Media Statement

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MUST INVESTIGATE THE STATE OF OUR ROADS, SAY PEOPLE OF OKHAHLAMBA IN KZN

The bad road infrastructure has impacted the economy in the Okhahlamba region, the Portfolio Committee on Transport heard when it received a briefing on a petition from the residents of KwaZulu-Natal Province’s Ukhahlamba Local Municipality. The petition asks the National Assembly (NA) to investigate the state of the roads in their communities.

The constituency leader and Member of the NA, Mr Alf Lees, told the committee that roads in Okhahlamba need a lot of attention and that the extent of deterioration will make it a difficult task. “Okhahlamba relies on tourism and agriculture and has a high unemployment rate. Roads there are in a very bad state,” said Mr Lees.

Parliament was petitioned in September last year and now the petition had officially been tabled before the committee. In terms of the process, the committee must consider the matter and then report to the NA.

Councillor Thys Janse van Rensburg said although the community maintained most of the infrastructure at Okhahlamba, it needed help with the roads. The committee heard that some of the potholes are so big that one could bury a dog in them.

Community members attending the meeting informed the committee that businesses have closed, and it is difficult for some families to access graveyards to bury their deceased relatives, as the roads to the burial sites crumbled and are now deep trenches. Families have to carry coffins for longer distances, as cars can no longer use the roads.

A business owner, Ms Megan Bedingham, said tourism business in the area has deteriorated, as tourists tend to reroute their holidays because of the state of the roads. “We need good infrastructure for jobs and the future of jobs in the area,” she said.

Committee member Mr Chris Humsinger asked whether the economic impact of the poor roads is quantifiable. If the committee is to understand the actual cost, a report is needed outlining the budget allocation from the South African National Roads Agency (SANRAL), the KZN provincial government, and the municipality, he said.

“SANRAL has enjoyed a budget increase of R21 billion in the past five years; the province got R4 billion increase for roads maintenance. These entities all need to prepare a report for the committee on how the money has been spent,” said Mr Humsinger.

Committee member Mr Lawrence MacDonald agreed with this sentiment, saying that the state of the roads indicates a broken funding model. “This destruction of roads is everywhere. It has become a crisis. There are very few roads maintained by provinces that are viable. If not attended to, this issue will have dire consequence for the economy,” he said.

Committee member Ms Noluthando Nolutshungu said KZN is not the only province with poor road maintenance issues. “The committee should not just accept reports on this matter. We should follow this up (with an oversight visit) and go back and report to the community.”

The committee said it is important for the Department of Transport to know the importance of road maintenance and the role of corruption in the problem. In addition, clear role allocation for road maintenance across all spheres of government in road maintenance needs to be considered.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Mosebenzi Zwane, said this is a serious matter and the committee will conduct an oversight visit to the area. “We should rope in the department and get their response and representation in accompanying us to the area. That will happen too with the municipality,” Mr Zwane said.

**Sibongile Maputi**
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