**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**POLICE COMMITTEE URGES NEW DNA BOARD TO REMEDY DYSFUNCTIONAL FORENSIC LABORATORIES**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 2 March 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Police today instructed the newly appointed National Forensic Oversight and Ethics Board to urgently assist in finding solutions to the current dysfunctional state of the National Forensic Science Laboratories (NFSL). In performing its oversight role, the board must ensure that permanent solutions are found to numerous longstanding challenges.

The Minister has appointed Advocate Lindi Nkosi-Thomas as the Chairperson and Adv R Rawat, Mr D Morema, Dr K Ehlers, Mr R Sono, Dr N Myeza, Mr AP Rapea, Adv O Sewpaul, Ms A Grove and Mr L Mthethwa as board members. The committee congratulated them on their appointment and believes that they are capable and competent to achieve their mandate. The board was appointed in terms of Section 15V of the Criminal Law (Forensic Procedures) Act, No. 37 of 2013.

The committee considers it unacceptable that NFSL currently has a backlog of over 172 000 cases. The committee is hopeful that the new capable and experienced board will promptly work towards restoring NFSL’s functionality.

Over the past two years, the committee has highlighted concerns about the backlog, which has a direct impact on the entire criminal justice value chain. “We know that the board is reasonably new, but the current dysfunctional state of the NFSL demands action to aid the criminal justice system to deliver on its mandate. The fight against the scourge of gender-based violence (GBV) is compromised by the inability of the Forensic Science Laboratory to timeously conclude their analysis. The fight against GBV requires a Forensic Science Laboratory functioning optimally to ensure that prosecutions are scientific, evidence-based and timely,” said Ms Tina Joemat-Pettersson, the Chairperson of the committee.

One challenge at NFSL raised by the committee is ineffective supply chain management systems and processes, leading to protracted delays in the procurement of buccal sample kits. Another challenge is shortages of buccal sample kits at police stations and service delivery points, leading to a growing DNA casework backlog, especially in GBV cases. Additional challenges arise from delays in the amendment of the DNA Act and IT challenges caused by the continuing FDA legal dispute.

Another serious concern is that because of delayed laboratory results, families sometimes have to wait for two years to bury their loved ones who were victims of crime. This is highly reprehensible and unacceptable.

The committee welcomed the board’s plan of action, which focuses on contract management, reduction of DNA case backlogs, establishment of a forensic investigative unit, software acquisition and resolving inadequate operational budget, among other things.

As a result, the committee has decided to give the board space to implement the plan of action, but has asked for regular progress updates. The committee remains invested in ensuring the NFSL’s functionality to ensure evidence-based prosecution of cases.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON POLICE, MS TINA JOEMAT-PETTERSSON.**