

# Insession



## PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT GOES VIRTUAL

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## MPs want more information on how R20 billion will be used to mitigate impact of Covid-19 on municipalities

*The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) recently briefed the Portfolio Committee on Cogta on the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on municipalities. The committee wanted to know how the additional R20 billion stimulus package announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa to cushion the municipalities would be used to ensure that municipalities fulfil their mandates at this time, writes Abel Mputing.*

### Mr Parks Tau

Briefing the committee, the Deputy Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Mr Parks Tau, said that the lockdown imposed to curb the spread of the pandemic gave rise to a situation in which many municipalities are unable to meet the financial commitments. These commitments include payments to Eskom and the water boards.

“This flies in the face of increasing demands for municipalities to meet the increasing demands of water and sanitation, and to cater for the most vulnerable people, some of whom are homeless. Most significantly, this has affected the credit rate of the municipalities and has affected the cost of borrowing for them from the banks,” Mr Tau explained.

The South African Local Government Association has pointed out that municipalities are currently using their limited resources to intervene in arresting the impact of the pandemic on their communities. Municipalities’ expenditure patterns have shifted and

the stimulus package will therefore go a long way, Mr Tau continued, to assist municipalities in this distressful period.

Mr Tau told the committee that his presentation to them was a draft document for the purpose of discussion on how best to manage the stimulus package. His department will continue to consult National Treasury and other stakeholders to ensure that the R20 billion stimulus package is put to good use.

He also singled out the critical role Members of Parliament can play in contributing ideas on how the stimulus package could be used. However, members of the committee were disappointed that the department had few of their own ideas on spending the R20 billion. They were also concerned to know if the department had any strategies in place to counter the long-standing record of financial mismanagement, ineptness and corruption in many municipalities to ensure that the R20 billion serves its intended purpose. In response, Mr Tau said: “We are considering the dispensing of the money to be done

monthly and this is a means to try to introduce controls and to immediately counter any mismanagement of the money by municipalities.”

The committee also wanted to know about any relief measures to assist families who cannot afford water, rates, electricity and other related payment obligations due to the lockdown. Mr Tau said the repurposing of municipal grants is intended to address areas of municipalities’ liquidity and cash flows and to respond to the challenges of unaffordability created by the pandemic.

The committee also wanted to know why it would take until August for the stimulus package to be approved. Committee members thought that more urgency was required, given the unusual circumstances created by the pandemic. Officials from the National Treasury, who were also in the meeting, told the committee that the R20 billion stimulus package has to be done through the Division of Revenue Bill, which is still before Parliament. This process allows for the review

of municipalities’ budgets, in order to allocate the stimulus package.

The committee asked the department to explain its turnaround strategy for the use of the R20 billion stimulus package, given the poor track record of certain municipalities on expenditure. In response to that, Mr Tau said the department will use a vulnerability index in accordance with the financial pressures that municipalities are faced with. He said when it comes to municipalities that lack capacity, the money will be channelled

through a different process of disbursement.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Faith Muthambi, said: “We are asking all these questions because we want to make sure that this money will be used for its intended purposes and not for other purposes.” She noted that in due course the department will provide the committee with a plan on how the R20 billion will be used. “We want this plan, because it will inform our oversight over this money,” emphasised Ms Muthambi. 🌱



Ms Faith Muthambi - Chairperson committee on COGTA

# Parliamentary 'virtual meetings save costs' - Public Service Commission

*The Standing Committee on Appropriations invited the Public Service Commission to outline its input on the current budget and the forthcoming adjusted budget to be tabled by the National Treasury in response to the unprecedented economic challenges posed by Covid-19. The committee's process of briefing and consultation is a prelude to the passing of the Appropriation Bill, writes Abel Mputing.*

The Public Service Commission (PSC) plays an important role in the appropriation of the budget because it is responsible for ensuring that there is effective management of public resources. It is also responsible for ensuring that there is value for money in the way in which public administration does its work.

Committee Members asked for the PSC's views on virtual interaction between departments and parliamentary committees as a potential cost-saving measure. PSC Commissioner, Ms Phumelele Nzimande, responded: "We need agility to make it possible to save resources that should be servicing our people. Virtual meetings should be the way to go in the future to save costs."

In its presentation on the Appropriation Bill to the Standing Committee on Appropriations recently, the PSC also highlighted procurement as a risk area for wastage and budget leakages. Ms Nzimande, alluded to the fact that the adjusted budget has to take into consideration amendments on the basis of a risk-based approach. Nonetheless, any further expenditure cuts would affect performance and service delivery. "Head cuts in public service is always an obvious target, but also we must not ignore the value chain associated with that."

