**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE CONCERNED ABOUT ONGOING PROTESTS IN POST SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR**

**Parliament, Tuesday, 7 March 2023** - The Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Innovation had an urgent meeting today with the South African Union of Students (SAUS) and the South African Technical Vocational Education and Training Students Association (SATVETSA) where the student governance bodies expressed areas of concern across the post-school education and training sector (PSET); highlighting specific universities and colleges.

On 23 November 2022 the committee had a ‘2023 academic year state of readiness’ meeting with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the SATVETSA, the SAUS, Universities South Africa (USAf) and the South African Public Colleges Organisation (SAPCO).

After this meeting the committee embarked on a two-week (24 Jan 2023 – 3 Feb 2023) oversight visit programme. It visited 14 institutions of higher learning in KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces. Following this oversight visit, the committee met again with the DHET and its stakeholders on 22 February 2023. Despite the recommendations the committee made during these interactions, it remains concerned by the ongoing protests that disrupt the start of the  2023 academic year.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Nompendulo Mkhatshwa, said: “I am concerned that some of the institutions that we as the committee visited during the 2023 state of readiness oversights, were now having collisions; in particular Capricorn TVET College.” Ms Mkhatshwa said the committee noted that there was simmering tensions and cautioned the sector not to assume that because there are no protests then challenges have been addressed.
The committee reiterated its recommendation on the revival of stakeholder engagements. It expressed its concerns about the arrests of University of KwaZulu-Natal students and the suspension of the SRC President at Wits University. The committee is of the view that there might be more students who have been suspended or received notices of suspension at various institutions.

The committee requested from the DHET and the student leadership the specific number of students who have been arrested or served with suspension letters at the various institutions. It reiterated that it supports student protests as an expression of their right to protest and implored on students to ensure that the protests do not infringe on the rights of others and that property is not destructed.

The committee recommended trainings on ‘civic education’ and ‘conflict mediation, negotiation and resolution’ for all stakeholders in the PSET system including senior management of institutions. The committee remains concerned about the overuse and over-reliance on private security on campus as it has no appreciation of institutional culture and cannot be held to account. The committee said the calling of armed security takes place too early and the protests turn into violence as a result.

The committee supports SAUS and SATVETSA on their stance in support of the R45 000 cap on student accommodation allowances for NSFAS students. The exorbitant prices of student accommodation cannot be normalised as these prices are tantamount to price fixing. The committee further recommends that the DHET and NSFAS reach out with speed to the Competition Commission to address issues of alleged collusion between private accommodation providers and officials of the institutions.

The committee reiterated that a cap on student accommodation not only looked at NSFAS-funded students, but takes into account self-funded students who need to be protected from price fixing by private accommodation providers.

The committee will tomorrow, 8 March 2023 receive a briefing from the DHET and stakeholders on interventions to address challenges highlighted by SAUS and SATVETSA. The committee remains committed to holding stakeholders to account, but, and most importantly, giving recommendations that can ensure the immediate inclusive start to 2023 academic year.

The committee remains concerned by the broader policy and structural issues such as funding for the missing middle and thus implores once again on the DHET to finalise its work on the Ministerial Task Team on Student Funding and submits its report to the committee.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, MS NOMPENDULO MKHATSHWA.**

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