**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE PERTURBED BY SELECTIVE PRECAUTIONARY SUSPENSION OF DIRECTOR-GENERAL**

**Parliament, Thursday, 18 February 2021 –** The Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation met yesterday to deliberate on the implementation of the recommendations arising from its oversight report on the New York project.

The Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms Naledi Pandor, was unable to attend the meeting and submitted an apology for her absence. She had been due to update the committee on progress with the report’s implementation. The committee was disappointed by the Minister’s absence, as the corruption within the Department of International Relations and Cooperation relating to the project is a very serious matter.

The committee resolved that the Minister should be invited again to account on the matter. The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Tandi Mahambehlala, said: “The Minister lost an opportunity to take the committee into its confidence and explain how she arrived at the decision for a precautionary suspension of the current Director-General (DG), Mr Kgabo Mahoai.”

The department had also been expected to provide further details that would have enabled the committee to make a determination on the extent to which the current DG is implicated in the procurement relating to the New York project. The department has incurred R118 million in irregular expenditure arising from this matter.

The committee emphasised that it does not wish to interfere in the department’s internal affairs. However, the committee is concerned that it learned through the media that the Minister had placed the DG under precautionary suspension, reportedly as part of implementing the oversight report’s recommendations.

Ms Mahambehlala said: “This is tantamount to undermining the authority of Parliament and it is also disregarding the thinking capacity of Parliament.”

The committee believes that the department should align itself with recommendation 12.13 of the oversight report, which provides for the immediate recall and investigation into the role played in the matter by the former DG, Ambassador Jerry Matjila. The committee saw no reason to suspend the current DG.

“The committee is indeed taken by surprise,” Ms Mahambehlala pointed out, “because the irregularities identified by the Auditor-General are related to the signing off and awarding of the tender by the former DG in 16 March 2016.” The R118 million was paid because there was already an obligation under that contract. “The tender was awarded despite many discrepancies, which the former DG ignored,” Ms Mahambehlala said.

An Auditor-General’s report identified officials in the department who should be held responsible for the irregularly awarded tender, including the former DG, the chief financial officer and the Chief Director: Property Management. The committee’s report also recommends action against these individuals, as well as other members of the bid adjudication committee.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION, MS TANDI MAHAMBEHLALA.**