# SCOPA REJECTS RECOMMENDATION TO REPAIR THE POOR-QUALITY BEITBRIDGE BORDER FENCE

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) has rejected a recommendation from the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure that suggests the Beitbridge Border Fence can be repaired.

The Acting Director-General, Mr Imtiaz Fazel, told Scopa today that the technical condition report is being finalised and the team has recommended that the fence can be repaired. “The department has commissioned a technical report and that is being finalised. The team recommended that the fence can be repaired under certain conditions. The repairs will consist of replacing the structural supports that were removed, where the fence has not collapsed,” he said.

Members of Scopa made it clear that repairing that fence would be a waste of taxpayers’ money.

Scopa member, Ms Veronica Mente, said the fence they saw when the committee conducted an oversight visit to Beitbridge was a residential fence and not a fence meant for a border.

“Are they repairing the same fence that can be easily breached? Are they installing the same type of a fence? If that is the case, how different is it going to be from what we have seen? It is a pity that the National Treasury did not give us a conclusive report in terms of its own findings on the Beitbridge expenditure. Because if that is the case, I don’t think there is a comparison of the department’s findings to what the National Treasury’s regulations are saying,” she said.

Mr Bheki Hadebe also echoed Ms Mente’s concerns on the recommendation to repair the fence. “I am also concerned about the recommendation that seeks to suggest, in terms of the technical condition report, that this fence can be repaired. When we were there, we were told that the specification used for that fence was meant to protect the buildings at Beitbridge, not for the border fence. Any suggestion or recommendation that seeks to suggest that this thing can be repaired, we are going to oppose it. If the department is going to consider using its budget to allocate more funds towards that fence, that will be tantamount to fruitless and wasteful expenditure,” he said.

Another member of the committee, Mr Sakhumzi Somyo, said in the current situation, there is no way that Scopa can justify that the department would do justice by only repairing the existing fence. Something else needs to be done there. “The Minister of Home Affairs has indicated that the rest of his problems, in as far as border management is concerned, come from the Beitbridge border post. This means that the quality, size, capability, the strength of any infrastructure which seeks to support the management of that border, needs to be solidified.”

The Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Ms Patricia de Lille, agreed with Scopa and has assured the committee that repairing and replacing the current poor-quality border fence would be an irregular expenditure.

“I certainly share the anxiety of the committee. I have also expressed to the department that I do not accept the proposal that we repair and replace. We have learnt lessons out of this. One of the lessons for us going forward is the transversal management of all borderline fences of our country and therefore, the engagement at ministerial level,” said Minister Patricia de Lille

“I have had an engagement with the Department of Defence (DOD) and we agreed with the DOD, like the minister of that department said to Scopa the last time, that fence is not fit for purpose. Any replacement, any repair to fix the mess at Beitbridge, will not be decided by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure alone. The DOD is the user department and therefore plays a major role in agreeing or advising us on solutions and specifications to the fence. Those consultations are ongoing,” said Minister Patricia de Lille.

Scopa Chairperson, Mr Mkhuleko Hlengwa, urged the department to move with speed when addressing the issues at Beitbridge. “I get a sense that there is no urgency in dealing with these matters. Given the gravity of the situation and also the extent to which this is one of the most glaring glitches of the Public Finance Management Act among other things, and instances of corruption which came about because of the pandemic, I would imagine that we have to move with a particular speed,” he said.

**By Faith Ndenze**

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