**MEDIA STATEMENT**
**COMMITTEE ON COGTA CALLS FOR CONSEQUENCES ON UNTIMELY DEATHS OF 14 INITIATES IN THE EASTERN CAPE**

**Parliament, Thursday, 5 August 2021 –** The Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) today held a follow-up engagement with the Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs on the December 2020 male initiation season.

It’s a follow-up on matters arising from the meeting that took place between the committee and the provincial department on 30 March this year on the December 2020 initiation fatalities.
In that meeting, a decision was taken that an invitation must be extended to the Eastern Cape Provincial Initiation Task Team, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Provincial Department of Health to take part in today’s engagement as they are among the critical stakeholders in the male cultural initiation value chain. Furthermore, interventions into the initiation crisis are multi-sectoral in nature.

According to the current disaster management regulations, male customary initiation is prohibited. This is part of government’s precautionary measures to limit the spread of Covid-19. When this prohibition was in full force, there were zero initiation-related fatalities in the country, including in hotspot provinces such as the Eastern Cape.

The committee noted that this changed when some traditional structures, mostly from the Eastern Cape, persuaded government to lift the ban as some traditional communities were intent on resuming the practice even at the risk of contravening the regulations.

During the committee’s previous engagement on this, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs had indicated that the National Command Council was open to accommodating the Eastern Cape, provided that those calling for the lifting of the ban were also prepared to take responsibility and be held accountable should initiates suffer harm.

The committee is saddened that when the Eastern Cape was allowed to proceed with the December 2020 initiation season, 14 initiates lost their lives, four suffered amputations and 39 were hospitalised. The committee was informed that these deaths were not Covid-19-related. However, the presentation by the province indicated that at least one death was confirmed as a Covid-19-related complication.

The committee requested to be furnished with a comprehensive report on the 14 fatalities, including the support provided to the bereaved families and actions taken to effect consequence management. The committee noted from the report of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) that in most cases the families of the deceased declined to prosecute, without giving any reasons. The report furnished to the committee by Nkosi Mavuso, the Acting Chairperson of the Eastern Cape House of Traditional Leaders, drives home the point that the 14 initiation fatalities are not just statistical numbers with nameless persons.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Faith Muthambi, said: “These are real people whose lives have ended prematurely for no sensible reason.”  In most cases, the boys were circumcised by illegal traditional doctors with poor or no treatment facilities in the bush.

Ms Muthambi said the District Development Model must be activated to make resources available. The committee resolved to invite the Department of Arts and Culture to present at its next meeting.

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