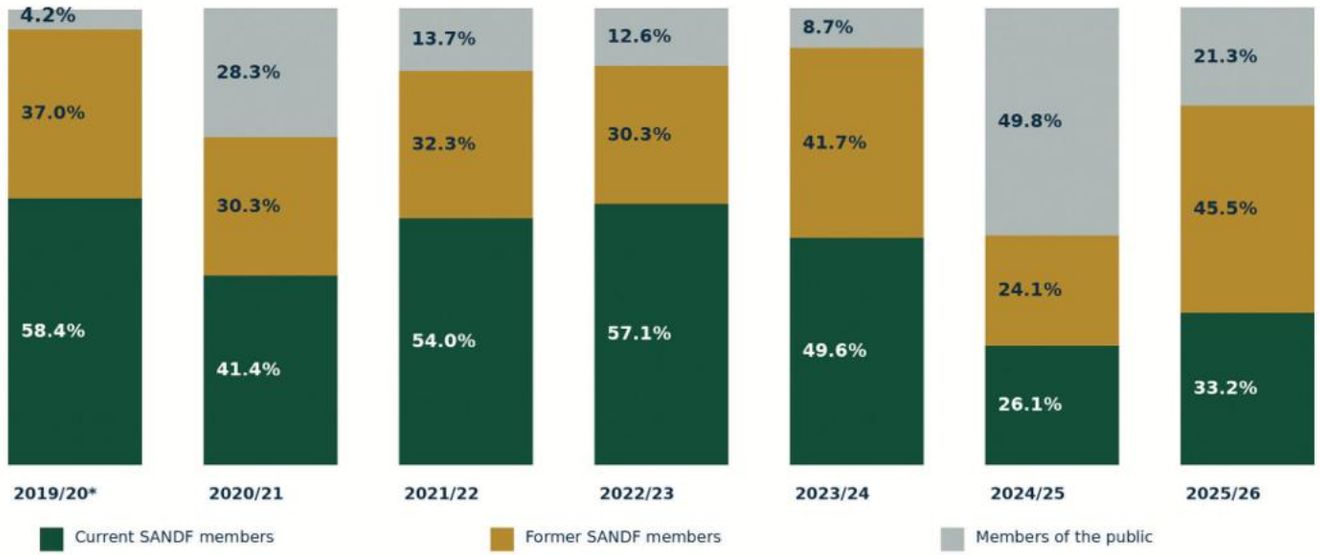
Throughout the Second Military Ombud's term of office, complaints covered a broad spectrum of matters falling within the Office's statutory jurisdiction. Although each complaint was assessed on its own merits, the cumulative complaint profile demonstrates that a relatively small number of recurring themes consistently accounted for the majority of matters received. These themes broadly reflected concerns relating to conditions of service, career management, remuneration and benefits, medical administration, separation from service and the application of administrative processes within the SANDF.

The persistence of these themes throughout the review period is significant. Rather than indicating isolated incidents, they point to recurring administrative challenges experienced across different Services, Divisions and occupational groups. In many instances, complaints arose not because policies were absent, but because existing policies were interpreted inconsistently, applied

FIGURE 3.3

Profile of Complainants in terms of Mandate

Share of new complaints by financial year



2019/20 source values total 99.6%. Anonymous complaint accounted for 0.4%.



incorrectly or implemented with avoidable delay. This distinction reinforces the important role of the Military Ombud in promoting fairness, consistency and accountability in military administration.

The classification of complaints also provides the Office with an important management tool. By identifying recurring patterns, the Office is able to monitor emerging trends, focus investigative resources, prioritise stakeholder engagement and identify matters that may warrant systemic recommendations beyond the resolution of individual complaints. The complaint profile therefore serves not only as a record of the Office's workload, but also as an indicator of broader organisational issues affecting the defence establishment.

Although complaint categories evolved over time as the Office refined its recording and case management systems, the underlying themes remained remarkably consistent throughout the review period. Matters relating to conditions of service continued to dominate the Office's workload, reflecting the central purpose of the Military Ombud Act in providing independent oversight of military administrative decisions affecting serving and former members of the SANDF.

The classification of complaints demonstrates that the work of the Military Ombud extends well beyond the investigation of isolated disputes. The recurring nature of many complaints indicates that similar administrative issues were experienced across different Services and Divisions, often by members serving in different geographic locations and under different operational circumstances. Although every complaint required individual consideration, the broader complaint profile provided the Office with valuable evidence of recurring issues requiring sustained engagement with defence leadership.

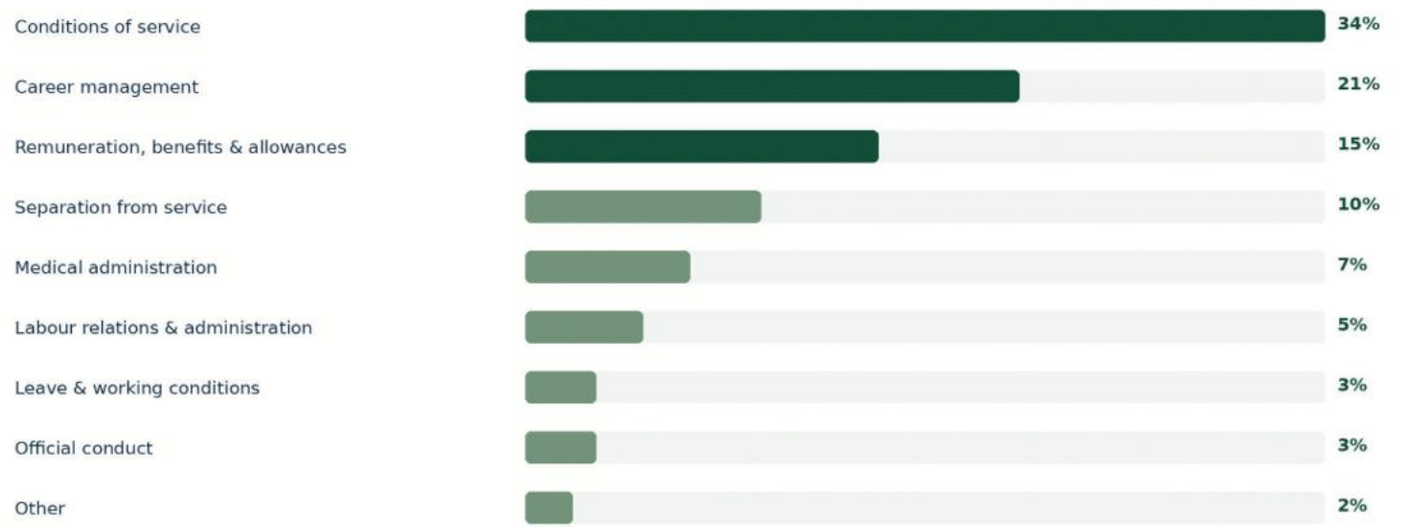
Importantly, complaint categories should not be interpreted solely in quantitative terms. A complaint category with comparatively fewer cases may nevertheless involve matters of considerable complexity or systemic significance. Conversely, a high volume of complaints within a particular category may indicate opportunities for improved administrative communication, more consistent policy implementation or enhanced awareness of existing grievance mechanisms. The analysis of complaint trends therefore assisted the Office not only in resolving individual matters, but also in identifying areas where institutional improvement could strengthen fairness, transparency and accountability.

The cumulative complaint profile presented in this chapter provides the foundation for the discussion that follows. Having considered the principal issues brought before the Office, the next section examines the demographic and organisational characteristics of complainants, illustrating how complaint trends varied across the defence establishment and providing further insight into the operational environment within which the Office fulfilled its mandate.

FIGURE 3.4

Principal Complaint Themes: 2019–2026

Relative Percentage per Theme
Share of complaints by category, 2019/20–2025/26



Compiled from Military Ombud Annual Reporting



Understanding the Complaint Profile

Having considered the principal issues brought before the Office, it is equally important to understand the characteristics of those who sought the intervention of the Military Ombud. Examining complaint trends by complainant category, gender, organisational affiliation and geographic distribution provides valuable insight into the reach of the Office and the environment within which it exercised its statutory mandate.

Viewed across the seven-year tenure, the complaint profile demonstrates a remarkable degree of consistency. Current members of the South African National Defence Force remained the predominant complainant group for most of the reporting period, reflecting the Office's primary oversight role in relation to serving members' conditions of service. During the latter years of the Ombud's term in Office. However, complaints from former members increased proportionally, eventually becoming the largest complainant category during the final reporting period included in this review. This trend demonstrates the Office's continuing relevance to former members seeking the resolution of conditions of service matters arising during their military service.

Complaints from members of the public consistently represented a smaller proportion of the Office's workload, with one notable exception. During the COVID-19 national state of disaster, the domestic deployment of the SANDF resulted in a temporary increase in complaints concerning the official conduct of the Defence Force members. A further increase occurred during the 2024/25 reporting period, when an exceptional cluster of related complaints from former civilian employees of the SANDF, who are classified as members of the public, significantly influenced the annual complaint profile. These events illustrate how external circumstances can temporarily affect complaint trends without altering the Office's underlying jurisdiction or the nature of its core work.

The organisational distribution of complaints provides a further perspective on the Office's work. Complaints were received from across the Services and Divisions of the SANDF, reflecting the national footprint of the Office and the diversity of administrative matters falling within its jurisdiction.

Although some organisational components generated a higher proportion of complaints than others, these patterns generally reflected the relative size and composition of the respective services rather than indicating systemic shortcomings within any single organisation. The value of this analysis lies less in comparison than in demonstrating that the Office provides independent oversight across the defence establishment as a whole.

The complaint profile demonstrates that the Office's work extends across every level of the defence establishment. Whether viewed in terms of complainant category, demographic profile or organisational distribution, the trends observed over the review period reinforce the Office's role as an accessible, independent oversight institution serving the entire Defence community. More importantly, they demonstrate that complaint data is not merely a measure of institutional activity they provide valuable evidence that informs operational planning, stakeholder engagement and the identification of systemic issues requiring attention. Interpreting the Complaint Landscape.

