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## **SOUTH AFRICAN GRIPEN MAKES ITS DEBUT**

Linköping, Sweden: South Africa's first completed Gripen fighter was unveiled today in a roll-out ceremony as it left the production line.

The aircraft, which will be the first of 28 Gripens delivered into South African Air Force service from 2008, will now be prepared for a rigorous and thorough flight test programme to integrate South Africa's customized avionics and mission systems.

Speaking, on behalf of the South African Government, at the roll-out ceremony in Linköping, Sweden, South Africa's Minister for Public Enterprises, Alec Erwin, highlighted the strategic significance of South Africa's Gripen acquisition and its role as a catalyst for broad industrial, trade and economic development in South Africa.

Sweden's Minister of Defense, Mrs Leni Björklund, said Sweden would continue to further develop its already strong strategic political, defence, industrial and economic links between Sweden and South Africa:

*"The relations between our two countries can only be described as excellent. I would like to take this opportunity to underline and manifest the Swedish Government's desire to further develop and expand these much-appreciated relations."* Mrs. Björklund said.

Underlining this sentiment, Saab CEO, Mr. Åke Svensson, described the significance of the Gripen programme in establishing South Africa as Saab's second home-market. Underpinning its commitment to South Africa, Saab has invested in several businesses, including its major investment in Grintek, the South African advanced technology group.

*"Saab is now a proudly South African company employing around 1.300 of the best technical and marketing brains within Saab Grintek, in which we own a 70% stake"* he explained.

Chief of the South African Air Force (SAAF), Lt-Gen Carlo Gagiano, said the Gripen programme was an icon for transformation and modernisation in the SAAF and would strengthen South Africa's contribution to peace and security in Africa. He also expressed his delight with the progress of the Gripen programme.

*"In an industry notorious for sliding deadlines, Saab has been able to roll out this specific aircraft well ahead of the original schedule. I congratulate you to this achievement!"* he said.

**Background note to editors:**

- South Africa has ordered 28 Gripen fighters (19 single-seaters and 9 two-seaters) for delivery from 2008 onwards. The aircraft will be based at AFB Makhado in South Africa's northern Limpopo Province. The combined contract for the 28 Gripen and 24 Hawk aircraft (ordered from BAE Systems) is valued at US\$2.2-billion
- To oversee the Gripen development program for South Africa, Armscor and the Department of Defence decided to place a project team at Saab with the first four members arriving in Sweden in February 2001. This team is known as the Gripen Joint Project Team or GJPT. Since then the team has grown to its current strength of eleven members. In addition, several pilots from Armscor and the South African Air Force have undergone training at Saab Test Flight Department.
- The Gripen aircraft programme is on track to meet its key milestones, including:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> flight in Sweden in 2 weeks' time – *well ahead of schedule!*
  - Arrival of the 1<sup>st</sup> Gripen to the Test and Flight Development Centre in South Africa in mid-2006
- The Total Industrial Participation obligation is worth US\$8,7-billion to be fulfilled by April 2011
- South Africa's Parliament this month acknowledged that the Gripen partners, Saab & BAE Systems, had met their milestones and were on track to fulfill their obligations in delivering new economic benefits to the country by 2011, through their combined Industrial Participation ventures.

*Photos can be downloaded from the Gripen Image Base at [www.gripen.com](http://www.gripen.com)*

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*For further information, please contact*

**Mr. Owe Wagermark**, Gripen International Communications Director  
mobile phone: +46 734 181824, fax +46 13 180055 email: [owe.wagermark@gripen.com](mailto:owe.wagermark@gripen.com)

**Mr. Adrian Stockwell**, Gripen International Communications Manager [South Africa]  
mobile phone: +46 734 184763, fax +46 13 180055 email: [adrian.stockwell@gripen.com](mailto:adrian.stockwell@gripen.com)



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