**RESPONSES TO CONCERNS OF SOUTH AFRICANS LIVING ABROAD ON CIVIC SERVICES**

A working group has been established by the Departments of Home Affairs (DHA) and Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO) respectively, aimed at reducing the turn-around time for applications lodged in foreign missions.

Both Departments found it necessary to work on solutions to address delays and challenges experienced by citizens living abroad when applying for various documents. A directive was issued and signed by the Director-Generals of both Departments to ensure strict compliance by missions and improvement in the turnaround time for applications regarding applications of various products assisting in ensuring the shortest turnaround times. This entails a solution with an improved shared schedule for the shipment of diplomatic bags. High-volume foreign missions diplomatic bags, e.g. USA, etc. are shipped twice a month and for low-volume missions e.g. in our continent, on a monthly basis, however, this service may have been affected since the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and contractual obligations with postal or courier services by DIRCO.

In June 2022 the Department launched a pilot passport application service in 3 VFS locations in the United Kingdom and as of May 2023, 10042 passports were issued to South Africans living in the UK through VFS and the turnaround time is between 60-90 days compared to the diplomatic bag applications which range from 180- 270 days due to the process mentioned in earlier paragraphs.

There’s an intention to roll out this service through VFS in UAE, Dubai, USA, New York, and Washington DC, New Zealand, Wellington, Australia, Sydney, France, Paris and other countries with a South African population of over 20 000. The department is yet to make a decision on the matter due to the imminent expiry of the VFS contract.

**END**