**COMMITTEE ON COGTA APPEALS TO SOUTH AFRICAN CITIES NETWORK TO COLLABORATE WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 25 November 2020**– The Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) has advised the Chief Executive Officer and the Chairperson of the South African Cities Network (SACN) to collaborate with provincial and local houses of traditional leaders on its programmes to develop cities.

The committee told the SACN that in its engagement with the National House of Traditional Leaders and the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa recently, traditional leaders claimed to be the agents of development. On this basis, the committee asked what the SACN can offer to make rural communities places of development, to avert the influx of the people to the cities.

During the engagement, traditional leaders told the committee that rural communities will remain a permanent feature of the South African landscape, despite the growing migration of people from rural communities to urban centres in search of employment.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Faith Muthambi, advised the SACN that the Deputy Minister of the Department of Cogta, Mr Obed Bapela, is the point of contact between SACN and traditional leaders on this issue. Ms Muthambi, also highlighted the importance of this proposed collaboration in the context of predicted urbanisation by 2050.

The CEO of the SACN, Mr Sithole Mbanga, said its objective is to build strong cities and rural communities. “There is no division on that,” he emphasised.

Ms Muthambi said the purpose of yesterday’s meeting was for the committee to receive the latest update from the SACN in relation to its objectives of promoting good governance and management in South African cities; to analyse the strategic challenges facing these cities; and promoting shared learning partnerships between the different spheres of government to support the management of the country’s cities.

Although the Cities Network is not a statutory body, it is still important to hear its voice on matters of development and transformation, given the increasingly influential role it plays in defining and framing the country’s urban agenda. As a non-statutory body that does not engage in any implementation activities in cities, the SACN is exempt from the reporting requirements of the Public Finance Management Act, including the tabling of Annual Reports and Annual Performance Plans to Parliament.

Notwithstanding that exemption, Ms Muthambi said the committee would be failing in its oversight responsibility if it did not engage the SACN to account on its annual grant from the Department of Cooperative Governance. In the 2019/20 financial year the grant amounted to R7.8m and in the current financial year it is R7.5m. That was confirmed in the SACN’s presentation to the committee.

“These sound like small amounts from the network’s perspective, given its high operational demands, but as a committee we believe that every cent of the taxpayer’s money is worth accounting for,” added Ms Muthambi.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, MS FAITH MUTHAMBI.**