

President Zuma, military veterans awarded medals

PRETORIA: President Jacob Zuma and other uMkhonto we Sizwe military veterans were on Thursday, 6 December 2012, honoured with medals in recognition of their involvement in the struggle against the apartheid regime.



Zuma and former President Thabo Mbeki were awarded the Military Veterans Decorations medal Platinum Class II, while others received Platinum Class III, Bravery, Merit Gold, Sabotage Campaign and Luthuli Commemorative Medals.

Former President Mbeki was awarded his medal in absentia, while other former members were represented by their family members.

The President conferred medals to other military veterans and he was the last to receive his.

According to the Department of Military Veterans, the Military Veterans Decorations medal Platinum Class II is awarded to members of the first National High Command of uMkhonto we Sizwe and functionaries of uMkhonto we Sizwe who were arrested in Rivonia and sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island.

It is also awarded to members of the subsequent National Politico-Military Commands (PMC) of uMkhonto we Sizwe, which were constituted in exile after the Rivonia arrests.

Speaking after receiving the medal at the ceremony held in Pretoria, Zuma said: "It is a significant achievement in that today, we can restore the dignity and acknowledge as patriots, those who were once vilified as terrorists.

"We are given an opportunity to recognise their struggle and efforts as representing a legitimate cause of building a South Africa which is free, democratic, united and prosperous.

"Today we erase forever any tag that could have attempted to brand them as outlaws, and we duly memorialise them as

heroes and heroines who loved their country and all of its people," he said.

Zuma said the dawn of democracy has brought real and significant progress in giving a better life to all.

"For this, we are eternally indebted to the recipients here and their many comrades who dedicated their lives to the cause of freedom, including those who perished in the course," he said.

The conferring of the second highest Military Veteran Award forms part of the 50th anniversary of the former Military Wing of the ANC.

Among the other recipients were former ministers Essop Pahad and Aziz Pahad, who served in President Mbeki's Cabinet. They were awarded with Military Veterans Decorations: Platinum Class III, which was awarded to those members of uMkhonto we Sizwe who were in the first regional command structures in 1961 and those who subsequently served in regional command authorities of MK in exile until the suspension of the arms struggle in 1990.

Also receiving a medal was Winnie Madikizela Mandela, who was awarded the Merit Gold medal, which is awarded to those members who distinguished themselves through exceptional service beyond the call of duty.

Speaking to SAnews after receiving the award, Madikizela Mandela said she was excited that their efforts were not in vain.

"We fought tirelessly for our freedom, we deserve to be recognised," she said, before shaking hands with other military veterans.

Speaker of Parliament Max Sisulu and former Arts and Culture Minister Pallo Jordan were awarded the Luthuli Commemorative medal, which is awarded to former members of uMkhonto we Sizwe who heeded the call to take up arms by going to exile under perilous conditions and enormous self-sacrifice to acquire the requisite skills and proficiency to take the struggle to a higher level.

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