**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**LIMPOPO AND MPUMALANGA LAND CLAIMANTS DEMAND EQUITABLE SHARE ON KRUGER NATIONAL PARK**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 30 November 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Environment, Forestry and Fisheries received briefings today from the Chairperson of the South African National Parks Board, the Chief Land Claims Commissioner, the Mpumalanga Regional Commission, the Limpopo Regional Commission, and the affected communities on the land claim settlements in Kruger National Park.

The Commission Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) as well as the Departments of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform, and the Department Forestry, Fisheries and Environment were also present.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Faith Muthambi, said beneficiation of communities around Kruger National Park should remain a priority, particularly when considering the high poverty and unemployment levels. She said it has become clear that when communities do not benefit from their land, crime is inevitable. "We also need to remember that the land where Kruger National Park is located as a protected area belongs to the communities," emphasised Ms Muthambi.

She said the ongoing court processes should not stop the implementation of post-settlement plans and capacity building activities. "It is unacceptable that government departments and agencies will shift the blame, and stop finding solutions," added Ms Muthambi.

The committee heard that the communities that live on the boundaries of the Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga and Limpopo, and who lodged land claims on parts of the park are not happy that a beneficiation scheme, that could see them profit from the park's commercial activities, is still not finalised almost five years after the settlement of their claims.

Land claims in the world-renowned game reserve were settled in 2016 in a two-part settlement, being financial compensation and a beneficiation scheme which is still outstanding as a result of a dispute between the claimants and SanParks.

One of the beneficiaries, Mr Richard Miyambo from the Madonsi community in Limpopo, told the committee that the dispute relating to the establishment of the beneficiation scheme was as a result of "SanParks negotiating in bad faith."

He told the committee that the talks about the beneficiation scheme collapsed after they could not agree on business opportunities in the Kruger National Park and the notarial deeds. He said SanParks is delaying the process by not negotiating in good faith. Following the deadlock, the committee heard that a mediator was brought in but also could not continue, and now the CRLR has approached the Land Claims Court for a court mediated settlement on the beneficiation scheme.

The Chairperson of the SanParks Board, Ms Pam Yako, told the committee that their intention was to include the claimants' communities in the economy of the Kruger National Park, but that was difficult without a signed agreement on the beneficiation scheme. She said they are committed to solving the issues as complex as they are, and they don't want to deny the communities the right to benefit from the new South Africa.

Ms Muthambi, said the committee was worried that some claimants were dying before benefiting from economic activities in their land. She advised the CRLR and SanParks to develop an integrated system for the whole country to deal with beneficiation agreements on settled claims involving land owned by SanParks, where restitution is impossible according to laws governing protected areas.

Ms Muthambi also instructed the involved parties to ensure that there are legal and functional Communal Property Associations (CPAs) in all the communities of beneficiaries. She said the land claimants must benefit from the economic activities that take place in the Kruger Park to alleviate poverty and must discourage people living in these communities from being easily recruited by rhino poaching syndicates.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES, MS FAITH MUTHAMBI.**

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