**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE ADJOURNS ITS MEETING ON CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION DUE TO NON-AVAILABILTY OF THE MINISTRY**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 17 March 2021 –** The Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Technology had to abruptly adjourn its meeting today where it received briefings on the challenges facing students at the country’s universities, from the Department of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Universities South Africa (USAf), South African Union of Students (SAUS) and the University of the Witwatersrand which was represented by the university council and management and the Student Representative Council (SRC).

The Minister of the Department of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Dr Blade Nzimande, who briefed the committee, asked the committee to release him as he had to attend to another very urgent matter. He assured the committee that the Deputy Minister, Mr Buti Manamela, was going to continue with the meeting and respond to issues that needed a response from the department.

Regrettably, the Deputy Minister later on also asked the committee to release him to attend to a meeting of the task team that he is chairing. Based on the absence of the political leadership of the department to respond to the issues to be raised by Members of Parliament in a meeting that dealt with critical challenges that have rendered the South African higher education sector into turmoil, the meeting had to be adjourned.

The request by the committee to the Deputy Minister to postpone his meeting by an hour to allow the committee to conclude its business was not acceded to, rendering the continuation of the committee meeting unnecessary in light of the absence of the political leadership.

The committee expressed its regret and unhappiness with the fact that a meeting of a committee of Parliament had to adjourn due to the discontinued participation of the political leadership. This is quite sad given the fact that the meeting was convened on an urgent basis in response to the current crisis facing the higher education sector. The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Philly Mapulane, had to convey the committee’s apology to the invited stakeholders.

The committee views this abrupt adjournment of its meeting owing to the discontinued participation of the political leadership of the department as an expression of the lack of appreciation of the role of Parliament as a pre-eminent constitutional body responsible for oversight and for holding the executive to account. The Chairperson of the committee undertook to take this matter up with the Minister. The adjourned meeting will continue next week on Tuesday, 23 March 2021.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, MR PHILLY MAPULANE.**