**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE INFORMED THAT 13 PUBLIC HOSPITALS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED TO TREAT CORONAVIRUS**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 4 March 2020 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health heard that South Africa does not have cases of coronavirus in the country. The committee was briefed by the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize, on the status update, and the Department of Health’s response to the outbreak of coronavirus and its readiness in the event that the virus reaches South Africa.

Dr Mkhize said if the country were to have cases of the virus, the Department of Health would be able to treat any patient as all the provinces are ready. Thirteen public hospitals have been identified and clinicians have been trained to treat infectious diseases.

Briefing the committee, the Minister said the department has ensured that in all international ports of entry, screening machines have been deployed such as thermal screening gadgets and has also ensured that immigration officers are given masks.

Giving an update on the infection rate in the countries that have been affected by coronavirus, the Minister said the virus is settling in every country with the highest infection rate outside of China being South Korea, Italy and Iran. In Africa, Egypt was the first to record a case of the virus, with Morocco also reporting a case, in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria and Senegal have reported cases of the virus.

Regarding South African citizens that are in China who are coming back following a Cabinet decision, the Minister said “we are focusing on an emergency response and preparations”. However, plans are in place by the department to quarantine all the South Africans coming back from China.

Working with the South African National Defence Force, arrangements are in place for those who need to be quarantined. This will take 21 days, which is in line with the estimated incubation period. The Minister said the South African citizens from Wuhan are not sick but need to get tested if they are positive they will be moved to designated treatment centres.

The committee commended the department on the strategies that it has put in place to address the virus. However, some members of the committee expressed concern about the porous borders in the country and how the virus will be tackled.

The committee welcomed the hotline number that has been established but this will be activated when there is a reported case of the virus.

The committee has called on the department to improve its communication mechanisms in educating South Africans about the virus in order to take precautionary measures. In his presentation, the Minister said the importance of washing hands cannot be underestimated.

The Minister indicated that fake news is a challenge that the department is faced with and called on the members of the committee to assist in sending communication that the country does not have any cases of coronavirus.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, DR SIBONGISENI DHLOMO.**