Address by (MP) Cde Grace Kekulu Tseke on the Budget Vote Debate of the Department of Human Settlements

**Introduction**

I wish to preface this debate by quoting the President in his letter to the nation yesterday: “the Coronavirus is a dark cloud that is hanging over the lives of South Africans and the economic fortunes of our country. South Africa is not alone. Many countries are experiencing harsh economic challenges. Like many countries, we have responded through an economic and social assistance package, worth R500 billion. But we also know that we need to evolve a clear vision and strategic plan that will help us chart our way beyond the impact of COVID-19”.

The ANC wishes to take this opportunity to commend Government in general, and the Department of Human Settlements and its entities, in particular, on the work they have undertaken to assist South Africans during these difficult times.

**Department of Human Settlement’s Mitigation Measures**

We applaud the Department on its strategies and implementation plans for the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these mitigation measures focused on the following:

* Minimising and mitigating the rate of COVID-19 infections and spread, through interventions in vulnerable households and communities, focused on informal settlements, hostels, inner-cities and backyards;
* Enabling vulnerable households to observe physical and/or social distancing and self-isolation public health requirements;
* Assisting in the provision of personal and household sanitizers and personal protection equipment; and
* Promoting inter-sectoral and spherical partnerships to combat the pandemic.

**The Role of Departmental Entities and Grant Spending**

We note that most entities have not been impacted by the Supplementary Budget, and are thus, working within the framework of their approved budgets.

As the ANC, we welcome the step taken by the Department on the Emergency Housing Grants, which will be converted to Schedule 6 (Indirect Grant), and will now be administered by the National Department. The inability of Provinces and Municipalities to respond to emergencies and disasters has been a concern to the ANC and has, thus, compromised many communities.

The ANC welcomes the R300 million set aside to assist people in the rental housing who cannot pay their rent due to COVID-19 pandemic. We further welcome the R300 million allocated from the Supplementary budget to the National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC) which will go towards assisting those who cannot pay their bonds due to Covid-19.

Based on the analysis conducted by the Department in relation to the Human Settlements Development Grant (HSDG) allocation, we note the R600 million to be redirected for households living in Social and Affordable Rental Housing. This directly impacts the work of the Social Housing Regulatory Authority (SHRA) and the NHFC, and as the ANC, we will ensure we closely monitor this intervention to ensure that our people do not find themselves in worse conditions due to the pandemic.

**Conclusion**

In the spirit of commemorating Madiba, I too, wish to quote him, when he said: “What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead”.

Thus, we appeal to the Department to continue making a difference on the lives of many South Africans who look to the ANC-led Government to improve their material conditions, and to effectively use this Supplementary Budget to assist the poor and working class communities.