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SA delegation to trek to Cuito Cuanavale

A Parliamentary delegation will depart from Pretoria on Friday in a convoy to Cuito Cuanavale to commemorate the battle that took place there during the Angolan war.

The delegation includes military veterans from both sides, representatives from government, scholars and civil society, Parliament said in a statement.

The defence forces of Cuba, Angola and South Africa met at Cuito Cuanavale in 1987 in what has been described as Africa's largest land battle since World War II, with all sides claiming victory.

In a statement, Parliament said it was regarded as one of the final battles of the Cold War which irreversibly changed the history and political landscape of Southern Africa.

"At Cuito Cuanavale, Angolan, Namibian and Cuban forces managed to bring the military aggression of the apartheid military forces to a halt, whilst South African liberation armies fighting in the north of Angola managed to contain the Angolan rebel armies -- preventing them from reinforcing the apartheid armies," Parliament said.

This was however disputed earlier this year by former members of the apartheid era South African Defence Force (SADF), who said it was never the SADF's intention to capture the city of Cuito Cuanavale but merely drive back opposing forces from south-east Angola, which it did.

They also claimed that while 4 000 Angolan and Cuban soldiers died, only 20 SADF soldiers perished.

The peace negotiations that followed the battle led to the withdrawal of all foreign defence forces from Angola and later the independence of Namibia.

Parliament said the visit would highlight the significance of the battle and encourage an appreciation of the importance that global solidarity played in the emancipation of Southern Africa and Africa.

"With this trail, homage will be paid to all those who made the ultimate sacrifice for South Africa's liberation," it said.

"En route to Cuito Cuanavale the convoy will visit places of great historical significance; visit community projects initiated after years of conflict, and gather information on areas requiring development assistance," Parliament said. – Sapa

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