**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BASIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE CONDEMNS MILLIONS OF RANDS OF DAMAGE TO SCHOOLS DURING RIOTS IN GAUTENG AND KZN**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 3 August 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education today received briefings on the damage and vandalism caused to schools in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) during the recent community protests.

Committee Chairperson, Ms Bongiwe Mbinqo-Gigaba, said: “It is shocking that the cost of damages and vandalism to schools is estimated at over R141 million. This is money that was not budgeted for. Money that government does not have and money that could have been spent on other much-needed projects.

“As public representatives we need to have serious discussions in our constituencies that members of the public cannot be targeting much-needed infrastructure, especially schools, when they vent their frustrations for whatever reason. We cannot be comfortable with the current situation. Schools always end up being soft targets during protests and it is the poorest of the poor learners that suffer.”

The committee today received updates from the national Department of Basic Education (DBE), the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department and the Gauteng Education Department on the damages during the unrest, as well as the readiness to reopen schools for the third term yesterday.

The DBE told the meeting that protests and looting affecting 137 schools and offices in KwaZulu-Natal – one school in Pinetown burnt to the ground. Gauteng Province has four schools affected but fortunately there were no major structural damages. According to the department, it was still in the process of repairing more than 1 700 schools damaged during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020.

The committee heard that some of the damages during the latest protests include electric wiring, admin blocks, doors, roofs, ceilings, ablution facilities and sanitary fittings. Looting also occurred during the protests and stolen property include electrical equipment, including laptops, computers, projectors, LTSM screeners, sound systems, routers, furniture (mostly tables), wires, transformer tables, lights and garden equipment. Kitchen resources and equipment like stoves, fridges, microwaves, eating utensils, school nutrition programme equipment and food items and Covid-19 essentials like sanitisers, soap, and masks were also stolen.

The committee expressed its concern that food and equipment were also looted that are used to feed learners as part of the National School Nutrient Programme. “The programme serves to cater for the most vulnerable learners in our schools. For many of them, this is the only meals they received. How can responsible communities take the food out of the mouths of the very vulnerable young ones that we are trying to make a difference to?”

The DBE assured the committee that many of the items have either been replaced or are in the process of being replaced. The committee has resolved to undertake an urgent oversight visit to both provinces in order to establish first-hand the damages to school property.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION, MS BONGIWE MBINQO-GIGABA.**