The complaint profile presented in this chapter demonstrates that the work of the Office of the Military Ombud extends beyond the resolution of individual grievances. Viewed collectively, complaints provide a valuable evidence base from which recurring administrative challenges, emerging trends and opportunities for institutional improvement may be identified. Throughout the second Military Ombud's term of office, the systematic analysis of complaint data strengthened



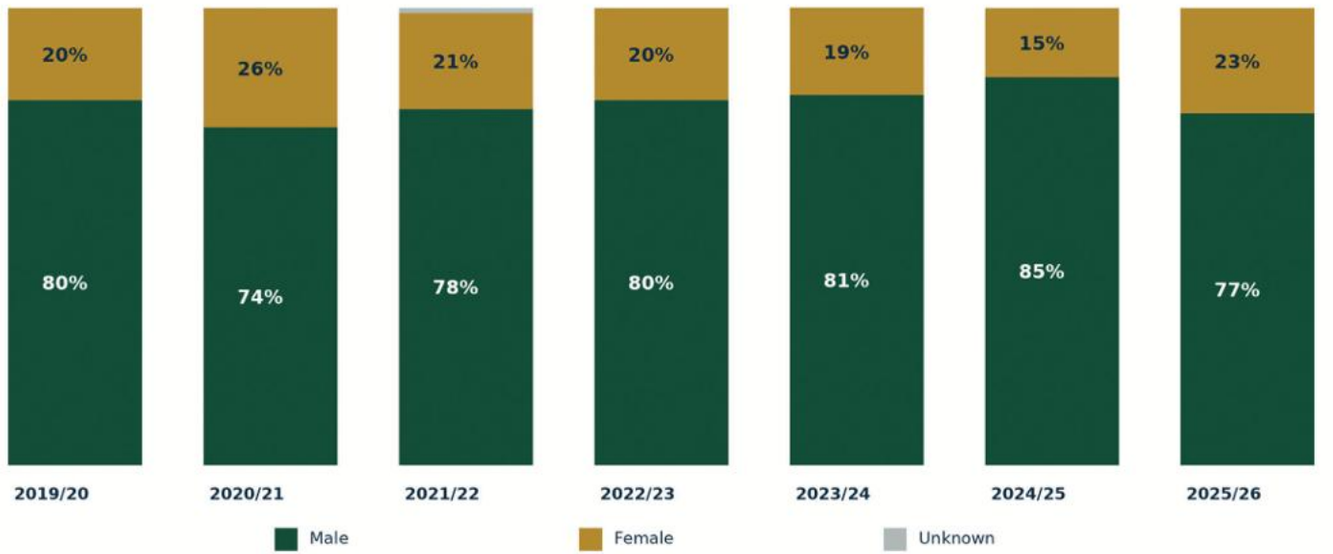
the Office's understanding of the concerns affecting members of the South African National Defence Force and informed a more strategic, evidence-based approach to independent military oversight.

The analysis further illustrates that complaint trends are shaped by both the internal dynamics of military administration and the broader operational environment within which the SANDF functions. Although individual events, such as the domestic deployment of the SANDF during the COVID-19 pandemic or the exceptional cluster of related complaints from former civilian employees of the SANDF, temporarily influenced the complaint profile, the underlying trends remained remarkably consistent. Matters relating to conditions of service, career administration and administrative fairness continued to dominate the Office's workload

FIGURE 3.5

Gender Profile of Complainants

Percentage of total complainants by financial year

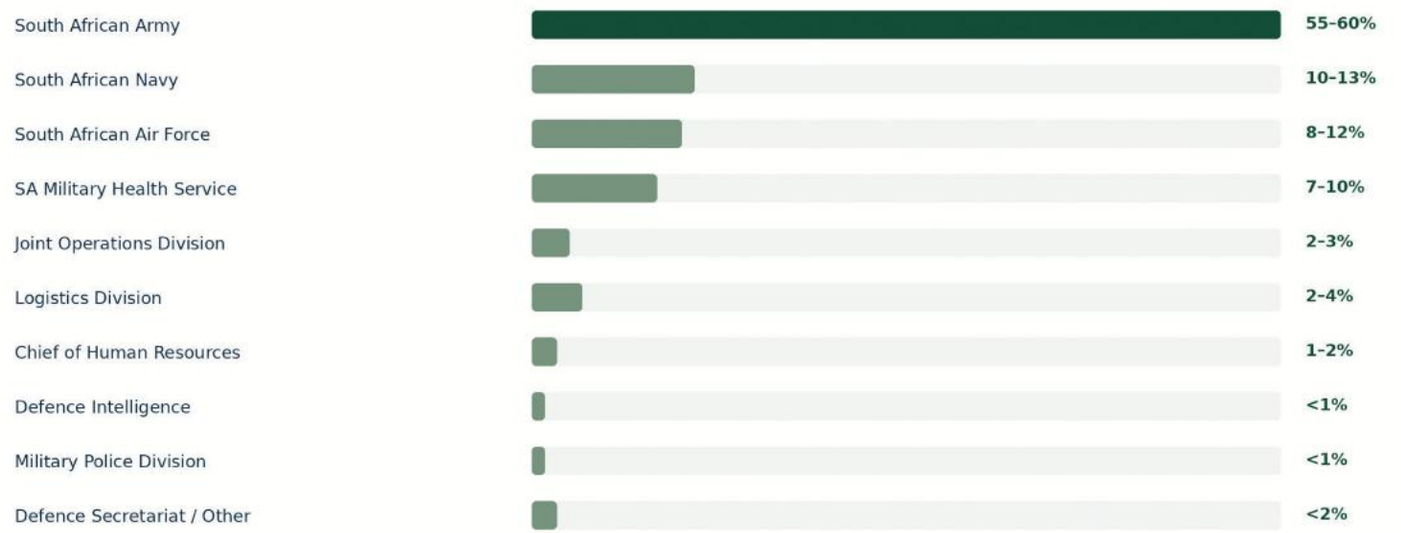


Gender percentages as per Military Ombud Annual Reporting

FIGURE 3.6

Complaints by SANDF Service or Division

Indicative percentage ranges across the review period



These are indicative ranges observed across different reporting periods, not a single seven-year distribution. They should not be added together.



throughout the review period, reinforcing the enduring relevance of the Military Ombud's statutory mandate.

From Trends to Insights

Most importantly, the complaint landscape demonstrates the value of viewing complaints not simply as isolated disputes, but as indicators of organisational health. Each complaint represents an individual seeking an independent assessment of perceived unfairness; collectively, they provide insight into areas where policy implementation, administrative practice or institutional communication may require attention. By identifying recurring themes and monitoring long-term trends, the Office has increasingly been able to complement the resolution of individual grievances with broader contributions to organisational improvement, administrative fairness and sound military administration.

The statistical trends presented in this section therefore provide more than a record of institutional activity. They form the empirical foundation upon which many of the Office's operational priorities, stakeholder engagements and systemic interventions were developed during the Second Military Ombud's term of office. the complaint landscape identifies recurring themes and emerging patterns; it does not fully reflect the practical impact of the Office's work. That impact is best understood through the investigation and resolution of individual complaints. Independent findings and recommendations not only addressed the concerns of complainants but, in many instances, contributed to broader improvements in policy, administrative practice and institutional accountability within the South African National Defence Force.

The sections that follow examine a selection of landmark investigations and the systemic recommendations that emerged from them, illustrating how individual complaints became catalysts for meaningful organisational improvement and strengthened confidence in independent military oversight. ■

A Legacy of Operational Excellence

In-Depth Case Studies of Profile Investigations that Shaped Policy

LANDMARK INVESTIGATIONS

During the period under review, the Office of the Military Ombud conducted significant investigations that strengthened fairness, accountability, administrative justice and good governance within the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the Department of Defence. These investigations resolved individual complaints while also identifying systemic challenges and contributing to policy improvements.

CASE STUDY 1

Procedurally Unfair Non-Appointment and Removal of a Candidate Officer

The Office of the Military Ombud investigated a complaint lodged by a complainant concerning his non-appointment as an officer and subsequent removal from a Candidate Officer post, despite his successful completion of the Officer Potential Assessment and Officers Formative Course.

The SANDF relied on C SANDF Instructions 36/2021 and 75/2022 to justify its decision, citing the complainant's previous military disciplinary conviction. However, these policy instruments were promulgated several years after the complainant had qualified for consideration and after his service had formally recommended his appointment.

The investigation examined whether the complainant's removal from the Candidate Officer post complied with the Defence Act, applicable SANDF policies and the principles of procedural fairness.

The investigation established that the complainant had met the qualification requirements under the legal framework applicable at the time and that subsequent policy provisions had been applied retrospectively. It further found that the complainant had not been afforded an adequate opportunity to make representations before the adverse administrative decision was taken.

The Military Ombud found that:

- The retrospective application of C SANDF Instructions 36/2021 and 75/2022 was legally impermissible.
- The complainant's removal from the Candidate Officer post was procedurally and substantively unfair.
- The SANDF's interpretation of Section 54(2)(g) of the Defence Act failed to give proper effect to the requirement for an individual assessment of whether a member is a fit and proper person.
- The complainant's constitutional rights to lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair administrative action and fair labour practices were not adequately protected.

The Military Ombud recommended appropriate remedial action and advised the SANDF to review its policies and decision-making processes to ensure compliance with the Defence Act, constitutional principles and the requirements of administrative justice.

Structural and Behavioural Change

The investigation identified institutional weaknesses extending beyond the complainant's individual circumstances. It demonstrated the need for consistent and legally compliant officer appointment processes, transparent decision-making and individualised assessments of suitability for appointment.

The recommendations encourage decision-makers to move away from automatic disqualification based solely on previous disciplinary convictions and instead adopt balanced assessments that recognise rehabilitation, sustained performance, leadership qualities and operational experience. The investigation further reinforces procedural fairness as an essential component of military human resource administration.

Recommendations

The Military Ombud recommended that the SANDF:

- Review and amend officer appointment policies to ensure alignment with Section 54 of the Defence Act.
- Assess whether members are fit and proper on an individual, objective and evidence-based basis rather than applying blanket exclusions.
- Ensure that members affected by adverse administrative decisions are afforded procedural fairness in accordance with the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act.
- Develop policy mechanisms for evaluating rehabilitation and subsequent conduct when considering members with previous disciplinary convictions.
- Ensure that appointment decisions comply with constitutional principles of legality, fairness, transparency and reasonableness.

