COMMITTEE ON SPORTS TO CONDUCT OVERSIGHT ON GRANT DISBURSEMENTS IN ARTS SECTOR

The Portfolio Committee on Sports, Arts and Culture will conduct an oversight visit to entities administering Covid-19 relief funding. The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Beauty Dlulane, asked that the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture prepare detailed information on the disbursements.

She said: “We will check the viability of visiting the projects as funds are being disbursed. The committee should get the information from the department. The committee said that it won’t rely on media for information. Huge sums were given to the National Arts Council (NAC) and the National Film and Video Foundation.”

The committee received a detailed briefing yesterday on the disbursements of the third phase of Covid-19 relief funding in the arts sector. The committee heard that although the second phase was characterised by stringent approval criteria and only a few applicants were eligible, R80 million had been disbursed since October. The committee also heard that the department partnered with the Department of Small Business Development and the Solidarity Fund.

After the briefing, committee members asked questions on a range of issues. One question concerned artists staging a “sit-in” at the NAC offices. Other questions were about the newly-established Ministerial Advisory Council and the contracts signed with artists. Committee member Mr Tshepo Mhlongo said there seemed to be contradictions in the presentation and he alleged that some athletes and organisations were “double-dipping”. He wanted to know if fraud charges had been brought against anyone in this regard.

Committee member Ms Vuyisile Malomane sought clarity on whether the adjudication committee members were rotated and whether job opportunities had been created through the presidential stimulus programme. “What recovery plan is there to revive the arts sector? The pandemic is still going to be around. When is the council going to publish the full list of beneficiaries?” added Ms Malomane.

In response, the department said compliance was a challenge during the first and second disbursements. The committee heard that many applications were ineligible due to lack of tax compliance. This problem has since been resolved. After a number of interventions and engagements with the South African Revenue Service, tax compliance certification was relaxed.

The Minister of the department of Sports, Arts and Culture, Mr Nathi Mthethwa, said the challenge with the NAC is that the council got into action when everything was happening. He told the committee that the suspension of the CEO and the CFO had not helped, and budget constraints hamper operations further.

Minister Mthethwa clarified that the advisory team was an industry-driven process convened by the Freedom Park. He said the industry developed rules and appointed people whose organisations had a national footprint. “The sector felt those were the right people; we will work with them in order to deal with the plight of artists in the country.”

**Sibongile Maputi**
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