**MEDIA STATEMENT: COMMITTEE ON IR CRISS-CROSSED THREE CONTINENTS VIRTUALLY TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY BY MISSIONS ABROAD**

**Parliament, Saturday, 20 March 2021 -** The Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation has conducted an unprecedented virtual oversight programme from 17 - 19 March 2021, criss-crossing three continents to ensure accountability and service delivery by eleven South African missions abroad.

The committee Chairperson, Ms Tandi Mahambehlala, said: “We chose to do our work virtually, we see it as a nascent oversight model, something Parliament can embrace.” She pointed out that the Covid-19 pandemic “has taught us to adapt and be innovative, hence this Portfolio Committee resolved that, its oversight work beyond the borders of South Africa will not be hampered by the situation created by the pandemic”.

The committee’s overseas virtual oversight programme was driven by three distinct objectives. Firstly, Cash Missions abroad contributed to negative audit outcomes in the 2019/20 financial year.

The committee identified challenges with handling cash accounts and petty cash, unexplained differences under cash and cash equivalents and petty cash were then moved to a suspense account under “receivables”. The differences that could not be explained amounted to R188 million. These challenges necessitated the committee to visit the Cash Missions virtually, to ensure that proper reconciliations are done and proper records of cash transactions are kept.

Highlighting the second objective, Ms Mahambehlala said: “We had to assess the state of state-owned properties abroad, establish their level of dilapidation in order to determine the state of readiness by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation to assume custodianship of state-owned properties abroad, when the Foreign Service Act 2019 comes into force.”

The committee’s third objective was to assess the completeness of the asset register of movable assets. “We wanted to ensure that it is up to date with codes and movable assets can be verified in a Nettrace system,” said Ms Mahambehlala.

The committee was dismayed by the number of vacant and abandoned state-owned properties and land parcels in these missions abroad. Some had been vacant for 20 years while such missions are on rented accommodation with exorbitant rates. The asset register was not fully complete with many missions and some slowly managing with cashbooks to avoid misstatements.

The committee had asked for video recording evidence of what would be discussed, be it cash books, asset register, movable assets and immovable vacant properties, to enable it to see what was on the table. “Furthermore, the committee asked that all Covid-19 protocols be observed when preparing for and during the virtual overseas oversight,” added Ms Mahambehlala.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION, MS TANDI MAHAMBEHLALA.**