Institutional Impact

This case illustrates the role of the Office of the Military Ombud in strengthening institutional governance by identifying systemic deficiencies within military personnel administration. The recommendations promote lawful, transparent and equitable appointment processes, improve consistency in decision-making and reinforce confidence in SANDF human resource management. By encouraging policy reform that balances the SANDF's operational and disciplinary objectives with constitutional and statutory obligations, the Office contributed to improved governance, accountability and fairness across the organisation. The complainant is a member of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) who lodged a complaint after being removed from a Candidate Officer post despite successfully completing the required officer selection and training processes. The complainant argued that his previous disciplinary conviction had been unfairly used as the sole basis for denying his appointment and that SANDF policies had been applied retrospectively.

The Military Ombud's investigation found that the SANDF had acted unfairly, both procedurally



and substantively, by applying policies introduced at a later stage retrospectively, failing to adequately consider the complainant's full service record and not giving him an opportunity to make representations. The investigation highlighted the need for a holistic assessment of members with previous disciplinary convictions.

The complaint was upheld, with recommendations that the SANDF reconsider the appointment, provide appropriate redress and review its officer appointment policies.

The investigation contributed to policy reforms, including the establishment of mechanisms to assess the future utilisation and suitability of members with criminal or disciplinary convictions.

CASE STUDY 2

Non-Payment of Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD) Benefits

The Office of the Military Ombud investigated complaints lodged by two retired members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) concerning the non-payment of Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD) benefits.

Although both members retired in 2020, they had not received the OSD back pay due to them following the implementation of the nurses' OSD. The outstanding remuneration related to the period from 2007 to 2020. Before approaching the Office of the Military Ombud, both members had unsuccessfully pursued the matter through the Senior Staff Officer (SSO) and the Area Military Health Formation Headquarters (AMH Fmn HQ), despite submitting all the required documentation. The investigation sought to establish whether the complainants qualified for payment and to identify the reasons for the prolonged delay.

The information provided confirmed that both complainants qualified for payment of the OSD benefits. The investigation further established that the delay resulted from systemic administrative challenges, including a significant backlog of qualifying members awaiting payment and the requirement for the Final Pay section to reconcile manually salary records spanning more than a decade.

Following the intervention of the Office of the Military Ombud, the processing of the complainants' outstanding claims was prioritised. Both complainants subsequently received their OSD back pay and confirmed that the matter had been satisfactorily resolved.

The Military Ombud found that:

- The complainants qualified for payment in accordance with the approved implementation list contained in the MOD&MV Instruction: Audit on Nurses OSD, approved by the then Minister of Defence and Military Veterans on 21 October 2021.
- The delays were caused by systemic administrative inefficiencies, including manual reconciliation processes and a backlog of outstanding claims.

- The Office's intervention directly contributed to the resolution of the matter and ensured payment of benefits lawfully due to the complainants. The complaint was resolved in terms of Section 6(6)(b) of the Military Ombud Act after the outstanding OSD benefits had been paid.

Structural and Behavioural Change

Although the complaint related to two individual members, it exposed broader weaknesses within the SANDF's remuneration administration processes. The investigation highlighted the need for improved coordination between Human Resources, Personnel Payment and Final Pay functions, as well as more efficient systems for processing historical remuneration claims.

The intervention encouraged the responsible authorities to prioritise long-outstanding OSD claims and reinforced a culture of administrative accountability, responsiveness and timely service delivery. It also demonstrated the importance of proactive oversight in identifying recurring administrative shortcomings that could affect large numbers of members.

Recommendations

The Military Ombud recommended that the SANDF:

- Strengthen its internal procedures for verifying, reconciling and processing Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD) payments.
- Develop standard operating procedures and prescribed turnaround times for historical remuneration and final payment claims.
- Improve coordination between Human Resources, Personnel Payment and Final Pay sections to eliminate administrative bottlenecks.
- Establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track outstanding remuneration claims through to finalisation.
- Digitise historical salary and personnel records to reduce reliance on manual reconciliation and improve administrative efficiency.

Institutional Impact

This matter demonstrates how the Office of the Military Ombud's intervention extended beyond resolving an individual complaint by identifying systemic weaknesses affecting remuneration administration across the SANDF. The recommendations support improved governance, greater administrative efficiency and fair, timely payment of members' financial entitlements.

SYSTEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

How the Office Influenced Structural and Behavioural Change within the SANDF

The Office of the Military Ombud's investigations into individual complaints extended beyond the resolution of personal grievances by identifying systemic weaknesses within the SANDF's administrative and human resource processes. Through its recommendations, the Office promoted structural reforms that strengthened governance, accountability, fairness and administrative efficiency.

In the Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD) matter, the Office identified deficiencies in remuneration administration, including poor coordination between Human Resources, and the Finance Management Division, specifically Section Personnel Payment, manual reconciliation processes and inadequate monitoring of outstanding claims. Its recommendations encouraged the SANDF to strengthen payment procedures, establish standard operating procedures and turnaround times, improve interdepartmental coordination, implement monitoring mechanisms and digitise historical personnel records.

These measures support the more efficient processing of remuneration claims and the timely payment of members' financial entitlements.

In the officer appointment matter, the Office identified weaknesses in policy implementation and administrative decision-making. The investigation emphasised the need for legally compliant appointment processes, objective and individualised assessments of whether candidates were fit and proper, adherence to procedural fairness and alignment of SANDF policies with the Defence Act and constitutional principles. The recommendations further encouraged recognition of rehabilitation and subsequent conduct when



assessing members with previous disciplinary convictions, promoting transparent, fair and evidence-based decision-making. Collectively, these interventions demonstrate the Office of the Military Ombud's broader institutional impact.

By addressing recurring administrative shortcomings and promoting policy reform, the Office contributed to structural and behavioural change within the SANDF. Its interventions strengthened governance, improved service delivery, enhanced accountability and fostering a culture of fairness, responsiveness and lawful administration.

The investigations conducted by the Office of the Military Ombud demonstrated how individual complaints can reveal broader institutional challenges requiring systemic intervention. Through its oversight role, the Office identified recurring administrative, policy and governance shortcomings within the SANDF and made recommendations aimed at improving organisational effectiveness, accountability and compliance with legal and policy frameworks.

In the area of remuneration administration, the Office's investigation into the non-payment of Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD) benefits revealed weaknesses in the processing of historical financial claims. These included administrative backlogs, manual reconciliation processes and insufficient coordination between relevant personnel administration structures. The resulting recommendations focused on strengthening remuneration management to improved administrative efficiency and reinforced the importance of paying members' lawful financial entitlements accurately and promptly. Systems, improving coordination between Human Resources, Personnel Payment and Final Pay, introducing mechanisms to monitor outstanding claims, and improving records management through digitisation.

These interventions contributed. The Office's investigation into officer appointment processes further highlighted the importance of policy alignment, procedural fairness and consistent decision-making in military personnel administration. The recommendations emphasised the need to align SANDF appointment policies with the Defence Act and constitutional principles, while ensuring that decisions are based on objective, individualised assessments. The Office encouraged the adoption of fair and transparent processes that consider relevant factors such as rehabilitation, subsequent conduct, performance and leadership potential when assessing members' suitability for appointment.

These interventions illustrate the Office of the Military Ombud's contribution to institutional improvement beyond the resolution of individual complaints. By identifying systemic weaknesses and recommending corrective measures, the Office supported structural and behavioural change within the SANDF. Its recommendations promoted governance, greater administrative accountability, lawful decision-making and a culture of responsiveness and fairness. They continue to assist the SANDF in strengthening its systems, enhancing member confidence and ensuring that administrative practices support the principles of good governance and effective service delivery. ■

RESTORING DIGNITY

Quantifying the Impact of Independent Oversight on the Lives of Individual Soldiers





The Voices of Our Soldiers: First-hand Testimonials and Grassroots Feedback from Members of the Armed Forces.

CASE STUDY 3

Denial of Medical Benefits Following Early Retirement

A former member of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), who took early retirement at the age of 55 after more than 37 years of service, lodged a complaint with the Office of the Military Ombud after being denied access to medical benefits under the Regular Force Medical Continuation Fund (RFMCF).

Prior to her retirement, the Complainant applied to determine the lump sum contribution required to retain her post-retirement medical benefits. She was advised to pay R67 326.12, which she duly paid in full. Despite meeting this requirement, she was subsequently informed that she would only qualify for medical benefits upon reaching the age of 60.

The Complainant maintained that this decision was inconsistent with the SANDF General Regulations and sought the Military Ombud's intervention to resolve the matter and ensure that members who

retire early receive access to medical benefits once they have met the prescribed requirements.

The Office of the Military Ombud investigated the complaint by engaging both the Complainant and the Regular Force Medical Continuation Fund (RFMCF), reviewing the applicable legislative and regulatory framework, and examining the SANDF's policy position regarding healthcare benefits for members who retire before the compulsory retirement age.

During the investigation, the RFMCF explained that it had been administering benefits in accordance with its interpretation of the existing regulations. However, following engagement with the Office of the Military Ombud, the Chief of Human Resources issued a new implementation instruction confirming that SANDF members who leave the service through early retirement qualify for the immediate continuation of healthcare benefits, provided they have paid the required lump-sum contribution.

The investigation further confirmed that the Complainant's membership records were updated and that her medical benefits were activated retrospectively from 1 September 2025.

The complaint was successfully resolved after the Complainant's access to medical benefits was restored in line with the revised implementation instruction. In addition to resolving the individual complaint, the matter resulted in administrative clarification that benefits members who retire early under similar circumstances are entitled to receive, ensuring greater consistency and fairness in the administration of the RFMCF.

Restoring Dignity Through Independent Oversight
This case demonstrates how independent oversight can resolve systemic administrative challenges while protecting the rights of individual members. The Military Ombud's intervention not only secured the Complainant's access to essential healthcare benefits but also contributed to clarifying the implementation of SANDF policy for similarly affected members.

Beyond restoring a single member's benefits, the outcome strengthened fairness, legal certainty and confidence in the military complaints system. It illustrates how independent oversight can drive administrative improvements with a broader institutional impact, ensuring that members receive the benefits to which they are entitled after years of dedicated service.

Voice from the Ground

"After serving for more than three decades, I believed I had done everything required to retain my medical benefits. The Military Ombud's intervention ensured that my rights were recognised and my benefits restored. Knowing that other members who retire early will also benefit from this clarification makes the outcome even more meaningful."

Why This Case Matters

This case illustrates the value of independent oversight in three dimensions: restoration, clarification and prevention. It restored an individual's healthcare benefits, clarified the policy for early retirees and reduced the likelihood of similarly situated members facing uncertainty in the future.

