**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COGTA COMMITTEE ENGAGES RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON IMPACT OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT REGULATIONS ON RELIGIOUS SECTOR**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 16 June 2021** – The Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs has reaffirmed the importance of the religious sector as a key stakeholder in the context of disaster management in a meeting with religious leaders. The committee also acknowledged the vital role played by the religious community in promoting the necessity of behavioural changes to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The committee had a virtual engagement with religious leaders on the impact of the national disaster management regulations on the religious sector. The committee said churches and other religious organisations have been at the forefront during this crisis providing, among other things, social work, counselling services and supporting victims of gender-based violence.

Religious organisations wrote to the committee expressing a view that the government does not take the religious sector seriously. The organisations believe that the administration of the Disaster Management Act has targeted the sector unfairly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of written submissions to the committee suggest that some aspects of the Disaster Management Act need to be reviewed. The committee told religious leaders that it is also considering a draft Private Member’s Bill that proposes a similar exercise. It said Parliament will soon publish the draft Bill for public comment, to solicit the inputs of all interested parties.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Faith Muthambi, called upon the religious community to participate in the process of making that legislation. “Should the religious sector wish to submit additional inputs in this regard, you are welcome and encouraged to do so. Ourselves, as custodians of the Disaster Management Act, we are committed to realising a workable piece of legislation that responds adequately and justly to national disasters without infringing unreasonably on the rights and freedom of citizens.”

The committee has noted the concerns expressed by religious leaders about the impact of the disaster management regulations on the religious community. The committee has assured religious leaders that Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma will respond to all of their concerns on Thursday. The Deputy Minister of Traditional Affairs, Mr Obed Bapela, has also assured religious leaders that the department will emphasise the scientific reasons on which the regulations are based.

Religious leaders told the committee that the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) and the South African Human Rights Commission have failed to protect the religious community against what they say is the unfair implementation of the Covid-19 regulations against the religious community.

Religious organisations making presentations before the committee included the South African Religious Forum, the South African National Christian Forum, the Ecumenical Leadership Council, Sunni ulama Council Gauteng, Langa Baptist Church, Bahai Faith Community of South Africa, Muslim Supreme Council of South Africa, Higher Educational Institution, The Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Council for Charismatic Churches, Gauteng Faith-Based Organisation and the Open Circle.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, MS FAITH MUTHAMBI.**