**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**DELAYS IN APPROVING SECRET SERVICE ACCOUNT IS A MATTER OF GRAVE CONCERN FOR POLICE COMMITTEE**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 18 August 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Police is alarmed that it took eight months to obtain approval of the Secret Service Account Vote within the South African Police Service SAPS. The committee received SAPS’s second, third and fourth quarter reports and considers it unacceptable that approval for funding of such a critical function took this long.

“It is totally untenable that an application that was made on 9 December 2020 can only be approved on 2 August 2021. The delays in approving the budget have the potential of negatively impacting on operations of SAPS intelligence, which is a critical function for effective policing,” said Ms Tina Joemat-Pettersson, the Chairperson of the committee.

The committee’s concerns are based on the evident lapses in intelligence products during the recent violence and looting in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. As a result, the committee has resolved to write an official letter to the Minister of Police and the National Commissioner of SAPS to obtain a clear explanation for the causes of the delay, the implications for SAPS intelligence operations and plans to prevent a recurrence in the coming financial years.

Meanwhile, the committee is disappointed by the under-expenditure at the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), especially in the context of the repeated promises of successive corporate renewal strategies. The committee took exception to the fact that by end of the financial year, the FSL had only spent 81% of its budget, which is worrying in the context of the backlogs in processing buccal samples.

The committee is further concerned by the admission that the non-achievement of forensic-related targets was due to non-operational equipment and machinery, a lack of consumables and reagents, the utilisation of 50% personnel resulting from rotation due to Covid-19 and the closure of buildings for days for decontamination, which resulted in loss of production.

Although the committee acknowledged the impact of Covid-19 on production at FSL, it is unacceptable that the unavailability of consumables continues to impede the effective and efficient running of the laboratory. An effective FSL is central to the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) and the continued inefficiencies there undermine the fight.

The committee also raised serious concerns around the non-achievement of targets at the Central Firearms Registry (CFR). The committee heard that the finalisation of new firearm licence applications was at its lowest in quarter four. There was a decline from 44,19% in quarter three to 21.63% in quarter four, which is significantly lower than the 90% target and a turnaround time from 90 to 120 working days.

The committee finds unacceptable the reasons raised for this failure, including a shortage of personnel due to the Covid-19 rotation system; the lack of Integrated Ballistics Identification System reports, which delayed the processing of applications; and the incorrect capturing of information at police station-level on the Police Financial Management System, which contributed to underperformance.

Similarly, the committee is concerned that the SAPS could not achieve its target of recovering lost firearms, with only 2 160 stolen/lost firearms recovered for the 2020/21 financial year, against a target of 4 225. As a result, the committee has scheduled a meeting with SAPS senior management for a comprehensive briefing on the challenges at the CFR and at the FSL.

Meanwhile, the committee has taken exception to the delays from SAPS in responding to written questions posed by members of the committee. “On 15 May 2021, we sent through a number of questions and we have only yesterday, 17 August, received the responses. It has taken approximately three months for the SAPS to respond to our questions, which negatively impacts on our ability to do our work,” Ms Joemat-Pettersson emphasised. The committee has thus demanded from the SAPS and the Ministry a commitment to expedite responses to members to strengthen oversight and accountability.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON POLICE, MS TINA JOEMAT-PETTERSSON.**