**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**MINI PLENARIES (HYBRID)**

**WEDNESDAY, 17 MAY**

**17:15 – 19:15**

**(3) DEBATE ON VOTE 5: HOME AFFAIRS (GHC)**

**HON. LL VAN DER MERWE MP**

The Hon. Minister, Deputy Minister and Director-General of the Department of Home Affairs, the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs, colleagues, good afternoon -

House Chairperson, there is no doubt that South Africa faces a deepening rule of law crisis. And while the world watches, our beloved country is ***fast*** at risk of becoming a failed state. The importance, therefore, of a healthy, modern, well-functioning Home Affairs Department cannot be overemphasised.

***Yet,*** the reality is this Department is far from healthy. In fact, it continues to fail our people.

Systems are continuously offline. The Department lacks the best, basic legal support. Corruption remains endemic. Our IDs and passports are still being sold for just a few hundred rands. The Lubisi Report, into permit fraud, has highlighted how syndicates have overseen the issuing of permits themselves.

Communities like uMkhanyakude in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, are under siege ***daily*** from cross-border crime syndicates, who wage war on locals. Consider this: ***this*** Department, the very Department tasked with keeping the State safe, has no way of monitoring whether people who enter the country leave when their time is up.

But probably the most notorious feature of Home Affairs remains its painfully long queues.

Every day, thousands of South Africans rise at the crack of dawn, to take a day off work and school, using their last bit of money to travel to a Home Affairs office. They do so, because vital documents stand between life and death for many. Documents stand between South Africans and accessing a grant; between South Africans and securing a job opportunity and putting food on the table.

When the online booking system fails, when the Home Affairs Call Centre isn’t working and because the Department has not extended its footprint with banks, there is simply no other option but to join a queue. At many offices, there is no shelter, no toilet, no chairs, and no guarantee of being helped, but a very real possibility of being mugged.

Another of this Department’s failures is its inability to manage migration. Yes, migration is an international issue, but it is South Africa’s ***inability***to manage migration that is a national crisis.

During a historic Joint Sitting of Parliament on 18 September 2019, President Ramaphosa spoke to our immigration crisis and gave a number of undertakings.

***Now***almost four years later, nothing has happened.

Our people are still struggling to compete against those who sell counterfeit goods at prices they cannot match. Immigration officials are still taking bribes. The trucking and hospitality industry, **as an example,** is still no better at complying with the law, and nothing has come of an Inter-Ministerial Task Team, led by the Ministers of Home Affairs and Labour, to deal with these issues.

The physical infrastructure of our borders is missing. Therefore, ask yourselves a very simple question: how successful will the roll-out of the Border Management Authority be, when there are no borders to manage, in most instances?

Minister, with record high unemployment rates and almost half of South Africans relying on some type of grant alone for their survival, it begs another question: why has our Government and your Department not acted decisively to implement its laws and protect its citizens?

The growing presence of undocumented workers undercuts local wages, while an unregulated environment allows businesses to hire them. This, in turn, results in South Africans being denied jobs.

So, I ask again: what type of government fails to protect its most vulnerable citizens by denying them job opportunities which are rightly theirs? Minister, you and your Department, you and your Government, through your failure to implement our immigration laws, have condemned South Africans to the unemployment lines and SASSA queues.

***That*** is the shocking reality of life under an ANC government, 29 years since the dawn of democracy.

Urgent reforms are needed.

The Department must increase its accessibility. It can start by increasing its footprint with banks, by increasing its Call Centre capacity. We need to clamp down on corruption. We need to ensure that this Department has a legal team fit for purpose. We must regulate foreign ownership and participation in certain types of SMMEs. We need to reserve the spaza shop industry for locals, for example. And we need to reserve entry level or no skill job opportunities for locals.

Chairperson, in closing, there is no doubt that the ANC’s governance failures strike at the very heart of our democracy: they impede the development of our people, hamper social cohesion, and put the safety and security of our state at risk.

Mark Twain once said, “*Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it.”*

A government that does not act in the best interests of its people does not deserve our support. However, with 2024 now fast approaching, we know that you are only asking us to **support you one last time**.

**And so, we will**.

Because either we rise together, or together, we sink into the abyss.

I thank you.