Speech on Budget Vote 5: Home Affairs  
By Steven Swart MP, ACDP Whip

ACDP questions whether sufficient resources are being given to fight various other diseases, including Covid-19

“Chairperson,

The ACDP wishes to express its condolences to the family and friends on the passing of veteran Hon Andrew Bab’ Mlangeni, who served with us for many years in Parliament. Our thoughts and prayers are with you at this time.

COVID-19 has forced many government departments to restructure their budget allocation for the 2020/21 financial year even before the announcement of the Special Adjusted Budget. The Department had already diverted R9 million of its 2019/20 budget for COVID-19 related expenditure such as the procurement of Personnel Protective Equipment.

The Special Adjustment Budget reduces the Department's allocated budget at the start of the financial year by R562 million.

The ACDP notes the department’s assurance that despite the budget reduction, measures have been put in place to ensure budget cuts will not drastically affect service delivery in the short term.

The crucial work done by this department cannot be overstated. It is responsible for the population register, which registers all births and deaths in the country. In view of Covid-19, it is significant that as at 19 May, that is about 6 weeks into the lockdown, 50 356 deaths from various illnesses had been recorded. Of these 286 were Covid-19 related. As of yesterday, there were 5 368 Covid-19 related deaths, which is tragic. However, by yesterday, which is about 2 months from the previous figure, one can estimate that at least another 50 000 people have died from other illnesses, including HIV/Aids, TB, and other chronic diseases. That would bring the total number of deaths to more than a 100 000 from illnesses other than Covid-19.

The Deputy Minister indicated that 135 000 death certificates have been issued during the lockdown. Not all of these deaths would be due to illnesses, but it does give an indication of the high numbers of deaths from diseases. Hon Minister, you could probably give a more accurate figure in this regard.

The question is whether sufficient resources are being given to fight these various other disease, and what impact the lockdown has on patients accessing medication and food to fight all these diseases, including Covid-19. Every life is precious, and we should, honourable minister, be given the daily tally of all people dying of all diseases in South Africa, as that would be very revealing. This does not detract from the seriousness of Covid-19.

The IEC budget has been reduced by R35 million in the Special Adjusted Budget.

The ACDP welcomes progress by the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC) in preparation for the 2021 local government elections, which should not be delayed beyond the end of next year. This progress is particularly laudable in light of the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and funding pressures experienced. Given the decline in IEC funding, in a pre-election year, the ACDP supports looking into the possibility of e-registration and even e-voting. We also support the need to procure new zip-zip machines, which are critical in delivering credible elections.

Lastly, the ACDP welcomes the briefing received from the IEC on potential electoral systems in view of the New Nation Constitutional Court judgement allowing independent candidates to stand in national and provincial elections.

It is crucially important that the Committee keeps a close eye on progress in this regard, given the complexity of the electoral reforms necessary, and the tight time frames laid down by the court. The different policy decisions and the amending of legislation need to be tabled as soon as possible.

I thank you.”