

First military veterans receive houses

PRETORIA: Government has budgeted R300-million for 504 houses, access to free medical service and to education for military veterans and their dependants, says deputy minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Thabang Makwetla.

Makwetla was speaking during the handover of houses to two military veterans, Jacob Modise, 97, and Phillip Sebopelwa, 94, at Kraaipan, near Setlagole in the North West province on Wednesday. The two men had fought in World War II.

They were given keys to fully furnished houses, making them the first beneficiaries of a national housing programme for military veterans across the country.

Makwetla said the programme was targeting 38 houses per province and an additional 200 in the Eastern Cape as part of government's recognition of the efforts of the military veterans, who fought to protect and preserve the country.

"We are here to correct the wrongs and injustices of the past. The few who are still around must be appreciated. They made huge sacrifices to protect and preserve humanity against fascism.

"The partnership with the North West Provincial Government, the best performing provincial Department of Human Settlements and Ratlou Local Municipality that has made it possible for us to be here today for this historic launch must be duplicated throughout our communities to make sure that the Department of Military Veterans is successful in its effort," Makwetla said.

In her address, North West Premier Thandi Modise appealed to the youth to emulate military veterans by taking volunteerism or "letsema" seriously as a way to make a meaningful contribution in their communities.

Modise said she was pleased that government was able to fulfil its promise to build houses for military veterans, who were not compensated and had no direct benefit for defending their country.

She said that the country should always remember those who fell in the line of duty in defense of South Africa and celebrate those who are still alive as heroes and heroines.

Modise said she was particularly proud that the programme was starting in the Ratlou Local Municipality.

"It is one of the municipalities that gets a clean audit. We are proud - that's why we started this programme here. All the veterans who are here volunteered and self-selected to serve without expecting anything in return," said the premier.

Jacob Modise's son, Molusi Modise, said the family was very happy that government has honoured their father for his

contribution.

"We are glad that government is making an effort to correct the injustices because at least now he will have a decent place to call home," said Molusi Modise.

Umkhonto We Sizwe Military veteran Simon Senna also expressed confidence that the gesture will give hope to those who have been waiting in the wings.

"This is a milestone that should make sure that the two world war veterans enjoy the best of life in the remaining years of their lives," said National Deputy Chairperson and North West Provincial Chairperson of Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) Unity Association, Dr Moeletsi Leballo, in echoing Senna's view.

The Department of Military Veterans is also in the process of rolling out a programme that will enable the veterans to have free access to public transport, free healthcare and counselling, which will also be extend to family members.

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