COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES CONCLUDES INTERVIEWS FOR POSITIONS ON SAHRC

The Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services today concluded its two-day interview sessions with 11 candidates for two vacancies on the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC).

Committee Chairperson Mr Bulelani Magwanishe said the nominee/applicant must be a South African citizen and a fit and proper person to the hold office of commissioner, as stipulated in section 193(1) of the Constitution. The person must have a record of commitment to promoting and respecting human rights, have applicable knowledge or experience on matters connected with the objects of the commission, and comply with any other requirements prescribed by national legislation, in particular the SAHRC Act, 2013.

Mr Magwanishe said the committee called for nominations or applications in November last year to fill the two vacancies. The vacancies arose after the death of the deputy chairperson of the Commission, Ms Priscilla Jana, and the end of term of Adv Mohamed Shafie Ameermia.

The committee received 59 nominations/applications for the vacancies and shortlisted 11 candidates to be interviewed. The candidates are Mr Jonas Ben Sibanyoni, Adv Mohamed Shafie Ameermia, Ms Eslpeth Nomahlubi Berlinda Khwinana, Ms Fatima Ismail Chohan, Ms Ferrial Ismail Adam, Mr Leonardus Kolbe Joubert, Mr Moss Ntlha, Ms Nomfundo Ntloko-Gobodo, Ms Philile Ntuli, Ms Vidhu Vedalankar and Adv Andre Gaum.

The committee prepared a list of questions and divided them between the multiparty committee members in order to ensure all candidates were asked the same questions.

Ms Ntuli informed the panel of committee members that she has always been an activist, who wants to contribute to redressing the imbalances of the past. Mr Sibanyoni focused on the demand for land and the delays in finalising land claims.

Adv Gaum, who is currently a serving commissioner of the SAHRC, said the legacy he would leave in human rights is his contribution to education. He mentioned a Life Orientation textbook that he worked on closely with the Department of Basic Education that would assist learners to understand their human rights and responsibilities. He further mentioned his involvement in the National Schools Moot Court Competition where learners debate human rights with peers around the country. The competition aims to create greater awareness of the Constitution in schools and communities and the values embodied in it through active participation. The aim is also to encourage talented young people to consider pursuing a law career.

Ms Fatima Chohan’s response to a question about the challenges facing the SAHRC focussed on the growing violence in society, particularly gender-based violence, civic protests and xenophobia. These violent acts hold South Africa back, she said. She further alluded to food insecurity, made worse by the Covid-19 era, which also creates a huge challenge.

The committee has sent all candidates’ fingerprints for security screening. After receiving the results, it will deliberate on the candidates and make recommendations to the National Assembly. The National Assembly will then make recommendations to the President on whom he should appoint.

**Rajaa Azzakani**
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