**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE MUST URGENTLY CAPACITATE DEFENCE WORKS FORMATION TO ARREST INFRASTRUCTURE DECLINE**

**Parliament, Friday, 16 September 2022 –** The Joint Standing Committee on Defence has urged the Department of Defence (DoD) to urgently capacitate and revive the Defence Works Formation to maintain and deliver its infrastructure projects and wean itself off the poor workmanship thus far experienced from the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI). The committee received an update on the 1 Military Hospital Repairs and Maintenance Project (RAMP), and status on upgrades at 2 and 3 Military hospitals.

The committee welcomed the department’s assurance that the RAMP at 2 Military Hospital has been completed, but is concerned that the projects at 1 and 3 Military hospitals are incomplete, despite the allocated funds having been spent, raising questions about value for money. As a result, the committee has resolved to engage the Surgeon-General to quantify the impact of the delays on the South African National Defence Forces’ (SANDF’s) medical services. Urgent action is required to ensure that the exorbitant cost escalation on the project and the outsourcing to private medical services as a result of non-completion of the RAMP in the affected hospitals are curtailed.

The committee considers the dissolution of this capability, which has led to the unavailability of the skills needed to guide and assess the DPWI’s performance and associate cost escalations, was regrettable and should be reversed. “The decision that led to the loss of critical skills within the works formation rendered the DoD powerless, which negatively impacted on project management. We hope that these are lessons learned, but we hope the department can move with speed to capacitate the works formation,” said Mr Cyril Xaba, the Chairperson of the committee.

The committee’s concerns are based on the evidence that the DoD relied solely on the DPWI to manage infrastructure development projects, which resulted in project delays and cost escalations downstream. Also, the DPWI’s R1.9 billion in under expenditure on DoD facilities for the period 2014 to 2018 is a concern, as the infrastructure portfolio has deteriorated leading to unusable infrastructure.

Despite this, the committee acknowledges that the capacitation of the works formation will take time and has urged that while the department works on rebuilding this capability care should be taken not to take on excessive work that the formation would be unable to handle. The committee welcomes the initiative to work with the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) as implementing agent to reduce risk during initial transfer of functions from DPWI. This will also support the DOD through mentorship and coaching to acquire and establish the required built environment professionals. The committee is hopeful that this collaboration will deliver the required spinoffs necessary in the rebuilding process of this essential capability.

Meanwhile, the committee is concerned about accountability for investigating delays at 1 Military Hospital. While the committee acknowledges that the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations should be given space to conclude their investigations, the committee has called for internal disciplinary processes to hold officials accountable.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE, MR CYRIL XABA AND MR MAMAGASE NCHABELENG**

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