**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY FROM THE INTERIM STEERING COMMITTEE**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 4 March 2020** – The Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities has expressed its concern over the lack of accountability from the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) expressed the same sentiments, saying that whilst trying to engage with the Interim Committee, the response was hostile and their efforts as a Chapter 9 Institution were hampered.

The Interim Steering Committee was established to provide a strategic and operational holding place to take the outcomes of the Presidential Summit on GBVF forward with a key focus on:

* establishing a permanent structure on GBVF; and
* implementing key actions listed in the Presidential Summit Declaration against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide 2019.

Committee Chairperson, Ms Nonhlanhla Ncube-Ndaba, said the response by the Interim Steering Committee towards the CGE is unacceptable, as it refused to engage with the CGE and Parliament at a joint meeting of committees.

“Last year on 19 November 2019, the Interim Steering Committee was invited by the portfolio committee for a briefing on its work, including the National Strategic Plan on GBVF, the National Council on GBVF and the Emergency Response Action Plan, but the invitation was met with disdain,” said Ms Ncube-Ndaba.

The same applied to an attempt recently to reinvite the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide to appear before the committee. Given the continued scourge of GBVF incidents reported in the media, the committee deemed it prudent that the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, together with the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, report on progress in terms of the draft National Strategic Plan on GBVF, the National Council on GBVF and the GBVF Fund.

Briefing the committee on Tuesday, 3 March 2020, the CGE said the leadership of the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide was largely hostile to the role that the CGE should undertake of monitoring the work of the committee, as well as interviewing some of the key role players involved in the process of establishing the National Council on Gender-Based Violence.

The issues raised by the CGE about the conduct of the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide is concerning to the committee. As such, the committee is of the view that the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide should not be allowed to disregard the request to appear before the committee to account to it in terms of the National Assembly Rule 227.

Article 3 of the Declaration states very clearly that “an Interim Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Committee should be established immediately with resources allocated in terms of the Public Finance Management Act, 1999 (Act No 1 of 1999) with the aim to (a) establish a permanent national multi-sectoral coordinating body and (b) implement actions listed in (this) Declaration, as agreed on by the said Interim Steering Committee”.

Given that the appropriation of the Interim Steering Committee comes from the fiscus, Parliament has an obligation to hold the end users to account. Therefore, the committee said the refusal by the Interim Steering Committee to appear for accountability leaves a lot to be desired. The Interim Steering Committee does not want to account for the funds that it has been allocated. Moreover, the existence of the Interim Steering Committee was at the behest of the President, with a clear mandate of developing the National Strategic Plan.

However, more than a year has passed and this crucial plan has not been forthcoming. It is for this very reason and that the country on a daily basis gets reports of cases relating to gender-based violence that a progress report is required from the Interim Steering Committee. It would appear that the Interim Steering Committee’s lifespan has been extended and more information is required in this regard. Moreover, now that the Estimates of National Expenditure for 2020 have been published, it is imperative that a clear understanding is gained about what funding has been allocated to address GBVF over the Medium Term Expenditure Framework period.

The committee will engage with the Speaker with the intention of raising the matters with the Presidency in order for swift action to be taken as incidents of GBVF remain unacceptably high in the country.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, MS NONHLANHLA NCUBE-NDABA.**