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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 1603**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 15 OF 2021**

**Dr L A Schreiber (DA) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation:**

(1) In view of the latest Language Policy Framework for Higher Education Institutions, published by his department on 30 October 2020, which uses a certain definition to define indigenous languages in the Republic (details furnished), Afrikaans and all Khoe- and San languages, such as Khoekhoegowab, are excluded thereby effectively designating the specified languages to the status of being non-indigenous, on what factual basis does the policy exclude both Afrikaans and Khoekhoegowab from the definition of indigenous South African languages, thereby effectively designating the languages as non-indigenous;

(2) whether, since the policy regards both Afrikaans and Khoekhoegowab as foreign and/or non-indigenous languages in the Republic, he will indicate in which countries the specified languages are indigenous; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;

(3) whether, since the policy explicitly states that an indigenous language is a language that is native to a region or country and spoken by indigenous people, the Government regards the speakers of Afrikaans and Khoekhoegowab as foreign, alien or otherwise non-indigenous to the Republic; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details? **NW1809E**

**REPLY:**

The definition of indigenous languages in the "Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions" (2020) was developed following broad consultations with different language practitioners and stakeholders in the country. In line with the Higher Education Act, the Department relied heavily on the advice from the Council on Higher Education, which made substantive input on the content of the policy, including the list of definitions included in the policy's initial draft. The Department also sought consistency in the use of terms with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which uses the term "indigenous languages", to underscore the importance of recognising and developing historically marginalised languages of the people of South Africa.

Alternatively, the policy framework could have used the terminology "indigenous African languages" as commonly used in literature. However, this expression could easily have been construed as excluding Afrikaans as it emphasizes the "Bantu" origins of the languages and their wide usage by the native population. The definition of the term "indigenous languages" in the policy is used purely to highlight the historical marginalisation of African languages as a result of both colonial and apartheid legacies, and the need to develop these languages for scholarly ends.

The policy framework does not in any way exclude or disadvantage Afrikaans or any other South African language, for that matter, as the need to develop all official South African languages other than English is well articulated in the policy, and in fact is, its underlying motive. The main objective of the policy is not to argue or settle the debate around the issue of indigeneity or otherwise of languages, but rather to highlight the fact of historical marginalisation of African languages in academia and propose ways and mechanisms in which this historical injustice could be corrected.

In terms of the Khoi language, the definition includes the following “an indigenous language is a language that is native to a region or country and spoken by indigenous people”. It, therefore, includes the Khoi language family.

These definitions should be read in the context of the policy and its aims. The policy aims “to contribute to transformation in higher education with specific reference to universities through enhancing the status and roles of previously marginalised South African languages to foster institutional inclusivity and social cohesion”. This policy does in no way, imply that Afrikaans must be removed/or not further developed. It simply aims to achieve the aspirations of Section 29(2) of the Constitution by making sure that all previously marginalised languages enjoy parity of esteem and that language is not an obstacle to access for all South Africans.

As indicated above, the Policy Framework does not exclude Afrikaans and San languages as indigenous languages. The definition adopted in the Policy when read correctly within the broader context of the framework is meant to highlight the colonial and apartheid history of the exclusion of indigenous African languages or simply indigenous languages of Bantu origin. At no point is the Policy intended to settle the debate of the indigeneity or otherwise of Afrikaans or any other language.