# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 788**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 12 MARCH 2021**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 08)**

**Ms N N Chirwa (EFF) to ask the Minister of Health:**

Notwithstanding his reply to question 27 on 25 February 2021 that COVID-19 related deaths are updated daily and that late reports and/or delays are updated subsequently upon collection of data, the excess deaths reported by the SA Medical Research Council (SAMRC) to have been COVID-19 related have not yet been added to the daily updates shared by him on public platforms and/or the information shared in relation to the report provided by the SAMRC (details furnished), (a) what are the reasons that he has not updated the daily statistics of COVID-19 deaths and (b) by what date will the specified reporting be done to truthfully reflect the death toll of COVID-19 related deaths?

###### NW945E

**REPLY:**

This question was previously responded to during a Portfolio Committee meeting. Nevertheless let us repeat our previous explanation as it suggests there is a lack of understanding of scientific terminology.

Excess deaths are typically defined as the difference between the total number of deaths reported in a specific time period and “expected” number of deaths in the same time periods.

The total number of deaths refers to the total number of people that died during a defined period of natural causes. The expected number of natural deaths is an estimate derived through modelling data, so it is not based on any confirmation of the actual cause of death. The model basically assumes that the trend in the number of deaths due to natural causes is similar to pre-COVID. Hence the excess deaths is an estimate as the difference between the total number of natural deaths and the estimated number of natural deaths. This exercise is useful for the purposes of assessing trends in mortality but cannot be used as an official statistics since it is based on an estimate. In the excess deaths estimate we cannot identify actual persons that may have died due to COVID.

(a) The Minister cannot update the official COVID death statistics based on an estimate of deaths. The official statistics is based on deaths of persons that are confirmed to have died due to COVID. This statistics is not an estimate.

(b) The official statistics of deaths due to COVID is an accurate representation of deaths in the country as each death reported is linked to the identity of a specific individual that died due to COVID. The excess deaths report from the MRC is an estimate that cannot be linked to the identity of a specific individual hence cannot form part of the official statistics.

END.