ONE-STOP BORDER POST TOUTED AS SOLUTION TO CHALLENGES AT BEIT BRIDGE

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Long snaking lines of trucks are remnants of the previous chaos at the Beit Bridge port of entry from South Africa to Zimbabwe. The South African government’s decision on Monday 11 January 2020 to close all land borders to the public means that only a fraction of the previous thousands of people are now reporting at the border.

The Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs visited the border and identified the implementation of a one-stop border post and the roll-out of the Border Management Authority (BMA) as the keys to resolving the challenges at all land borders. This will ensure the seamless movement of people in and out of the country, the committee believes.

In February 2020, the Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, announced plans to implement one-stop border posts, particularly with Zimbabwe, due to the high number of people and goods crossing between the two countries. One-stop posts are intended to harmonise the crossing of border by people and goods.

“To alleviate the perpetual crisis at this border, the government must move with speed to implement an already-agreed policy position to establish one-stop border posts. The tardiness in implementing this policy position is both unacceptable and a contributing factor to problems at this port of entry,” said Adv Bongani Bongo, the Chairperson of the committee.

The Department of Home Affairs highlighted that one of the contributing factors to the challenges at the border is that while South Africa uses electronic systems for movement of people, Zimbabwe still uses manual paper based system. “The implementation of the one-stop border post will ensure that the two countries utilises similar systems and will make clearing of the post quicker,” Adv Bongo emphasised.

The committee also called for the speedy implementation of the BMA, which it believes will enhance solutions to challenges at the border area. “We urge government to quickly roll-out the BMA, which will ensure that one agency is responsible for the ports of entry and will ensure effective planning,” Adv Bongo emphasised.

According to the Department of Home Affairs, one of the factors contributing to problems at Beit Bridge in the past two months is the inadequate capacity to process stringent health requirements for the huge number of people and trucks using the border, particularly after Botswana trucks were prevented from using the Groblersburg border crossing with Botswana and were diverted to Beit Bridge. This led to 21 800 trucks crossing Beit Bridge in December 2020, compared to 19 800 during the same period in 2019. Some 20 to 30 trucks can be processed per hour on the Zimbabwe side of the crossing.

The committee highlighted that some of the interventions recently implemented that proved successful in reducing congestion should be strengthened in the short- and medium-term as the country awaits the implementation of both the one-stop border post and the BMA.

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