CASE STUDY 4

Unlawful Termination of Service (Restored Opportunity)

The Complainant approached the Office of the Military Ombud following the termination of his Reserve Force call-up contract. The termination resulted in the loss of income for the remainder of his call-up period and was linked to allegations of sexual harassment.

The Complainant challenged the lawfulness and fairness of the termination. He sought:

1. Reinstatement of his Reserve Force call-up;
2. Compensation or utilisation for the remainder of the call-up period; and
3. Finalisation of his proposed transfer to the Regular Force.

At the heart of the complaint was a fundamental question: whether a member's service could be terminated without first giving him an opportunity to respond.

The investigation examined the applicable Reserve Force regulations, SANDF processes and relevant documentation and established that the complainant's call-up had been verbally and

summarily terminated by the former Chief of the Air Force without affording him an opportunity to make representations.

The investigation further established that the SANDF's personnel system reflected the Complainant's call-up from April 2017 and that he had been remunerated accordingly. The contention that his Reserve Force enrolment was invalid was therefore not supported by the available records.

The Office found that the termination was unlawful and procedurally flawed, particularly because the principle of **audi alteram partem** (the right to be heard) had not been observed.

Outcome

The complaint concerning the termination of the Reserve Force call-up and the consequential loss of income was upheld in terms of Section 6(7)(a) of the Military Ombud Act.

The Office recommended that the Complainant:

- Be called up in the South African Air Force Reserves for six months, representing the remainder of the unlawfully terminated period; or
- Alternatively, be paid for the remainder of the call-up period.

The complaint relating to the transfer to the Regular Force was dismissed because sufficient supporting evidence could not be established.

The Human Impact

For a Reserve Force member, the termination of a call-up is not simply a change in administrative status. It can immediately affect income, professional identity, family security and confidence in the institution.

The investigation reaffirmed that military administration, like all public administration, must operate within established legal and procedural boundaries. The right to be heard is not a technicality; it is an essential safeguard against arbitrary decision-making.

The Voice of Our Soldier

Following the investigation, the Complainant wrote to the case manager to express his appreciation for the manner in which his complaint had been handled.

He particularly valued receiving prompt responses and regular progress updates without having to request information repeatedly. He stated that the process reaffirmed his confidence in the institution and its commitment to strengthening internal dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Importantly, his appreciation was expressed before the matter had been finalised. His message therefore speaks to the value of a fair and respectful complaints process, regardless of whether the ultimate outcome meets every expectation of a complainant.

Why This Case Matters

The case demonstrates that the impact of independent oversight cannot be measured only by financial compensation or reinstatement. It can also be measured by the restoration of procedural justice, institutional confidence and respect for the individual.

CASE STUDY 5

Securing the Payment of a Deceased Member's Pension Benefit

The Complainant approached the Office of the Military Ombud on behalf of her late husband, who had served as a motor vehicle fitter at Air Force Base Hoedspruit.

He passed away on 6 August 2023. Despite his death, his pension remained unpaid for an extended period.

The family had been informed that the delay was connected to outstanding items recorded against the deceased member's inventory and an investigation into missing or unidentified assets. However, repeated enquiries did not provide the family with clear information about the reasons for the delay or when the pension would be processed.

For the surviving spouse, the delayed pension represented more than an unresolved administrative file. It affected the family's financial security at a time of bereavement.

The Office convened a meeting with the relevant leadership and human resources officials at Air Force Base Hoedspruit to establish the causes of the delay and identify a practical solution.

The investigation identified several administrative obstacles, including:

- An incomplete termination-of-service process;
- Outstanding clearance documentation;
- Distribution accounts that had not been updated;
- Outstanding items recorded against the deceased member's distribution account; and
- Unresolved administrative matters between Air Force Base Waterkloof and Air Force Base Hoedspruit.

The investigation further established that the delay could have been handled differently and that the administrative obstacles should not have resulted in an indefinite delay in processing the pension.



To resolve the matter, a dedicated team was established to address the outstanding distribution-account matters and reconcile the relevant records. Following the Military Ombud's intervention, the Complainant confirmed that her late husband's pension had eventually been paid, together with interest.

The complaint was subsequently regarded as resolved in terms of Section 6(6)(b) of the Military Ombud Act.

The Human Impact

A pension is an earned entitlement. When payment is delayed following the death of a service member, the consequences extend beyond the member to the surviving family. The intervention helped convert a prolonged administrative delay into a defined process with accountable officials and a clear pathway towards resolution. Most importantly, the family eventually received the pension due to them, together with interest.

THE VOICE OF OUR SOLDIER'S FAMILY

Following payment, the Complainant expressed her appreciation to the Military Ombud for the efforts that ultimately resulted in her late husband's pension being paid. Her experience illustrates a central principle of military complaints resolution: behind every administrative file is a person or family whose daily life may be affected by the outcome.

Why This Case Matters

The case highlights the importance of measuring administrative performance not only in terms of processes completed, but also in terms of time, financial consequences and human dignity.

For a bereaved family, resolving a pension complaint means restoring financial certainty and closing a chapter that might otherwise remain open indefinitely.

"Good day,

> I refer to our conversation today.
>
> I hereby confirm that my late husband's pension has been paid to me.
>
> I received amounts on 8 July 2025 and 11 July 2025.
>
> I visited the GEPF offices yesterday (14 July 2025) to confirm the payment.

They confirmed that I had received my late husband's pension, including the monthly pension and all arrears. The monthly pension will be paid from 31 July 2025.
We are satisfied that the purpose of our complaint has been achieved. I confirm that the investigation can be closed.

Thank you for your assistance. Without it, there would have been no progress whatsoever."

CLOSING REFLECTION

Taken together, these cases reveal that military complaints are rarely just about regulations, forms or administrative decisions. They are about people.

A medical benefit can represent security after 37 years of service. A Reserve Force call-up can represent a family's income and a member's professional dignity. A pension can determine whether a bereaved spouse receives financial stability after losing a loved one. An outstanding OSD payment can represent years of earned financial entitlement.

These outcomes illustrate the tangible value of independent oversight. They show that restoring dignity is not simply about resolving a file. It is about ensuring that those who serve, those who have retired and the families of those who have passed away are treated fairly, their rights are respected and their legitimate benefits are not lost in administrative processes.

Independent oversight gives soldiers and their families a voice—and turns that voice into accountability, remedy and institutional improvement. ■



CHAPTER

04

Taking the Ombud

TO THE PEOPLE


Welcome
BUILDING A HIGH
PERFORMANCE
CULTURE

The Outreach Strategy Explained

Accessibility lies at the heart of the mandate of the Office of the Military Ombud. An institution established to provide impartial oversight and consider complaints from serving and former members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), as well as members of the public, must be visible, approachable and understood by those it serves.

Between 2019 and 2026, the Office embraced this responsibility by developing outreach into one of its strategic pillars. Guided by stakeholder feedback and informed by successive stakeholder perception surveys, the Office recognised that many serving members, former members and members of the public remained unfamiliar with its mandate, functions and complaints processes.

Rather than waiting for people to seek assistance, the Office adopted a proactive approach by taking the Military Ombud to military bases, operational units and public spaces across the country. Outreach was positioned not simply as an awareness activity, but as an important means for improving accessibility, strengthening engagement and ensuring that stakeholders understood the Office's role and how to access its complaints process.

Coordinated by the Communications Business Unit, the Outreach Programme evolved into one of the Office's flagship strategic initiatives, significantly expanding its national footprint and brought its mandate closer to the people it serves.

Implemented annually, the programme incorporated a range of activities designed to reach different audiences and respond to their needs. These included visits to military bases, joint operations engagements, pop-up offices, public awareness activations, exhibitions, national commemorative events, stakeholder engagements, conferences and participation in public platforms, including izimbizos.

The Office's participation in SANDF Joint Operations induction programmes formed a further component of the programme. During deployment preparations, the Office delivered presentations to deploying members on its role and mandate, the complaints process and the standards of conduct expected when performing official duties. These engagements complemented the SANDF's broader pre-deployment preparations and ensured that members were aware of the Office as an independent oversight mechanism before commencing their deployments.

The programme was further strengthened through strategic partnerships with the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS),

provincial and local government structures, SANDF formations and other key stakeholders. These relationships provided established networks and platforms through which the Office could communicate its mandate, reach broader audiences and gain a better understanding of the environments in which its stakeholders live and work.

The evolution of the Outreach Programme reflected a growing understanding within the Office that accessibility is not achieved merely by establishing an institution or providing a complaints mechanism. People must know that the institution exists, understand its mandate, recognise when they may approach it and have confidence that their concerns will be considered fairly and impartially.

Outreach therefore became a practical expression of the Office's commitment to accessibility.

Breaking Barriers

A central objective of the Outreach Programme was to remove barriers between the Office and the people it serves.

The Office recognised that accessibility extends beyond physical proximity. Information must also be communicated through channels that are familiar, convenient and accessible to different audiences. Face-to-face outreach was therefore complemented by a growing media and digital presence. Throughout the seven-year period, the Office strengthened its presence across all nine provinces, engaging serving members, former members and members of the public through military engagements, public activations, exhibitions, stakeholder platforms and communication initiatives.



The programme increasingly extended beyond military establishments into public spaces where people live, work and gather. Activations at shopping centres, taxi ranks, schools, public participation events and other accessible venues created opportunities for officials to engage directly with members of the public and explain the mandate of the Military Ombud in clear and accessible terms. This was particularly important in communities where awareness of the Office was limited or where information about the complaints process was not readily available. The approach reflected the dual nature of the Office's accessibility responsibility: engaging the defence environment while ensuring that members of the public are equally aware of the role of the Military Ombud.


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Media and Digital Visibility

As the Outreach Programme expanded, traditional and digital communication became important tools for extending the reach of physical engagements.

Television, radio and print media provided opportunities to explain the role and mandate of the Military Ombud to wider audiences, clarify the types of complaints that may fall within the Office's jurisdiction and inform stakeholders about how to access its services.

Social media and the Office's website further strengthened these communication efforts. These platforms enabled the Office to share information about its mandate, complaints processes, outreach activities, and stakeholder engagements beyond the locations where officials were physically present. Digital communication also helped maintain visibility between physical outreach activities. Information continued to reach stakeholders beyond the dates and locations of specific activations, creating a more sustained approach to public awareness.

