**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT POOR PERFORMANCE AT FORMER DEPARTMENT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND LAND REFORM**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 24 March 2021** – The Portfolio Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development yesterday received a briefing from the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development on the 2019/20 annual performance and financial statements of the former Department of Rural Development and Land Reform.

In his opening remarks, the Chairperson of the committee, Inkosi Zwelivelile Mandela recounted the experience of Mr Ivan Cloete, who was a beneficiary of the land reform process on the West Coast and who was frustrated by the very people mandated to resolve his claim. The chairperson raised this matter as an example of how the system sometimes fails the people. The Chairperson credited Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development Ms Thoko Didiza for investigating and resolving the matter. Mr Cloete will be concluding a 30-year lease on the farm Colenso.

Inkosi Mandela congratulated Mr Ivan Cloete for staying the course and being resilient in the face of alleged corrupt officials. "How many people in similar situations just give up or simply don't have the energy, resources or technical expertise at their disposal to sustain such a fight?" he remarked. Inkosi Mandela thanked the Minister for her commitment to stamp out corruption in the department and for investigating officials alleged to have contravened the Public Finance Management Act.

The committee queried the department's poor performance, considering it spent 100% of its budget and land reform is a government priority. For the year under review, the department achieved a 37% performance rating, with an expenditure of R3.6 billion. A trend analysis of land reform shows a significant decline in performance when compared to 2018/19. The committee also noted that the department had a vacancy rate of 16.4% and a performance rate of 37%. This does not indicate a priority programme, in the Chairperson's opinion. Nor does it show a department achieving value for money on land reform.

The committee is also concerned about departmental vacancies in senior management and asked what the department was doing about this problem. By the end of March 2020, there were 73 vacancies, which could contribute to poor performance. The committee further asked why 42 of 342 senior management staff, including the Director-General and Deputy Director-Generals, do not have performance agreements.

The committed called on the department to provide an update on legislation and approved policies. The committee had previously been assured that the Communal Land Tenure Policy, which commenced in the 2019/20 year, would be tabled by the end of 2020. However, this did not happen. The committee urged the department to take heed of the Auditor-General's report and speed up land reform.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, INKOSI ZWELIVELILE MANDELA.**