**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**SCOPA UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVES TO TREAT NATIONAL SKILLS FUND FORENSIC REPORT AS NON-CONFIDENTIAL**

**Parliament, Thursday, 29 September 2022 –** On Monday 26 September 2022, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) received a last-minute request from the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation asking the committee to treat and declare the National Skills Fund Forensic Report as confidential, in terms of Rule 198 of National Assembly Rules. The basis for the Minister’s request was that “people whose names are mentioned in the report have not been engaged at all, whilst the department is still finalising its internal processes.”

The forensic investigation was commissioned at the committee’s insistence and direction, following disclaimer audit opinions from the Auditor-General for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years.

During discussions at a meeting on Tuesday 27 September 2022, which had been scheduled to discuss the report, the committee was of the opinion that the Minister’s request fell short of Rule 198 in that, amongst other things, the report had been handed over to the department in March 2022 without action being taken. In addition, the committee felt that a report into the mismanagement of public funds could not be held in confidence.

The committee was, therefore, not inclined to support the Minister’s request. The committee sought legal advice from Parliament Legal Services on the application of Rule 198, which confirmed the committee’s position.

On Wednesday, 28 September 2022, after careful consideration the committee unanimously resolved not to accede to the Minister’s request to treat the National Skills Fund Forensic Report as confidential in terms of Rule 198 of the National Assembly Rules. The committee’s view is that the request, inclusive but not limited to the reasons cited, does not meet the muster of Rule 198.

The Chairperson has communicated the committee’s decision to the Minister.

Accordingly, the committee will schedule a meeting with the department and the NSF at the earliest possible opportunity when Parliament returns from recess to deliberate on all relevant matters emanating from the report that relate to the committee’s work.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS, MR MKHULEKO HLENGWA**

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