The combination of direct engagement, traditional media and digital platforms therefore enabled the Office to communicate with audiences that could not always be reached through face-to-face activities. This integrated approach was central to the development of the Outreach Programme. A physical presence created opportunities for direct interaction and dialogue, while media and digital platforms extended the conversation to a broader audience.

Outreach was consequently no longer confined to a particular venue or event. It became an ongoing process of communication and engagement.

International and Regional Engagement

The Office strengthened its international and regional engagement through participation in the Second International Ombud Expo (IOE) in Gaborone, Botswana, in 2024. The platform provided an opportunity to share experiences, exchange knowledge and engage with ombud and oversight institutions on governance, accountability and effective complaints resolution.

This participation built on the Office's earlier involvement in the inaugural IOE held in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2019. Together, these engagements contributed to the Office's growing international visibility and strengthened opportunities for benchmarking, collaboration and institutional learning.

The Strength of Local Government Partnerships

A significant strength of the Outreach Programme was the Office's ability to work with established government and community-facing structures to extend its reach at local level.

Provincial and local government structures offered valuable local knowledge, established relationships and access to public platforms through which the Office could engage residents.

These partnerships enabled the Office to connect its specialised mandate with networks already operating within local communities. The involvement of local government was particularly valuable during public awareness activations. Local structures understood the communities in which they operated, the issues affecting residents and the platforms through which people could be reached most effectively. Their involvement helped the Office to identify suitable venues, mobilise participants and create opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Community Development Workers played an important role in this process. Their proximity to residents and their role in facilitating engagement with government engagement positioned them to connect the Office with members of the public and to support the dissemination of information about the Military Ombud.

Community Policing Forums and community-based volunteers also provided valuable channels for extending awareness. Their established relationships with residents and knowledge of local environments enabled the Office to engage through trusted networks and reach people who might otherwise not have encountered information about the Military Ombud.

These partnerships demonstrated that effective outreach does not necessarily require the Office to establish a new network in every area it visits. By working with existing structures, the Office could build on relationships and networks already established at local level.



The value of collaboration therefore extended beyond logistical support. Local government structures and community-facing stakeholders deepened the Office's understanding of local environments, while the Office provided specialised information about its mandate, complaints process and oversight role.

The Western Cape provided a strong example of this collaborative approach. Public awareness activations in areas such as Delft, Bishop Lavis, Hanover Park, Philippi and other public spaces demonstrated the value of working alongside local government structures, Community Development Workers, Community Policing Forums and other local stakeholders to bring information about the Office directly to the public.

The strength of these partnerships lay in the combination of institutional expertise and local reach. The Office brought its specialised knowledge of the Military Ombud's mandate, while government and community-facing structures brought local knowledge, established networks and access to residents.

Local partnerships therefore became more than a means of facilitating individual events. They became part of the broader outreach network through which the Office could strengthen accessibility and sustain awareness at local level.

From Military Bases to Public Spaces

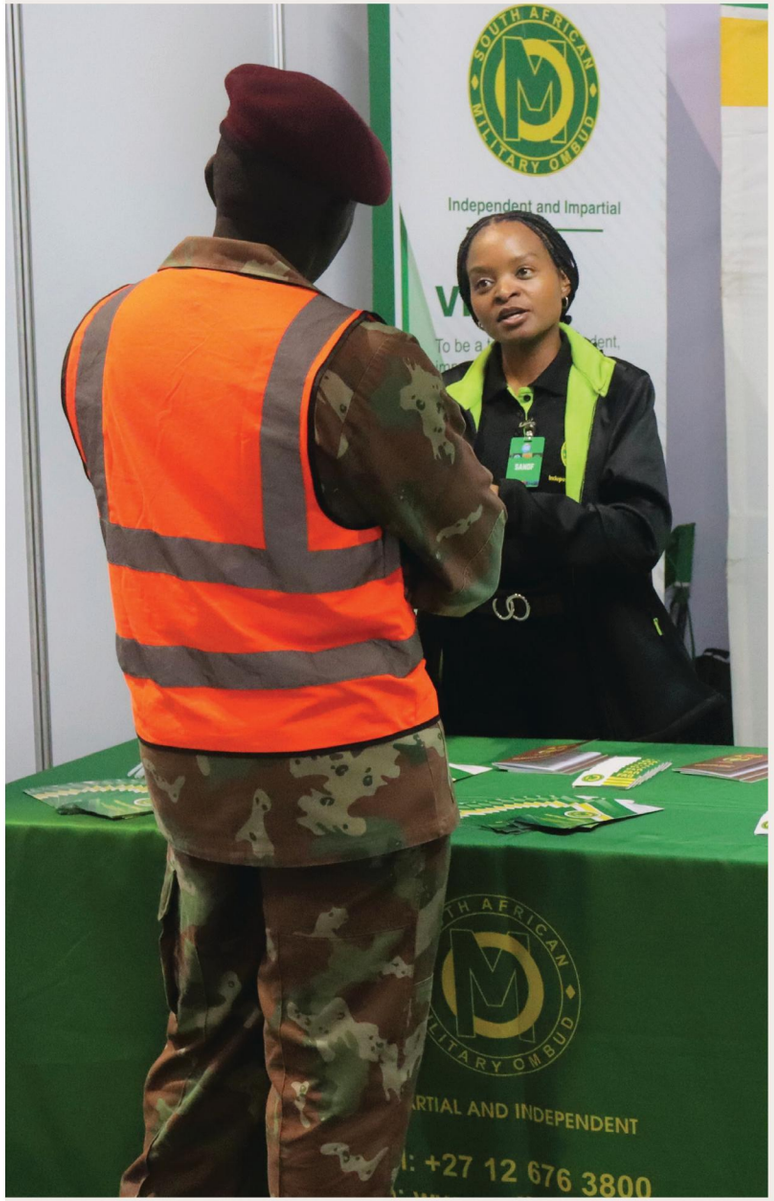
The evolution of the Outreach Programme reflected a deliberate effort to reach stakeholders wherever meaningful engagement could take place.

Military bases, formations and operational units remained central to the programme, providing direct access to serving members of the SANDF. These engagements enabled officials to explain the mandate of the Office, the complaints process, jurisdictional limitations and the procedures members should follow when seeking assistance.

The programme also recognised the importance of reaching former members of the SANDF and members of the public beyond military establishments.

Public activations consequently became an increasingly important component of outreach. Engagements at shopping centres, taxi ranks, schools, public participation platforms and other public spaces created opportunities for officials to interact directly with members of the public and explain the role of the Military Ombud.

The programme also extended into communities surrounding military deployments, particularly border and operational areas. These engagements provided an opportunity to reach members of the public living alongside deployed SANDF personnel and to explain the role of the Military Ombud in matters concerning the official conduct of Defence Force members. By working with local stakeholders, the Office extended awareness beyond military



other outreach initiatives, the Office reached serving and former members of the SANDF and members of the public.

The national footprint represented an important shift in the Office's approach to accessibility. Rather than relying primarily on stakeholders to approach the institution, Outreach Programme enabled the Office to take information about its mandate and functions directly to the people it serves.

Military bases and operational units provided important platforms for engaging serving SANDF members, including Regular Force and Reserve Force personnel. Public activations, exhibitions and public participation platforms created opportunities to reach members of the public and former SANDF members.

The involvement of provincial and local government structures, Community Development Workers, Community Policing Forums, volunteers and other stakeholders further extended the reach of these initiatives and strengthened the Office's ability to engage audiences in different settings.

The nine-province footprint was therefore more than a measure of geographic coverage. It represented an institutional commitment to making the Office more visible and accessible across the country.

The recurring nature of the programme was equally important. Outreach was not treated as a once-off campaign, but as a continuing programme through which the Office could return to communities, strengthen relationships, address emerging information needs and maintain awareness of its mandate.

Listening on the Ground

Although raising awareness remained a central purpose of the Outreach Programme, the engagements also became an invaluable source of institutional insight.

Direct interaction with members enabled the Office to hear first-hand about the issues affecting them and develop a deeper understanding of recurring concerns within the defence environment. The engagements revealed concerns about the effectiveness of internal grievance mechanisms, delays in the processing and monitoring of grievances, limited accessibility of grievance systems at unit level and capacity constraints among officials responsible for administering these processes.

Members also raised concerns relating to their conditions of service and the application of policies and administrative processes. These included matters concerning promotions, transfers, housing allowances, recruitment, disciplinary processes, allowances, medical services and other benefits.

Reserve Force members raised particular concerns regarding disparities in access to benefits and conditions of service, including medical support, allowances, pension and retirement benefits, training and career progression.












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Concerns relating to the Group Life Insurance Scheme and other benefits also highlighted the importance of clear and consistent policy implementation.

Workplace concerns also emerged during several engagements, including allegations of victimisation, retaliation following the lodging of grievances, hostile command environments and discriminatory practices.

Resource and infrastructure constraints were also raised, including challenges relating to facilities, medical infrastructure, duty transport and access to resources required to perform official duties.

These issues were not confined to a single location or formation. Similar concerns emerged across different engagements, enabling the Office to identify recurring themes and consider where broader institutional attention might be required.
The significance of these engagements extended beyond the individual issues raised. Outreach provided a direct window into the experiences of members and helped the Office identify recurring patterns, emerging concerns and areas where stakeholders required greater clarity.

In this way, outreach became a form of institutional listening.

From Awareness to Understanding

The Outreach Programme demonstrated that simply making information available is not enough. Stakeholders also needed to understand what the Office did, what fell outside its mandate and how its complaints process operated. Direct engagement enabled officials to explain the mandate of the Military Ombud in accessible terms and respond to questions about jurisdiction, complaint procedures, investigation processes and the role of the Office.

For serving members, engagements provided opportunities to understand the Office's in addressing complaints concerning conditions of service and other matters falling within its mandate. For former members and members of the public, outreach provided an opportunity to understand how to access the Office and the circumstances in which a complaint could be lodged. Stakeholders consistently sought clarity on procedural matters, including the timeframes for lodging complaints, the circumstances in which condonation may be considered, jurisdictional limitations and the relationship between internal grievance mechanisms and the Office of the Military Ombud.

Members also sought clarity on the Office's role when internal grievance processes had not resolved their concerns, as well as on the implementation of findings and recommendations. These questions highlighted an important reality: an oversight institution can be accessed effectively only when stakeholders understand its mandate and the processes governing its work.

