**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA COMMENDS SOUTH AFRICA FOR ITS SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS IN KEEPING THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUT OF THE COUNTRY**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 25 February 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Tourism and the Portfolio Committee on Health today received a briefing from the Consul General of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on the impact of the outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus (NCV) which has been declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The Chinese Consul-General was today at Parliament to share with the portfolio committees on health and tourism the PRC’s experiences with regard to the Corona Virus and its implications for the tourism sector. And there was also a briefing by the National Registrar of the Tourist Guides on compliance with relevant legislation and other programmes.

The Chinese market has become one of the significant markets for South Africa. The country receives approximately 100 000 Chinese tourists per annum who usually travel as groups and stay longer – and their stay contributes to the tourist spend and GDP (gross domestic product). With the increased number of tourists from China, the committee has previously urged South African Tourism to develop a dedicated strategy to harness the tourists from China.

The Department of Tourism is training local tourist guides in Mandarin to effectively cater for the Chinese tourists. South Africa has not stopped marketing in China as China remains an important tourism market.

The Consul General reported that credit must be given to South Africa, including the Portfolio Committees on Health and Tourism on their successful strategy of keeping the Novel Coronavirus, a flu-like virus, out of South Africa.

Thus far in numbers, there were 77 780 confirmed cases, 27 377 people who were cured and discharged from hospitals and a further 2 824 suspected cases which are yet to be confirmed. To date, there have been 2 666 deaths. Since the outbreak in early December last year, there have been nine newly confirmed cases outside Wuhan and Hubei, the epicentres of the NCV.

To date, a number of cities have downgraded their responses to emergencies with eight provinces in China having downgraded from first to second response, which is significant. It is envisaged that within the next few days more provinces, autonomous regions and cities will downgrade. The NCV has become a world-wide issue which has spread to 25 countries across the world.

In South Africa we have been fortunate that we have not received any report of confirmed cases since the outbreak of the NCV, this is due to the high vigilance and measures in place at the ports of entry into South Africa.

Due to the collegial relationship between SA and the People’s Republic of China’s tourism authorities, there was a group en-route to SA from Madagascar who were turned back due to some members of the group having a fever.

At the ports of entry at OR Tambo and Cape Town, medical personnel from the communicable disease unit were inspecting and quarantining people who were suspected of carrying the virus. This was due to SA having a comprehensive strategy to deal with the virus by ensuring that 11 hospitals were identified to deal with such cases across the country.

The committee wants to commend the PRC on its handling of the virus which was detected in early December last year. On 8 January 2020, the virus was named as the Novel Coronavirus.

On 10 January 2020 the PRC shared the health genetics to the WHO. One of the measures the PRC took to deal with the outbreak decisively was the removal of the leadership in Wuhan and Hubei and had them replaced with more capable people.

The PRC also ensured that its response was timeous, effective and proactive in confining the virus by restricting the movement of people within the infected areas. To note that there are more than 1.4 billion people in China, we want to commend the PRC for its handling of this virus and more importantly, for its actions of mobilising 41 000 medical personnel in a short space of time, and for showing the world how to build two fully functional hospitals in 14 days.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON TOURISM, MR SUPRA MAHUMAPELO.**