**MINISTRY**

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION**

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY

Date of Publication: 10 March 2023

Ministry: 17 March 2023

Reply date: 24 March 2023

**782. Ms H Ismail (DA) to ask the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation:**

1. What regulatory bodies does her department deal with to (a) correlate tourism and (b) oversee pilgrims during the Hajj and/ or pilgrimage to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
2. (a) On what basis and (b) who appointed the SA Hajj and Umrah Council (SAHUC) to oversee the Hajj and / or pilgrimage process to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;
3. Whether she will furnish Ms H Ismail with all the documentation stating full details with regard to the process; if not, why not, if so, what are the relevant details;
4. Noting that the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issues the visa quotas to the SA Government and that the SAHUC is given the visas, what (a) are the reasons for the process and (b) happens to the visas after the quota is given?

**NW882E**

**REPLY:**

1. The Department of International Relations and Cooperation does not deal with any regulatory bodies to correlate tourism and oversee pilgrims during pilgrimage to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. DIRCO only provides consular assistance to South African pilgrims visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
2. The Department of International Relations and Cooperation recently appointed a Ministerial Committee on the Efficient Management of the Annual Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimages. The mandate and role of the Ministerial Committee is to provide strategic direction to support the efficient management of the annual Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimages and to ensure that the South African pilgrims may enjoy a well-organised pilgrimage by an appropriate system under the auspices of the relevant Ministry of Hajj and Umrah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As a result of several complaints regarding arrangements made by many travel agencies facilitating travel services for South African pilgrims at that time, the Saudi Arabian Government, in 1994, approached the Members of Parliament of the South African National Assembly to address the matter. It was therefore deemed necessary for one entity to manage the entire Hajj process. The then Department of Foreign Affairs, through the then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Aziz Pahad, facilitated meetings for engagements among Non-Governmental Organisations representing the interests of Muslim Communities as well as political parties representing Muslim constituencies with the view to establishing a single entity to manage the Hajj process. As a result of these engagements, a Management Committee was formed, which led to the formation of the South African Hajj and Umrah Council (SAHUC) and the Government of Saudi Arabia was informed of SAHUC’s formation and its objective to facilitate the Hajj pilgrimage for South African pilgrims.
3. The formation of SAHUC was done through multi-stakeholder engagements with entities representing the interests of Muslim Communities. The Government of Saudi Arabia was informed of the formation of SAHUC to facilitate Hajj pilgrimages for South African pilgrims.
4. The entire Hajj process for South African pilgrims is facilitated through SAHUC, in its capacity as the Pilgrims Affairs Office according to the procedures set by the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which includes the annually set quota, therefore it is not issued to the South African Government. The Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah implements two systems for the purpose of organising pilgrimages, i.e., that of a Pilgrims Affairs Office or that of Organisers. SAHUC resorts under the category of a Pilgrims Affairs Office and administers the distribution of visas.