NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

# QUESTION NO. 1196

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## INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 20 OF 2019

**1253 Mr A C Roos (DA) to ask the Minister of Home Affairs:**

In light of the Foreign Mission Observation Report that was submitted by the Auditor-General to his Department in March 2018, highlighting risks that were identified, what are the details of the interventions that have been undertaken by his department on the (a) applications for passports and identify documents that have been outstanding for a long time, (b) applications dispatched from missions of which his department has no record, (c) training of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation staff who assist with the visa application process, (d) lack of access to virtual private server for mission officials to perform proper risk profile assessment, (e) applications received directly by missions, where Visa Facilitation Service (VFS) is available, and paid in cash creating a fraud risk, (f) overriding of Home Affairs officials by heads of missions, particularly where fraudulent documents are involved in the application, (g) allegations that Indian nationals are receiving free permits without supporting applications, (h) challenges of the citizens of the Republic struggling to get responses regarding their application status and (i) VFS passing fraudulent documents with applications put through his department?

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**REPLY:**

1. A working group has been established by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) and International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO) respectively, aimed at reducing the turn-around time for applications lodged in foreign missions. This process will integrate the workflow of DIRCO and that of DHA into one workflow. This process will be concluded as soon as possible. Furthermore, there is a process underway to restructure and automate passport dispatch which will result in the current work team being deployed to augment the citizenship and passports applications administration.
2. Unfortunately there is currently no automated application process and track and trace system from the mission to DIRCO thereby the Department is not able to track any application until it arrives at the Department’s processing centre in Pretoria. This matter is the subject of discussion at the monthly meetings of the Working Group.
3. The training of officials is co-ordinated between the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO). The officials at the Missions have been trained and where there is a need for further training. DIRCO will indicate to the Department.
4. The Missions are connected to the Visa and Entry stop list on the electronic Visa Processing System which allows the Missions to do the risk profiling.
5. All visa applications in Lubumbashi are submitted through Visa Facilitation Services. Both the Mission and the Visa Facilitation Company are aware of this process.
6. The Department has not come across any overriding of decisions by officials which involves submission of fraudulent documents. However, the Head of the Mission constantly discusses matters of mutual interest as he/she is the Representative of the South African Government and takes responsibility for all functions of government in the Mission.
7. Indian nationals are exempted from paying visa processing fees but are however subject to the prescribed visa requirements.
8. The Department is able to provide status update on applications lodged in Foreign Missions only once the applications are in its possession. Also to speed up communication between the Department of Home Affairs and Foreign Missions, generic email addresses have been established for each Mission so that if there are non-complaint applications, messages are sent through emails to the relevant Mission informing them of such instead of sending the hard copy applications back to the Mission through the diplomatic bag. A checklist will also be submitted to DIRCO for onward transmission to Missions to assist with the quality assurance process. The above Working Group has also agreed to send one communication about turn-around times to reduce enquiries about the status of applications.
9. VFS performs front office functions of accepting applications on behalf of the Department, transmits such applications to the Mission and hand over outcomes to the clients. The adjudication process is performed by officials at the Missions. This includes verification of supporting documents.

**END**