Outreach therefore became an important educational mechanism. It enabled the Office to explain the complaints process before misunderstandings could become barriers to access. At the same time, the engagements reinforced the importance of managing expectations. The Office could explain which matters fell within its jurisdiction while clearly distinguishing them from those that were the responsibility of other structures or processes.

This clarity strengthened the credibility of the Office and contributed to a more informed understanding of its role as an independent mechanism for impartial oversight and complaints resolution.

Outreach as a Two-Way Conversation

Over the seven-year period, the Outreach Programme developed beyond a one-way communication model.

The Office did not enter military bases, public spaces and stakeholder forums to tell people about its mandate. It also listened.

Every engagement created an opportunity for stakeholders to share their questions, concerns and experiences. This direct interaction gave the Office clearer understanding of the realities faced by serving members, former members and members of the public.

The information gathered through these engagements contributed to a broader understanding of systemic issues within the defence environment. Recurring concerns relating to internal grievance mechanisms, conditions of service, Reserve Force matters, administrative practices and access to

information could therefore be considered within a wider institutional context.

This two-way relationship strengthened the value of outreach. Stakeholders received information and guidance, while the Office gained first-hand insight into the experiences and concerns of the people it serves.

The approach also reinforced the importance of maintaining relationships beyond individual outreach events. Engagement with government structures, community-based networks, military formations and other stakeholders created channels through which information could continue to flow between engagements. In this respect, outreach became both an awareness mechanism and a source of institutional learning.

Outreach and the Identification of Systemic Concerns

The issues raised during outreach engagements also highlighted the distinction between individual complaints and broader systemic concerns.

Across different engagements, members raised concerns affecting groups rather than individuals. These included recurring issues relating to the Internal Grievance system, Reserve Force conditions of service, benefits and allowances, administrative inconsistencies and the implementation of policies.

There was a growing expectation that the Office should contribute to addressing systemic and collective concerns where these fell within its mandate. This expectation was significant because it demonstrated that stakeholders increasingly viewed the Military Ombud as more than a mechanism for resolving individual complaints. They also recognised its potential role in identifying recurring problems and bringing broader institutional concerns to the attention of the relevant authorities. Outreach therefore complemented the Office's formal complaints-resolution function by providing an additional source of information about recurring challenges within the defence environment.

The information obtained through these engagements helped identify emerging trends, strengthen stakeholder engagement and highlight areas requiring further attention. Formal complaints and investigations however remained subject to the Office's statutory processes and jurisdiction.

Building Trust Through Presence

Equally important, the Outreach Programme strengthened confidence in the Office itself.

Members increasingly encountered the Military Ombud not only as an institution that investigates complaints, but also as one that listens, educates and engages constructively.

The demand for outreach visits, invitations from military units and continued collaboration with stakeholders reflected the value placed on direct engagement with the Office. Every engagement created another opportunity for the Office to demonstrate its accessibility and reinforce its commitment to impartiality, fairness and accountability. Direct interaction allowed stakeholders to ask questions, express concerns and obtain clarity in ways that written communication could not always achieve.

The relationships established through outreach also strengthened the Office's institutional network. Collaboration with GCIS, provincial and local government structures, Community Development Workers, Community Policing Forums, community-based volunteers, military structures and other stakeholders created broader platforms for sustained awareness and engagement.

The value of this network extended beyond the immediate delivery of outreach activities. It created lasting relationships through which the Office could remain connected to stakeholder concerns and continue strengthening public understanding of its role.

Trust in an oversight institution is strengthened when people know that the institution exists, understand what it does, know how to access it and have opportunities to engage with it directly. ■

OUTREACH HELPED CREATE THOSE OPPORTUNITIES

A SEVEN-YEAR JOURNEY OF PRESENCE

The Story of Sutreach Between 2019 and 2026 is, Above All, a Story of Presence

It is the story of an Office that recognised that accessibility could not be achieved from behind office walls. The Office moved beyond a traditional approach to communication by creating opportunities for direct engagement, information sharing, education and listening.

Over seven years, outreach developed into an integrated approach combining military engagements, public awareness activities, exhibitions, stakeholder partnerships, media, digital communication and public participation platforms. The Office's presence across all nine provinces expanded opportunities for stakeholders to learn about its mandate, understand its complaints process and engage directly with the institution.

The strength of the programme lay not only in the places visited, but in the relationships established to make those engagements possible.

Partnerships with national, provincial and local government structures, Community Development Workers, Community Policing Forums, community-based volunteers, military structures and other stakeholders enabled the Office to extend its reach and engage people through networks already established within local communities.

These partnerships demonstrated the value of collaboration. By combining the specialised mandate of the Military Ombud with the local knowledge, networks and reach of government and community-facing structures, the Office carried its message further and created more meaningful opportunities for engagement.

The Western Cape experience provided a particularly strong illustration of this approach. where Military engagements were complemented by public activations and stakeholder-supported activities in public spaces. At the same time, media and digital communication extended the programme's reach beyond physical engagements, ensuring that awareness of the Office could continue beyond the places and dates of specific outreach activities.

Outreach consequently became more than a programme of visits. It became a sustained approach to accessibility, one that combined presence, partnerships, communication, education and listening. By taking its mandate directly to the people it serves, the Office of the Military Ombud strengthened awareness, expanded accessibility, built enduring partnerships, deepened public understanding of its role and created further opportunities to hear stakeholders concerns.

The seven-year journey demonstrated that trust is not built only through the resolution of complaints. It is also built through visibility, openness, accessibility and a willingness to engage. By taking the Ombud to the people, the Office strengthened the connection between the institution and those it was established to serve, reinforcing the principles of fairness, accountability and good governance within the South African defence environment. ■





CHAPTER 05

Dialogues and Symposia

FOSTERING STRATEGIC RELATIONS AND ENGAGEMENTS


DCAF
17 ICOAF

Dialogues and Symposia

Fostering Strategic Relations and Engagements

International Collaboration

The Office hosts the Annual Military Ombud Symposium which brings together international military oversight institutions, academics, civil servants, and armed forces stakeholders. The primary purpose is to facilitate discussion on civil-military relations, human rights, and independent oversight. Through its annual symposia and special international editions, the Office sought to integrate South Africa's democratic values into global security discussions. This is reflected in the following events: Landmark Annual Symposia.

The selected recent symposia below reflect the thematic discussions that have contributed to be the Office institutional development:

- 2026 Annual Symposium & Seven-Year Review: Held on 30 October 2026, themed "Strengthening Trust and Accountability: Enhancing Complaints Resolution Mechanisms within the Civil-Military Relations Framework", marking the end of the Military Ombud's formal term of office.
- 2024 Annual Symposium: Held on 22 November 2024 at The Maslow (Time Square, Pretoria) under the theme "Affirming and Promoting the Military Ombud's Oversight Responsibility: 30 years into democracy".
- 11th Annual Symposium (2023): Focused heavily on "The role of military ombud institutions in promoting Human Rights and Administrative Justice within the military in the African context".

Regional Affiliation

African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA): The Military Ombud is an active, voting member. Through this affiliation, the Office shares good governance practices across the continent and contributes its experience as Africa's only dedicated, independent ombud institution for the armed forces.

International Affiliations

International Conferences of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF): The South African Military Ombud is a key participant in this global forum, which facilitates the exchange of good practices and experiences among representatives from more than 50 countries. Reflecting its prominent standing, South Africa hosted the landmark 10th ICOAF in 2018 and the 17th ICOAF in Johannesburg in October 2025, the first




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and second conferences of their kind to be held on African soil. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF): The Ombud maintains an active partnership with DCAF and participates in the DCAF Council meetings, contributing to the continuous improvement of oversight mechanisms, governance, and human rights frameworks. The Office works closely with the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) to exchange good practices and lessons learnt, eliminate defence maladministration and frameworks.

International Ombudsman Institute (IOI): The Office is a voting member of the IOI, the only global organisation dedicated to promoting cooperation among independent ombud institutions and supporting their development worldwide.

Stellenbosch University and the Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa (SIGLA): The South African Military Ombud Stakeholder Awareness and Perception Survey is a longitudinal research study undertaken in collaboration with Stellenbosch University and SIGLA.

It is designed to assess the impact and visibility of the Office of the Military Ombud, as well as the level of public trust in the institution.

The survey targets uniformed members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the public. Its core objectives are to gauge public trust and measure confidence in the Ombud's independent oversight, identify gaps in knowledge and determine areas in which members of the public or military personnel may not fully understand the Ombud's legal mandate. It also evaluates accessibility, including how easily serving and former military personnel can lodge complaints. The findings help the Office refine its services and guide future awareness campaigns, internal service standards and operational systems.

GLOBAL SHOWCASE

Hosting the 17ICOAF (2025): *A Dedicated Feature Page on South Africa Leading the Global Military Ombudsman Community*

The Office co-hosted the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (17ICOAF) with Switzerland-based Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) from 07-09 October 2025, themed "Building Bridges - Awareness and Outreach Efforts by Ombuds Institutions," at the Emperors Palace Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa. The conference drew more than fifty international countries as this highlighted global collaboration on military transparency, the necessity of awareness and education by ombuds institutions.

The theme reflected an understanding that the effectiveness and perceived legitimacy of oversight bodies depend on the levels of awareness, understanding, and trust among the people their mandate is intended to serve. Against a backdrop of increasingly diverse and complex operating environments, heightened public scrutiny of state institutions, and the spread of misinformation, the ability of ombuds institutions to fulfil their mandates effectively depends on building bridges through meaningful outreach and engagement. Participants explored and reflected on the outreach and awareness initiatives of ombuds institutions through a series of panel discussions and other opportunities for dialogue. The good practices shared during the conference were compiled and endorsed by participants in a non-binding Conference Statement at the closing session.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND AFFILIATIONS

Collaboration with Ombud Institutions, Academia, Civil Society and Legal bodies Strengthening institutional credibility through memberships and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU's).

Throughout the 2019 to 2026 term, the Office of the Military Ombud actively cultivated strategic alliances and collaborative networks across domestic, regional, and international domains to strengthen democratic oversight and advance administrative justice. Recognising that an effective oversight body cannot operate in isolation, the Office established formal and informal partnerships with academic institutions, civil society organisations, legal bodies, and fellow oversight institutions.

