Address by (MP) Cde iNkosi Zwelivelile Mandela on the Budget Vote Debate of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform And Rural Development

21 July 2020

Honourable Chairperson,

Ministers and Deputies

Honourable Members

We bring you greetings and felicitations in this difficult and uncertain time. I dedicate this speech to my grandmother Anna Gadikaenyana Mosehle and my aunt Zindziswa Mandela. Our thoughts reach out to all who have lost loved ones in this time and our prayers are with those who are ill and battling covid 19 and other illnesses that impair their well-being.

As a nation we have had to take extraordinary measures to combat the horrid impact that this global pandemic has had on every facet of life as we know it. The cuts to this budget is reflective of these austerity measures and intended to prioritise spending and refocus actions under extremely difficult circumstances.

We are cognisant of the enormity of the challenge that we confront but we are emboldened by the words of President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela when he said in 1953 and i quote: "There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires."

Honourable Chairperson, following the tabling of the Special Adjustment Budget by the Minister of Finance, Tito Mboweni, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development subsequently had to revise its budget and it has not been an easy task given the prevailing circumstances.

The Department’s budget allocation has been cut from R 16.8 billion to R14.4 billion.

**On Government Priorities:**

In his State of the Nation Address, President Cyril Ramaphosa affirmed that agriculture was one of the sectors that could play a large role in job creation, and confirmed that government would release about 700 000ha of state land for agricultural production this year and made emphasis on key priorities of government with regards to land reform and rural development. These agricultural and land reform sector related announcements have not significantly changed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. In this financial year the Department will be settling a number of outstanding land claims, including labour tenants claims. The Office of the Special Master has been established to deal with labour tenants’ claims and this is a welcomed progress, and we are hoping that this will end all kinds of injustices, humiliation, pain and suffering of the farm dwellers.

Honourable Chairperson, one of the priorities of government is to build an ethical, honest and capable developmental state, and human resources thus become very critical in this endeavour. The inability of the department to fill critical vacancies will impede on critical areas of operations within the Department, in the year under review.

**Agricultural Monopolies:**

We are encouraged by the confidence that government has in the agricultural sector to transform the ownership patterns of our economy. The support and the inclusion of small and emerging black farmers into the mainstream agricultural economy, including its related value-chain is an essential ingredient towards radical economic transformation of the sector. This Vote will contribute towards ensuring increased participation.

**On Rural Development:**

It is important to ensure increased investment into rural infrastructure support programmes that will support farmer production units located in the 44 districts of our country. Equally we need investment in social infrastructure such as rural roads and this will contribute to the effective realisation of urban-rural market linkages, and thus yield positive economic spin-offs for our rural agricultural communities.

**On Land Reform:**

Government’s land reform policy, as outlined in the 2019 Elections Manifesto of the African National Congress, is about ‘redressing the historical injustices and the dispossession of the black majority. Our approach takes into consideration the stability of the productive assets of our economy.

**On Food Security:**

Honourable Chairperson, as a result of these cuts, one of the most important programmes of the department, food security has been negatively impacted. We reiterate our call to ‘farmers, farmworkers and traditional leaders to work together’, to expand food production and ensure food security.

**Release of State Land:**

The legacy of apartheid spatial development planning continues to haunt us. Our people live in very crowded spaces with little exposure to sustainable economic activity. The release of state owned land for human settlement as well as agricultural development must be prioritised.

**Restitution:**

Land restitution programme has lost about R400 million of its initial budget and will require revision of planned targets for the year.

**On the Entities:**

The Department has a number of entities reporting under it. The Committee has raised its concerns and we are satisfied with progress being undertaken by the Department in ensuring full compliance by the ITB. The National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) remains critical in the development of market access to smallholder producers and the Agricultural Research Council is working on innovative and smart agricultural technologies that will enhance the productivity and the competitiveness of our farmers. To enhance the work done by the Deed Trading Account an additional R150 million has been transferred to the accounts in order to transform the deeds registry to record land rights in the country.

In Conclusion Honourable Chairperson, we acknowledge the reduction of the food security budget and across programmes, the suspension or revision of core service delivery targets when agriculture is considered an essential service remains a concern as it is going to have a negative impact on the sustainability of subsistence and smallholder farmers who are depended on Government support as well as household food insecurity. We have as the Committee raised concerns and we are content with the response.

We support the adoption of the adjustments budget Vote 29.

I thank you.