**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**TOURISM COMMITTEE BRIEFED BY BARSA**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 28 October 2020** – The Portfolio Committee on Tourism yesterday received a briefing from the Board of Airline Representatives of South Africa (Barsa) on activities and issues pertinent to the tourism sector.

Barsa represents international and African airlines, including South African Airways (SAA), airport operators and other stakeholders in the aviation industry, and works closely with OR Tambo, King Shaka and Cape Town International airports.

The committee welcomed the management roles of women leading Barsa and commended their Chairperson, Ms Carla da Silva, and Chief Executive Officer Ms Zuks Ramasia.

The meet heard about the importance of a coordinated, sensitive response at a country level when dealing with things like pandemics. For example, the communication of the requirement for the negative 72 PCR Covid-19 test caused ructions in the aviation sector, as airline crew members were also required to produce such tests. It would have been better if the relevant government departments had coordinated their response.

The committee heard that the road to recovery post-Covid-19 will be long, uncertain and tedious. Airlines have a critical role to play in the tourism industry’s recovery from the devastation of the pandemic. Some airlines have reduced their capacity and frequency of flights to South Africa due to the uncertainty around the regulatory environment.

Some airlines have even threatened to leave South Africa and use neighbouring countries as their new hubs. The biggest risk for South Africa is losing its strategic hub status, as currently plays the role of the gateway to Africa and Southern African Development Community countries. The committee heard that cargo flights are not enough to sustain the routes and that the phasing in of red-listed countries for leisure tourists is eagerly awaited, as leisure tourism is an economic enabler in the tourism sector.

At a continental level, the committee was urged to assist in pushing for the ratification and implementation the Yamoussoukro Declaration by all African countries. This will be a critical contributor to the competitiveness of African airlines. Furthermore, SAA has an important role to play in stimulating business in South Africa. Given that airlines achieve 1 to 3 percent profit margins, the airline should be considered from a profitability point of view and as a stimulator for internal business.

Barsa called for the relaxing of taxes and tariffs for landing fees, aircraft parking fees and passenger service charges. The committee also heard that it is more expensive to travel to smaller airports servicing small towns than to big cities. This affects the geographical spread of tourists and makes domestic travel by air unaffordable.

Barsa reported on the tourism value chain for South Africa at 8.6% of total gross domestic product providing 1,5m jobs. Almost 49 000 SMMEs have benefitted along the tourism value chain, however, many jobs have been lost in 2020. Barsa in nonetheless hopeful that tourism will recover.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Supra Mahumapelo, said: “Tourism affects everybody and when the country opens up fully again to international tourists, we must ensure that tourists visit the townships, villages and small dorpies, as that is where inequality and poverty exists the most.”

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