**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**TOURISM COMMITTEE TO INITIATE A COLLOQUIUM ON LONG-DISTANCE BUS TRAVEL SAFETY**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 23 August 2022 –** The Portfolio Committee on Tourism today received a briefing from Intercape Bus Service giving its perspective on acts of criminality that are disrupting long-distance bus travel in South Africa.

The committee heard from Intercape’s Chief Executive Officer, Mr Johann Ferreira, that Intercape is the largest intercity bus passenger service in South Africa. However, passengers using the service have experienced acts of intimidation, violence and extortion. Intercape has written to the Presidency and to the Ministers of Transport and of Police, but has received no response from any of them, despite the gravity of the situation.

Attacks on interprovincial bus operators are intensifying, with the fatal shooting of bus drivers and injuries to passengers. Between January 2021 and February 2022, there were over 150 shootings, stonings and other acts of violence and intimidation, including 21 shooting incidents in 2022 alone. These cases were reported to the South African Police Service (SAPS) in three provinces. The company alleges that there are leaks in the SAPS, as on 4, 5 and 26 June attacks on busses occurred when a SAPS escort was not available.

The operations of Intercape in Cofimvaba, Dutywa, Butterworth, Ngcobi and Tsomo have since been suspended and it only operates out of Mthatha on the interprovince route.

The committee also heard that Intercape does not belong to any long-distance coach organisation, as it refuses to give in to the demands of the taxi industry.

The Chairperson of the Tourism Committee, Ms Tandi Mahambehlala, said that it was unfortunate that the South African National Taxi Council (SANTACO) was not present at the meeting to table its challenges and reflect on the allegations labelled against its members. Such attacks give the international community a negative image of South Africa, Chairperson Mahambehlala said.

She further said: “It is clear that these are the acts of criminal elements and the law must take its course. The Portfolio Committee on Tourism will initiate a meeting between the Portfolio Committee on Police, the Portfolio Committee on Transport and the National Council of Provinces, as the challenges cut across all these sectors. The committee views the safety of all South Africans a priority, as people travel between provinces using the long-distance buses. The Visiting Friends and Relatives segment of tourism is important for domestic tourism to thrive. Due to the high costs of flights, many people prefer to make use of the long-distance buses.”

Intercape will be invited to present to these committees before the end of the third term. This meeting is critical to ensuring that a lasting solution is found. This will assist domestic tourism to recover in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON TOURISM, MS TANDI MAHAMBEHLALA.**

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