At the international level, the Office used platforms such as the Geneva Centre for Security Sector

Governance (DCAF) to share expertise and present the South African Military Ombud model as a leading African benchmark for military ombudsman ship. This included hosting benchmarking delegations, and engaging institutions such as the Kenyan Ombudsman, to provide technical insights into complaints handling frameworks, independent investigation methodologies, and systemic review mechanisms.

Domestically, the Office focused on formalising inter-institutional coordination with the Depart-ment of Defence (DOD) through direct workgroups, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), and Service Level Agreements (SLAs). These mechanisms were intended to streamline communication channels, improve response times to preliminary inquiries, and overcome operational dependencies while respecting the constitutional principle of the separation of powers.

Hosting the 17th ICOAF (2025)

South Africa Leads the Global Military Ombud Community A landmark highlight of the seven-year term was hosting the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (17ICOAF) in October 2025. This gathering positioned South Africa at the centre of the global discourse on military oversight, fundamental rights of armed forces personnel, and civil-military relations.

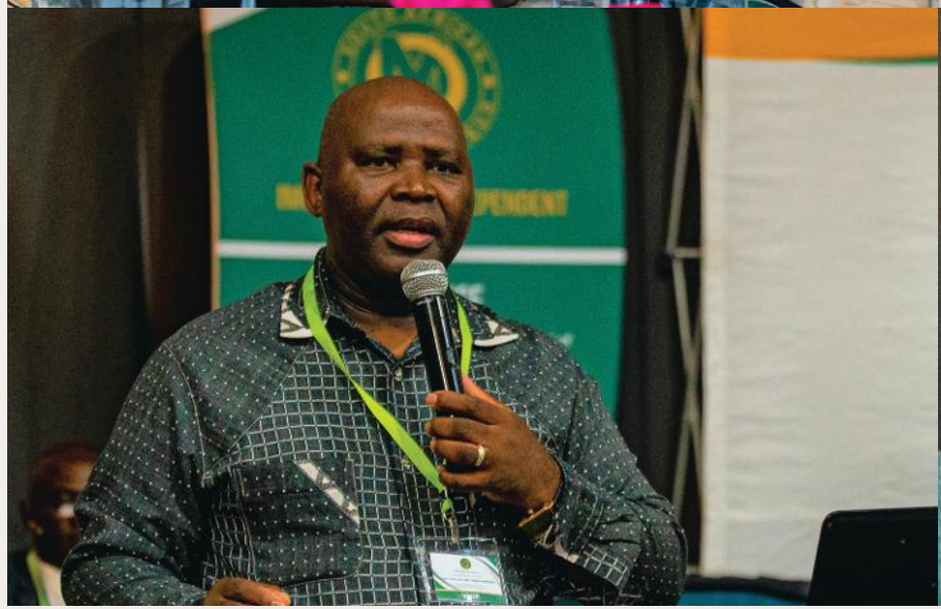


The hosting of 17ICOAF represented the culmination of a decade-long progression towards greater international integration:

- African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA): The Office has been an active member since 2016, promoting human rights and good governance standards across the continent.
- International Ombudsman Institute (IOI): After joining as a full member in 2020, the Office expanded its international reach, exchanging best practices on institutional resilience, independence, and administrative fairness.

At the 17ICOAF 2025, the South African Military Ombud showcased its distinctive statutory framework under the Military Ombud Act, 2012 (Act No. 4 of 2012). The Office highlighted its dual mandate to investigate complaints from serving and former SANDF members concerning their conditions of service, and complaints from members of the public concerning the official conduct of

























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SANDF members. The platform also enabled the Office to advocate for key social imperatives, including the inclusion and protection of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities (WYPD) within defence force structures. ■

PARLIAMENTARY ACCOUNTABILITY

Reporting Transparency with the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans

Parliamentary reporting represents the core pillar of democratic oversight for the Military Ombud. Throughout the 2019 to 2026 period, the Office maintained an unblemished record of 100% compliance in submitting statutory accountability documents including Strategic Plans, Annual Performance Plans (APPs), and Annual Activity Reports (AARs) to Parliament in accordance with National Treasury and DPME prescripts.

The Office regularly briefed oversight bodies, primarily the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans (PCDMV) and the Joint Standing Committee on Defence (JSCD). Key themes defining these parliamentary interactions included:

- Legislative Reform and Institutional Independence: Presenting the findings of the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC) feasibility study, which evaluated the most appropriate organisational form and budget structure for the Office. The Office consistently engaged lawmakers on the Military Ombud Amendment Bill to secure self-accounting authority and eliminate administrative dependencies on the DOD.
- Investigation Performance and Backlog Reduction: Reporting on annual caseloads—including the management of 458 complaints and the finalising of 353 matters (a 77.07% resolution rate) in FY2025/26—while outlining measures to address complex and carry-over complaints.





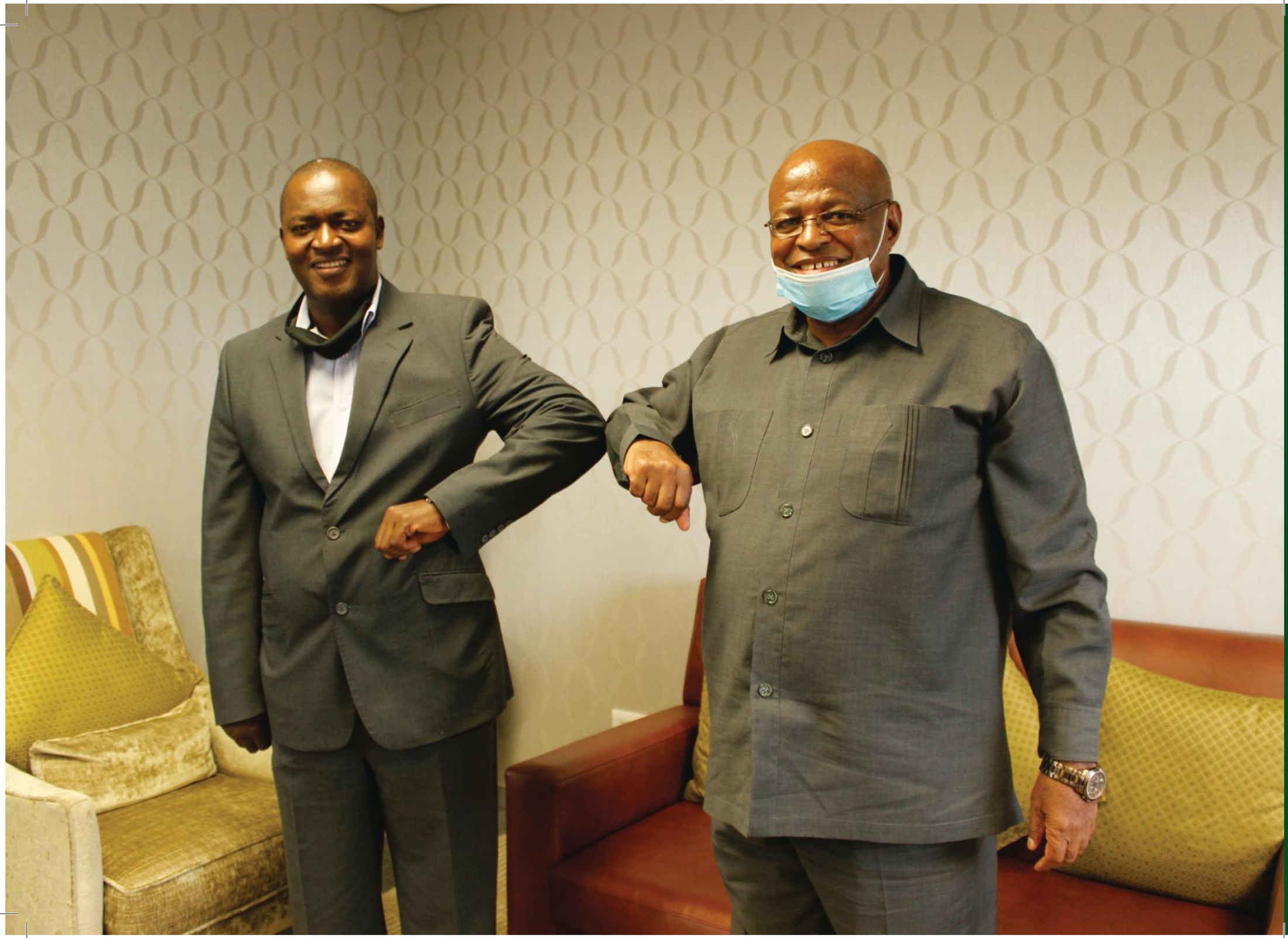


- Budgetary Baseline Allocations: Engaging on line-item budget constraints under National Treasury Budget Vote 23, with particular emphasis on Compensation of Employees (COE) ceilings and funding required to sustain core investigative capacity. Through these continuous parliamentary dialogues, the Office reinforced its commitment to accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and clean governance, ensuring that the fundamental rights of military personnel and the public remain safeguarded under democratic law. ■









CHAPTER

06

The Lasting Legacy

(2026 AND BEYOND)



The Blueprint for the Future

Handover priorities, emerging challenges, and recommendations for the third term

As the 2019 to 2026 administration concludes its seven-year term, the Office of the Military Ombud stands on a firm strategic foundation from which to advance into the next decade. The institutional roadmap for the incoming administration is anchored in the Strategic Plan for 2025–2030 and the accompanying Annual Performance Plan for 2025/2026, which map out the immediate operational targets and MTEF resource allocations.

The Office's long-term vision has been refined to reflect its evolving role in democratic governance: "To be a trusted, independent, impartial and expeditious Military Ombudsman Institution that upholds fairness, transparency and ethical governance, contributing to professionalism, inclusivity and accountability within the SANDF".

To operationalise this vision over the 2025–2030 planning cycle, the Office has identified five core strategic priorities:

- Strengthening Independent and Impartial Investigations: Enhancing investigative capacity through continuous professional development, leveraging technology, and incorporation of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms under the revised Complaints Handling Manual.
- Enhancing Accessibility, Awareness and Stakeholder Engagement: Expanding targeted outreach campaigns across SANDF bases, border deployments, and public platforms to ensure that military personnel and members of the public understand their constitutional rights and complaints mechanisms.
- Securing Full Institutional Independence: Positioning the Office to address operational dependencies through legislative review and an amendment to the Military Ombud Act, 2012 (Act No. 4 of 2012).
- Enhancing Institutional Capacity and Resource Management: Institutionalising the Governance, Risk and Compliance (GRC) framework, optimising human resources, and ensuring prudent financial management within constrained Compensation of Employees (COE) ceilings.
- Operationalising the Ministerial Policy Directive on Enterprise Resource Support: Continuing the joint DOD and Military Ombud Working Group to address ongoing administrative and operational support challenges.