Covid-19 is an opportunity for serious reflection at all levels on how to utilise the gains of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), Ms Nzimande added. "Our failure to deliver on it is now apparent. And if we don't take advantage of it, it will disadvantage the future generation and the efficiency of the public service. The government was enthusiastic about the opportunities of the 4IR. However, its (4IR) implementation has been slow. The government must ensure that this does not leave behind the very people it intends to serve."

She further mentioned that if 4IR is embedded in the operational strategies of the public sector, chaos related to the distribution of food parcels could be avoided. "Was the distribution of parcels efficient and effective? Was there value for money in how it was conducted? Could this have been done electronically?"

The inefficiencies in service delivery would have been a thing of the past had we embraced the 4IR as part of an operational strategy of the public sector. We would have gotten value for our money."

She also pointed out that the ever-increasing litigations against the government are untenable and pose a serious threat to the public purse. "Ethics and a high standard of professionalism are needed to curb underperformance. This is linked to the bigger concept of value for money concept." She warned that the stimulus package needed

an accounting framework that would curb wasteful expenditure and corruption. Asked by members of the committee as to which government programmes should be discontinued to free funds to respond to challenges posed by the pandemic, Ms Nzimande replied: "The non-payment of bonuses and freezing of wage increment are some of options that need to be explored."

Committee members also asked her about the lack of effective internal controls and the high cost of procurement. Her response was: "Where there is a lack of generic training for staff involved in this area in certain departments, training needs to be provided. Where there's an act of incompetency, those responsible for that should be held accountable."

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Sifiso Buthelezi, noted: "The cardinal impression I have, year in and year out, is that over-expenditure is indicative of poor project

management skills in various departments. Can such courses be offered as areas of demand in the Public Service School?" Mr Buthelezi queried whether this school provided value for money, and conceded: "We have to be honest. In public administration as a whole we have fallen short in effective training to ensure that public servants are fit for purpose."

There may be good schools of governance, Mr Buthelezi continued, "but in each government department there has to be a generic training unit that is responsive to the mandate of that department".

The continued non-payment of small businesses within 30 days, as stipulated in the regulations, irked Mr Buthelezi. "When we don't pay small businesses, we are breaking the back of the very notion of economic development of black businesses in this country." 



Mr Sifiso Buthelezi – Committee Chair



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# Speaker assures MPs of ‘virtual’ work capability during National Assembly’s Programme Committee meeting

*The National Assembly’s (NA’s) Programme Committee used its first virtual meeting to assess the effectiveness of working on virtual platforms, writes Abel Mputing.*

Mixed feelings were expressed by members of the committee on the newly adopted system. Some commended it for cutting excessive expenditure often incurred by departments when travelling to Cape Town to appear before the parliamentary committees. On the other hand, others complained about technical glitches the system has brought to bear on the oversight work of parliamentarians.

Ms Modise emphasised unequivocally that the administrators of committees need to be trained to be able to facilitate these meetings effectively to ensure that their businesses are run thoroughly, without any glitches. “This is an uncharted terrain and it forces us to embrace the notion of e-Parliament in a way that we have never imagined before, and we learn as we go.”

“Our commitment remains to ensure the work of committees is conducted without any compromise due to technological ineptness on our part.” Ms Modise went on to say that challenges with virtual platforms are also experienced by parliaments in other countries. Referring to the Zoom meeting app, she mentioned that the British parliament had also encountered glitches with it recently.

Some members of the committee urged the

Presiding Officers to investigate these problems, while others raised concerns about the quality of interaction emanating from the new system. They pointed out that often it is impossible to conduct these virtual meetings in a cordial manner.

Furthermore, there is an evasion of accountability in cases where questions are not fully answered by departments in virtual joint committee meetings. This, they argued, often defeats the purpose of Parliament to hold the executive accountable.

Members of the committee said the mandate of the chairpersons of committees is to ensure that there is quality interaction between the committee and the executive, and this “should not be done haphazardly, but in a structured manner to ensure that the quality of interaction in parliamentary meetings is not compromised in any way”. On the problem of presentations that reach members during committee meetings, Ms Modise stated that “no document of any interaction between the two parties should be presented for the first time in the committee meeting. If that is the case, one cannot expect to get a quality response from departments” as the question will also be compromised.

Significantly, she highlighted the need for committees to do their preparatory work more effectively. “Proper



**Ms Thandi Modise - Speaker of the National Assembly**

preparation of the committee meetings is more important ... It is of no use to be in a committee meeting not knowing what the department will be presenting on. That defeats the very mandate of our parliamentary work. These are matters that the chairpersons of committees are expected to guard against, to enable the committee to get to the gist of things, rather than glossing over them.”

