**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**AGRICULTURE AND LAND COMMITTEE WANTS LAND REFORM TO BE HASTENED**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 2 February 2021** – The Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development today received a briefing on the 2019/20 Annual Reports from the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) and the Office of the Valuer-General (OVG), both of which are entities of the former Department of Rural Development and Land Reform:

The Chairperson of the committee, Inkosi Zwelivelile Mandela, remarked that “land reform remains central to our collective responsibility to engage the process of transformation of the South African landscape and land ownership patterns bequeathed to us by three-and-a-half centuries of colonialism and land alienation. The blight of decades of apartheid entrenched dispossession, dislocation and social dysfunction. Up until today our rural areas, in particular, bear testimony to the legacy of skewed and unequal development and the weighty task that lies ahead of us”.

The committee heard from the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Ms Thoko Didiza, in her opening remarks that the CRLR is an entity and therefore accountable for its expenditure on its own. The financials of the entity are independent of the department. The committee raised its concerns on the lengthy time that the CRLR took to release state-owned land to beneficiaries and to resolve outstanding land claims.

The CRLR in its presentation informed the committee that the court confirmed that the 2014 claims (New Order) are still interdicted pending finalisation of the Old Order claims or a new amendment to the legislation. The Land Claims Court subsequently ordered the commission to refer all claims that the CRLR is unable to resolve to the Land Claims Court in terms of section 14(1) of the Restitution Act. The committee also heard that the CRLR has exceeded its target and has settled 436 claims in the past year. As this was the first year that the CRLR had prepared its own financial statements, the CRLR is reminded to heed the comments of the Auditor-General to ensure that in the ensuing years the CRLR improves on its financial and operational performance.

The Minister also informed the committee that OVG has shown some improvement, however, the committee raised its concerns that the entity was not able to meet its targets as set out in the annual performance plan (APP) to support land reform. The OVG had tabled the APP for the 2019/20 financial year and as a result was audited on performance information for the first time. The OVG had performed at 50% of its annual target, having achieved seven out of 12 targets. This is due to the OVG not having sufficient capacity to carry out evaluations, and the committee heard that 21 posts have been approved to be filled, of which 12 are valuations posts.

The committee also heard from the Minister that staff from the department will be seconded to the Ingonyama Trust (IT) as an intervention to assist the IT with capacity and administrative challenges. The committee will be meeting with the IT next week.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, INKOSI ZWELIVELILE MANDELA.**