**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COLLABORATION BETWEEN DHA AND DIRCO NECESSARY TO REMEDY SERVICE DELIVERY CHALLENGES AT FOREIGN MISSIONS**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 05 December 2018 –** The Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs has emphasised the importance of coordination and cooperation between the Department of Home Affairs and The Department of International Relations and Cooperation to resolve challenges picked up by the Auditor-General in services offered at foreign missions.

The Office of the Auditor-General briefed the committee on a Foreign Mission Observation report that they undertook on various missions. One of the key challenges raised was that some of the high volume missions are not adequately capacitated in terms of human capital which leads to longer turnaround times in visa applications. Also, the storage of applications was highlighted as a challenge.

The committee has highlighted a need for constant training of DIRCO officials who assist the Department of Home Affairs to administer the visa process. This will alleviate the pressure that the Department of Home Affairs faces in relation to lack of warm bodies in some missions as a result of high cost of employees versus its decreasing budget allocation.

“It is a simple fact that the fiscus is currently facing competing pressures and that Treasury has decided to trim spending on compensation of employees. To mitigate against a negative impact of this decision, these departments must work together to find workable solutions,” said Mr Hlomani Chauke, the Chairperson of the Committee.

This collaboration is important if the country is to achieve the goals set by President Cyril Ramaphosa in stimulating economic growth. Conversely, the increase in tourism and business investment will boost the country’s revenue base which in the long run will assist in increasing human capital to service these high volume missions. “If we improve services and turnaround times in issuing visas then the country will be well on its way to grow the economy which will eventually lead to increased allocations to government departments,” Mr Chauke emphasised.

Meanwhile, the Committee has decried the slow progress in completion of procurement of the Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) that is set to replace the Home Affairs National Identification System (HANIS). While the committee is cognisant of the challenges in migrating Information and Technology services as well as procurement frameworks that must be followed, it is of the view that the process must be expedited. The project delays caused by data migrations from HANIS must be resolved urgently.

The service benefits that will be derived from having this system, which include service delivery improvements due to faster turnaround times for those applying for ID documents or passports, reduction in duplicate identities as well as a futuristic identification solution in support of the drive towards a modernised department are important and must trickle down to clients of the department.

The committee welcomed operational plans by sister departments in preparation for the festive season border management. These plans include the increase of operating hours at ports of entry as well as increasing human resources at borders to handle the increase in numbers of people going entering and exiting the country. The committee emphasised that plans alone might seem sufficient but effective implementation is necessary. Furthermore, the coordination and cooperation between the different government departments is indispensable if the plan is to succeed.

Meanwhile, the committee has called on the Department of Home Affairs to work closely with key stakeholders in efforts to increase the collection of Identity documentation at various department offices. The department can use Community Development Workers, schools and as well as the Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa to resolve this.

“With the elections coming next year it is important that people receive their ID’s to enable them to register to vote,” Mr Chauke emphasised. The media as well as a non-mediated approach must also be strengthened to drill home the message to citizens to collect their IDs.

Furthermore, the committee has resolved to postpone the Gupta naturalisation inquiry due to the non-cooperation of Mr Ashu Chawla and his lawyers. As a result, the committee has resolved to summon Mr Chawla and his lawyers on a date still to be determined in order to conclude the inquiry.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HOME AFFAIRS, MR HLOMANI CHAUKE**