**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE APPROVES SOUTH AFRICA’S ACCESSION TO TREATY OF AMITY AND COOPERATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**Parliament, Thursday, 11 June 2020** – The Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation today received a briefing from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation on its request for South Africa’s Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with South East Asia and unanimously recommended that the National Assembly approve South Africa’s accession to the treaty.

The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Tandi Mahambehlala, highlighted: “Politically speaking, we welcome the initiative to formalise relations with the Asean [Association of South East Asian Nations] grouping.” Ms Mahambehlala went further to note with gratitude that “four of these diplomatic relations have been in existence before South Africa became a democratic state in 1994, while full diplomatic relations with the other six nations were established after 1994”.

One of the portfolio committee’s oversight functions is to ensure that the Department of International Relations and Cooperation strengthens regional integration across the different economic communities in the Global South. “We are of a view that by building diplomatic engagement with Asean, South Africa will enhance its ability to create strategic relations for social and economic benefit domestically, which can be transferred to the SADC [Southern African Development Community] region and Africa as a whole, as per the tenets of our foreign policy,” the Chairperson said.

The portfolio committee applauded South Africa’s efforts to expand its strategic economic ambit and find new markets. Given rising tensions in trade relations, exacerbated by the trade wars between the United States (US) and China, coupled with shrinking global markets, the committee resolved that accessing more economic partners and markets is in South Africa’s national interest.

Ms Mahambehlala cautioned that the global economic landscape is shifting and South Africa needs to open up access to other market opportunities, not only in the West. “We are mindful that relations with the US and the European Union (EU) remain strong, but in my view, we need to open up different locomotives of our economy.”

She cautioned the department not to focus all its foreign policy efforts on countries such as China, the US, Russia, India, and the EU, to the detriment of the Asean countries that may present important economic opportunities and development lessons.

The Asean treaty will contribute to the elimination of tariffs between member states, which will in turn lead to reduced prices and more investment opportunities. Nonetheless, the portfolio committee is aware of the dangers of an influx of cheap imports flooding local markets coupled with poor governance structures in some countries. The committee urged the department to conduct due diligence on the economic advantages and structural conditions of the Asean market, including consumer behaviour.

Ms Mahambehlala emphasised: “If South Africa has a commodity the Asean needs and if that offers us an opportunity to beneficiate through manufacturing the commodities needed, then by all means we must follow our national interest and promote trade relations and economic cooperation with the Asean.”

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON MS TANDI MAHAMBEHLALA.**