**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 1155**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 12 – 2021**

**1155. Mr D Joseph (DA) to ask the Minister of Home Affairs:**

With reference to elections that have been held by countries on the African continent during the COVID‑19 pandemic, what (a) total number of African countries continued with general elections in the period 1 September 2020 and 30 May 2021, (b) key lessons has the (i) Government and (ii) Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) learnt from the specified elections, particularly in terms of ensuring that the health and safety of (aa) voters and (bb) IEC staff will not be compromised during the upcoming local government elections, (c) total number of the elections in Africa did the IEC attend to observe their registration period, campaign period and/or election day and (d) is the additional estimated budget to ensure free and fair elections in a pandemic environment? NW1344E

**REPLY:**

1. Honourable member, the questions on events in other countries is a DIRCO matter and not a Home Affairs one.
2. (i) The Electoral Commission and government are co-ordinating the COVID response within the electoral arena through bilateral consultations with the Department of Health as well as through the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Elections. Lessons learnt from electoral events and COVID protocols for electoral processes are discussed in these engagements.

(ii) These events have confirmed the soundness of protocols that the Electoral Commission implemented in 133 by-elections since November 2020.

(aa) Voters are required to observe a distance of at least 1, 5 meters from other persons within boundaries of voting stations. Additionally, voters are required to wear face coverings or masks. Voters without masks are not allowed entry within the boundary of the voting station. Sanitising facilities are provided for voters at the entrance and exit of the voting station. The use of a shared indelible ink marking pen (to mark the thumb of the voter to indicate that they have voted) has been jettisoned in favour of a disposable single use cotton bud applicator. This is intended to deal with the real and or perceived risk that the use of a single pen to mark multiple voters may be a source of contagion. All voting stations are provided with the requisite stationery packs including pens that are sanitised routinely. However, voters are encouraged to bring their own pens to voting stations.

(bb) Electoral staff are equally subject to the protocol on social distancing, mask wearing and hand sanitizing. Furthermore, electoral staff are provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for use in the voter registration process, voting process at the voting station and during home visits during special voting. The provided PPE includes disposable gloves, disposable masks, hand sanitisers, sanitising hand wipes, face shields, disposable theatre gowns and aprons. The disposable theatre gowns are used during home visits during special votes.

(c) The Electoral Commission has not attended any of the elections in the referenced period.

(d) The additional costs imposed by Covid-19 on the budget of the Electoral Commission could not have been foreseen when the Medium Term Expenditure Framework allocations were made. Discussions are under way with National Treasury to fund the critical Covid-19 induced shortfall.

**END**