This long-term strategy directly supports the national planning cycle. It aligns with the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030, the priorities outlined by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the State of the Nation Address (SONA), and the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) Strategic Priorities 2024 to 2029, particularly Priority 3: Build a Capable, Ethical, and Developmental State. Furthermore, the Office remains committed to driving transformation by advancing the inclusion and protection of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities (WYPD) across the defence environment.

Legislative Reform and Digital Transformation: Paving the Way Ahead

Two critical pillars define the operational handover for the 3rd term administration: legal advocacy for statutory independence and ICT infrastructure modernisation.

- **Legislative Amendment Roadmap:** While the Military Ombud Act (Act No. 4 of 2012) established the Office as an independent body, its practical operation has been constrained by accounting and administrative dependencies on the Department of Defence. Building on feasibility assessments conducted by the Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC), the Office prepared key legislative amendments to address three fundamental gaps.
- **Own-Initiative Investigations:** Amending the Act to grant the Ombud explicit authority to initiate investigations proactively without waiting for a formal written complaint or ministerial directive, a limitation highlighted during national deployments, including the Collins Khosa incident.
- **Enforceable Implementation Mechanisms:** Establishing mandatory statutory timelines within which the Department of Defence must implement recommendations accepted by the Minister, accompanied by mandatory progress reporting to Parliament.
- **Financial and Accounting Autonomy:** Securing self-accounting status under the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) to ensure line-item financial autonomy and operational independence.
- **Digital Transformation & Automated Workflows:** To address resource constraints and persistent vacancy including an approved establishment of 63 posts, of which 52 were filled, the Office prioritised the transformation of its ICT infrastructure. Modernising electronic case management systems, automating intake and workflow processes and exploring advanced analytical technologies will streamline investigation turnaround times and provide data-driven monitoring of complaint trends. ■

THE OMBUD'S FAREWELL REFLECTION

Final Personal Thoughts from the Outgoing Leader

At the outset, I must emphasise that the Office of the Military Ombud has exerted significant collaborative and regional influence by serving as a leading African model of civil–military accountability, democratic oversight and human rights advocacy.

Reflecting on the Office's development across two seven-year terms-the foundational tenure of the first Ombud, Lt Gen (Retired) T. T. Matanzima (2012 to 2019), followed by my own non-renewable term from 2019 to 2026 reveals distinct institutional achievements alongside profound structural challenges.

The fixed, non-renewable seven-year term is intended to protect institutional autonomy, provide security of tenure and reduce the risk of executive conflicts of interest-principles that I embraced throughout my term. As South Africa is a constitutional democracy, the importance of strong civil–military relations cannot be overstated.

The pillars of oversight including fairness, accountability, transparency, trust and responsive-ness just to mention a few, must be protected. The receipt of complaints should not be regarded as an administrative burden, but as an indication of potential administrative weaknesses requiring prompt atten-



tion and resolution. In many instances, the employer-employee relationship remains strained due to labour-related disputes and may require intervention by institutions of last resort such as the ombudsman.

These circumstances can present challenges relating to institutional responsiveness and ,at times non-co-operation, particularly where oversight mechanisms are weak or collaboration is limited.

To overcome these administrative obstacles and achieve the Office's objectives, I invested in the capabilities of our staff and strengthened both human and institutional capacity. During my tenure, I undertook the task to reposition the Office and strengthen its performance. Over the seven-year period, the institution evolved significantly. He objective was twofold: to improve operational performance and the rate at which complaints were resolved, while also building institutional trust and reinforcing the Office's relevance among its stakeholders.

My tenure was marked by the following notable achievements and milestones:

Continental and Global Leadership

The Office solidified its international standing by hosting the 17th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF) in October 2025. This marked the second occasion on which the global event was held on African soil and positioned South Africa as a leader in security sector governance.

Strong Complaints-Resolution Performance

The Office consistently achieved and exceeded its complaints-resolution targets, recording a resolution rate of 75%. This reflected its sustained efforts to resolve complaints from SANDF members concerning their conditions of service and from members of the public concerning the official conduct of SANDF members.

Public and Grassroots Outreach

The office significantly expanded its national footprint via more than 500 localised outreach initiatives, including visits to military units, public education on soldier conduct, and participation in presidential izimbizo. Outreach also encompass border and pre-deployment briefings.

The Office engaged SANDF members stationed along South Africa's borders to promote awareness of public accountability and complement the SANDF's pre-deployment briefs on appropriate code of conduct.

Domestic and Inter-Agency Collaboration

To facilitate the effective referral and expeditious resolution of complaints, I ensured that the Office developed and maintained vital domestic partnerships and collaborative relationships Strategic MoU's

The Office concluded formal Memorandums of Understanding with key oversight entities like, amongst others but not limited to, the Public Protector South Africa, the Health Ombudsman of South Africa and the Commission for Gender Equality. These agreements facilitated the efficient referral of matters falling outside the Office's mandate. The Military Ombud and Chief SANDF Liaison Forum in collaboration with the Secretary for Defence managed his administrative mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Military Ombud's recommendations by the SANDF.

Regional Influence in Africa

Under the South African flag, the Office served as an important benchmark for independent military oversight on the continent. Its peer-benchmarking activities included working visits to Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states such as Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho and Mozambique.

One cannot fail to also mention the moral and administrative support rendered to and by Kenyan Ombudsman and the Ombudsman of Malawi. These engagements promoted the integration of human rights and fundamental freedoms within regional armed forces and enabled peer institutions to learn from one another's operational mechanisms.

Critical Reflection and Future Outlook

While implementing the repositioning strategy, the Office encountered several significant strategic challenges. Budgetary and Human Resources Pressures During my tenure, the Office faced a structural funding shortfall and a persistently high vacancy rate, which placed pressure on its capacity to manage cases effectively over the long term.

- **Persistent Systemic Hurdles:** Despite the achievements outlined above, the Office continues to face several interconnected strategic and operational challenges that may adversely impact its mandate and responsibilities going into the future:
- **Delayed Legislative Reforms:** Parliamentary efforts to amend the Military Ombud Act to secure a Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) Schedule 3 listing have stalled for more than five years. This inertia prolongs the Office's operational constraints.

Mandate and Investigatory Limitations

The Military Ombud does not currently have the authority to initiate investigations independently. Investigations can be undertaken only in response to complaints submitted in writing or at the direction of the Minister. This limits the Office's ability to respond proactively to emerging or systemic concerns.

Structural and Legislative Dependence

The Military Ombud Act does not establish the Office as a fully separate national public entity. The Office remains structurally dependent on the Department of Defence (DOD), particularly in relation to financial administration. It does not control an independent budget, and the Secretary for Defence serves as its Accounting Officer. This

arrangement may create the perception that the DOD determines the resources available to the Office.

- **Perceptions of Limited Enforcement:** Capacity A persistent challenge is that the Military Ombud's findings take the form of non-binding recommendations. Delays in responses from the Ministry and in the implementation of recommendations by the SANDF have contributed to a backlog of unresolved matters and recommendations awaiting implementation.
- **The cooperation bottleneck:** The Office frequently experienced prolonged investigation turnaround times because internal SANDF structures delayed providing records and evidentiary documentation required for impartial investigations. Finally ,in the midst of the above mentioned met Amid these challenges, plans and strategies were implemented to mitigate underperformance and preserve the Office's relevance to its mandate. All is not lost; I remain confident that I leave behind a high-performance culture and capable staff that will best ensure the repositioning of the Office as an efficient institution in line with the NDP vision of a capable and developmental state in delivering quality public service.

As the Office embarks on a new era under a new administration, my wish is for the Office to accelerate and foster a culture of persuasion and leverage its soft powers, enhance drive institutional collaborations and continue to resolve complaints impartially.

Final personal thoughts from the outgoing leader

Reflecting on his seven-year tenure (2019 to 2026), outgoing Military Ombud Lt Gen (Retired) V. R. Masondo emphasised the resilience of the institution in safeguarding administrative justice within the armed forces:

Over the past seven years, we have made significant strides in reinforcing military governance, embedding ethical conduct, reducing case backlogs, and deepening public and soldier confidence in civil-military oversight.

"Since its establishment under the Military Ombud Act, Act No. 4 of 2012, the Office has remained steadfast in its commitment to investigating and resolving complaints fairly, economically, and expeditiously."

Independent oversight within a disciplined military environment is not a hindrance to operational readiness. On the contrary, fairness and administrative justice serve as force multipliers that strengthen morale and institutional integrity.

As I hand over stewardship of this Office, I do so with complete confidence that the foundations laid from our 100% parliamentary reporting compliance to our international standing in AOMA, IOI, and ICOAF will enable the incoming leadership to elevate the South African Military Ombud to even greater heights as a world-leading oversight institution. ■



THE OMBUD'S FAREWELL REFLECTION

Roll of Honour & Acknowledgements

The growth and achievements of the Office of the Military Ombud over the 2019 to 2026 term were made possible through the collective dedication of its governance structures, leadership, and staff:

- The Executive Authority: Extending sincere appreciation to the Ministers of Defence and Military Veterans who provided executive oversight, policy guidance, and support throughout the term.
- Parliamentary Oversight Committees: The Office acknowledges the constructive engagement, guidance, and rigorous oversight provided by the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans (PCDMV) and the Joint Standing Committee on Defence (JSCD).
- Recognition is extended to the former Deputy Military Ombud, Advocate Simphiwe Damane-Mkosana, Chief Director Operations, Director Intake and Analysis, Director Investigations, Director Legal Services, the Executive Office, Communications Directorate, Corporate Support , and all Operations staff for their contributions to the work and achievements of the Office during the 2019 to 2026 term.
- Institutional & International Partners: The Office honours the collaborative partnerships maintained with the Department of Defence leadership, civil society organisations, the African Ombudsman and Mediators Association (AOMA), the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI), and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF).
- The Office of the Military Ombud of South Africa celebrates its staff and governance milestones through institutional acknowledgments, recognising leaders and support teams dedicated to human rights, administrative justice, and fair dispute resolution within the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). ■






MOKHETHI



