**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**IT IS IMPRACTICAL TO PRACTISE SOCIAL DISTANCING IN CORRECTIONAL CENTRES - COMMITTEES HEAR**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 29 April 2020 –** A joint meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services, and the Select Committee on Security and Justice today  heard that the implementation of social distancing as part of the basic strategies to curb the spread of Covid-19 pandemic is impossible at most correctional centres around the country as they are overcrowded.

The Minister of Justice, Mr Ronald Lamola, told the committees that they don’t have other options as the department as inmates have to share a cell. “It is not unique to South Africa, America and other countries in the rest of the world experience the same challenge. All we can do is to practise good hygiene like washing and cleaning of hands regularly,” said Mr Lamola.

The committees heard that 128 cases of infections in four provinces have so far been noted in correctional facilities and that includes officials and inmates. “Protective gear and sanitising products were a challenge in the beginning. We informed the centres that as they have sewing machines they can produce their own cloth masks. Over 17 000 masks have been produced already,” added Mr Lamola.

The meeting was informed that screening takes place daily for correctional officials. The committee heard that infections are brought in either by officials or new inmates that come in, and it is impossible to test officials daily. The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Trade and Industry, Mr Bulelani Magwanishe, said this is not just a challenge that the Department of Correctional Services can address alone, it requires the assistance of the Department of Health.

Regarding the court system, the committees heard that lockdown level 4 is still going to be very tight and strict regarding the movement of people. Courts don’t have video conferencing and the audio-visual remand system, and online system were used at times for postponements.

The Chairperson of the Select Committee, on Security and Justice, Ms Shahidabibi Shaikh and several members of the committees also raised concerns regarding the increase of the cases of domestic violence and the lack of facilities for the victims of domestic violence. The committees also heard that all services are available at Thuthuzela Centres, and will continue to be available even though with reduced staff, as victims still need to access these centres.  The committees were told that gender-based violence cases will get priority attention.

The committees heard that sanitisers and cloth masks are available at courts, two cloth masks and a box of cloves per official. Furthermore, the committee heard that there is a total of R10 million set aside for protective equipment and gear for court officials.

Mr Magwanishe said: “It is clear that a lot of work is being done, and we must express appreciation for that. We want to emphasise that screening is not the end but is the starting point and testing will be done as required.”

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICE, MR BULELANI MAGWANISHE, AND CHAIRPERSON OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON SECURITY AND JUSTICE, MS SHAHIDABIBI SHAIKH**