**HOME AFFAIRS AND THE 2022 STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS**

The 2022 State of the Nation Address makes specific mention of the Department of Home Affairs twice. More than in any of the recent years. This shows the increasing importance of the Department to the economic recovery of the country. This is in regards to:

1. Attracting skilled immigrants for a thriving economy.
2. Stimulating Employment includes DHA interns digitising paper records.

In addition, the following matters have a bearing on the work of the DHA:

1. Continuing work in standing against corruption.
2. Massive roll out of infrastructure including broadband.
3. Presidential State-Owned Enterprise Counsel and GPW.
4. Strengthening Democracy and reaffirming commitment to the constitution.
5. **Attracting skilled immigrants for a thriving economy**

The first mention of the DHA is in terms needing to improve in attracting skills to grow the economy in a competitive international market. The president mentions progress in streamlining and modernising the visa application process to make it easier to travel to South Africa for tourism, business and work. As already noted by the Committee, the eVisa system has now been launched in 14 countries, including China, India, Kenya and Nigeria. It will be critical in monitoring the plans of the DHA how this programme succeeds and is expanded.

The past decade has seen gradual increases in global concern around the security risks of migration often at the expense of the potential benefits. This can be seen in South Africa with the Border Management Authority Act, which although aiming to streamline border related services has also been criticised as being more concerned with security than economic or humanitarian concerns.

The revised Critical Skills List has been published for the first time since 2014, following detailed technical work and extensive consultations with business and labour. The updated list is said to reflect skills that are in shortage today, to ensure that the immigration policy matches the demands of our economy. Some of the most notable jobs which have been added to the list include:

* Director (Enterprise /Organisation) Chief Executive Office, Managing Director- NQF 9;
* Corporate General Manager (medium enterprises or larger) NQF 8;
* Programme or Project Manager (NQF 9);
* Quality Systems/ Quality Control Manager/ Quality Assurance Auditor NQF 9;
* Data Scientist Master’s Degree (NQF 9).

Now that the scarce skills have been published it will be critical that technical guidelines on the qualification and implementation of the list are published. Once published, potential candidates will know with certainty if they squarely qualify for an occupation under the list or not.

As the Committee knows, the President mentioned the comprehensive review of the work visa system, led by a former Director-General of Home Affairs, Mr Mavuso Msimang. This review is exploring the possibility of new visa categories that could enable economic growth, such as a start-up Visa and a remote working visa. The Committee must be briefed on the outcome of this review as soon as it is available, in order to plan for the possible legislative amendments. This ties in with the plans set by the DHA for a revision of the entire refugee and immigration Acts.

In addition, the President mentioned establishing a team to remove red tape of too many regulations. This has particularly been the case in the country around unduly complicated, costly and difficult immigration regulations. This prevents companies from growing and creating jobs.

1. **Stimulating Employment includes DHA interns digitising paper records**

The second direct mention of the DHA in the President’s speech is in relation to extension of the Presidential Employment Stimulus programmes, which launched in October 2020. Job creation is a continued theme relating to the DHA in President’s speeches in the last few years.

The total number of direct beneficiaries of these programmes will soon rise to over one million South Africans making it the largest youth employment programme ever undertaken in the Country. The employment stimulus will now also allow the Department of Home Affairs to recruit 10 000 unemployed young people for the digitisation of paper records, enhancing their skills and contributing to the modernisation of citizen services.

The digitisation of millions of old records is a long outstanding target for the DHA which has caused significant risks to the security and efficiency of services such registration of deaths, births and marriages. This in turn also delays the provision of all relative and marriage related Visas/permits.

The Committee will in due course invite the DHA to present on the progress made in this project including the possibility of internships to provide a gateway for the DHA to reduce delays related its significant staff and cost of employment budget shortages once the digitisation project is over. The Committee can support continued budget allocations to absorb some of these interns into the DHA in the longer term to expand the service delivery of the Department.

1. **Continuing work in standing against corruption**

Standing against corruption has also been a continued key theme in the President’s speech that related to all Government Departments including the DHA. There was significant work done in the 5th Parliament by this Committee in investigating state capture in the Department related to undue interference in the provision of immigration documents, citizenship and recruitment. This work will hopefully reflect in the final report of the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture that is due at the end of February and will be monitored in relation to the DHA.

The Corruption Unit Within the DHA will also be requested to provide continued updates on its work including consequences for those found guilty of fraud, corruption and negligence. This will hopefully contribute to the SONA intention of rebuilding the State and restoring trust and pride in public institutions. Additionally, as mentioned the modernisation and digitisation projects, are gaining momentum will also go a long way to prevent future abuse of the services provided by the DHA.

1. **Massive roll out of infrastructure including broadband**

The continued boost to the rollout of infrastructure will hopefully not only enable the private sector to grow but also contribute towards the DHA ambition to own rather than rent its offices as well as help upgrade and maintain them. The rapid deployment of broadband infrastructure across all municipalities by establishing a standard model for the granting of municipal permissions; must be of particular prioritisation for the DHA offices to overcome the hurdles in the systems allowing document provision as well as expand the footprint of modern offices able to roll out smart IDs and passports.

The DHA also has a role to play in improving the efficiency of sea ports to bring them up to speed relative to the ports in other parts of the world and on the African continent. The limited DHA capacity and infrastructure at port forms part of the constraints to economic activity in the Country. The DHA must motivate for the budget to increase its capacity and integration of its passenger clearance at ports both for commercial clients as well as tourists.

Significantly improved cruise ship and port security infrastructure is already in place in Cape Town harbour. The DHA must liaise with renewed Transnet programmes to partner on improving operational efficiencies at the ports through procuring additional equipment and implementing new systems to reduce congestion in particular at the Durban and Ngqura Container Terminals.

The gradual implementation of the Border Management Authority at all land, sea and air ports must also tie in with these efforts to bolster trade, tourism and infrastructure. The Committee is also due to conduct an oversight visit of the Sea and Air Ports to monitor progress in these initiatives.

1. **Presidential State-Owned Enterprise Counsel and GPW**

Although the Government Printing Works is not a formally a State Owned Enterprise in terms of treasury regulations, it is nonetheless a profit making entity fully owned by Government and will thus hopefully benefit from the a centralised shareholder model proposed by the President for key commercial state-owned companies. The separation of the State’s ownership functions from its policy-making and regulatory functions, could also perhaps help address the ongoing management, infrastructure and financial/auditing challenges at the GPW by minimising the scope for political interference, introducing greater professionalism and managing state assets in a way that protects shareholder value.

In the ongoing investigations of issues at the GPW, consideration and communication should be initiated on the work that has begun in the establishment of a state-owned holding company to house strategic SOEs and to exercise coordinated shareholder oversight. The Committee/Minister could potentially motivate that in order to ensure that GPW is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities, it forms part of the Presidential SOE Council that is preparing recommendations on SOEs to be retained, consolidated or disposed of.

1. **Strengthening Democracy and reaffirming commitment to the constitution**

Lastly the Presidents reaffirmation to strengthen democracy and commitment to a Constitution that protects us all will be fostered by the work the DHA and the Committee is doing in amending the Electoral Legislation in line with the Constitutional Court ruling. The oversight of the Electoral Commission as well as the DHA provision of enabling documents towards this goal will also continue by the Committee in its regular activities.