Reflecting on the need to improve the technical skills of parliamentary staff in conducting virtual committee meetings, Ms Modise mentioned that “we should be worried about information and communications technology (ICT), not the preparatory work of committees”.

Ms Modise called upon MPs

to get used to electronic means of doing their work and assured members of the Programme Committee that she, as well as the Acting Secretary to Parliament, the Secretary to the National Assembly, and the Secretary to the National Council of Provinces will work with the ICT department to ensure that the system is strengthened.

Ms Modise told the committee that she will ensure that in future there is an ICT person dedicated to each committee meeting to ensure their success. “We apologise for any shoddy work that has been experienced to date that affected the work of committees. We take full responsibility for that and we will ensure that that won’t happen again in the future.” 🌱



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**“OUR COMMITMENT REMAINS TO ENSURE THE WORK OF COMMITTEES IS CONDUCTED WITHOUT ANY COMPROMISE DUE TO TECHNOLOGICAL INEPTNESS ON OUR PART.”**

▀ MS THANDIE MODISE

# NA Programme Committee members express excitement on success of hybrid session

*Members of the National Assembly's Programme Committee expressed general excitement but also raised some concerns when they reflected on the first hybrid sitting of the National Assembly (NA) which took place recently for oral questions to the Ministers in the social services and governance departmental clusters, writes Mava Lukani.*

The departments making up the clusters are Basic Education; Health; Higher Education, Science and Technology; Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation; Social Development; Sport, Arts and Culture; Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs; the Ministry in the Presidency; Public Service and Administration; and Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

The hybrid sitting consisted of some members of the NA physically present in the chamber while most participated via a video platform. The sitting was attended by 297 Members of Parliament (MPs) – 250 of them participated through the virtual platform, and 47 were in the National Assembly (NA) Chamber in Cape Town. The questions to the Ministers related to the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The NA's House Chairperson responsible for committees, Mr Cedric Frolick, said members' attendance in the sitting's question and answer session was high, when compared to pre-Covid-19 sittings.

Members appreciated the manner in which the Presiding Officers of the NA handled the session, despite the difficulties arising from the fact that members were not under one roof and it was the first time that such a session was undertaken. The success of the session was

also attributed to the full and genuine cooperation between all the parties represented in the NA.

On technical glitches that caused stoppages here and there, members advised that they must be trained on things like handling microphones and cameras, and that IT technicians must be allocated to provide support to a certain number of members in each session. Members also called for the table staff to improve its assistance to the Presiding Officers. Asked to comment on that, the Secretary to the NA, Mr Masibulele Xaso, said a report on yesterday's session will be given to the members of the committee, and he will comment after the report has been discussed by members. Members suggested that, going forward, a hybrid session must be presided over by two Presiding Officers, one for members in the House, and the other for members who participate via the virtual platform. They said an enquiry must be made to the relevant scientists on wearing of a mask for more than three hours.

They said it was exciting to see the NA able to do its business through a hybrid session, a step that was unimaginable in the recent past. According to them, Covid-19 has shown that Parliament is ready to conduct its business electronically and that South Africa is ready to cross the Rubicon from the "old to the new normal".

Sittings of the Houses of Parliament are always screened on Parliament's TV

(DStv Channel 408) but that sitting, according to Mr Frolick, attracted a lot of attention from members of the public and MPs were called upon to ensure that their behaviour during hybrid sittings of the House promotes a good image of Parliament. "We must be driven by that reality of promoting the image of Parliament in whatever we do. It's not the image of a party that is going to be affected, but of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa," said one participant in today's programming meeting.

Another suggestion from members to improve participation in a hybrid session included the use of one podium, the one in front of the Speaker in the NA for members that are in the House, instead of members using microphones fitted on their tables.

Some members complained

about the poor answers provided by certain ministers. They suggested that to deal with this problem the NA should hold sessions for questions to ministers in Tshwane, where ministers will appear physically before the members of the NA.

The Speaker of the NA and Chairperson of the NA Programme Committee, Ms Thandi Modise, urged members to always keep the rules of the House in mind when they participate. She said she noted yesterday that a lack of adherence to NA rules affected the quality of the session. She said members must not make unnecessary interjections when a Minister is responding to a question. "When I apply the rules, I'm not chastising anybody. Always ensure that you talk when you are recognised," she said. 🇿🇦



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## ‘We must soldier on until we emerge, triumphantly’ - Masondo on Covid-19

*In his opening address to the first virtual programme committee meeting of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), the NCOP Chairperson, Mr Amos Masondo, called on all South Africans to soldier on until it emerges triumphantly, writes Abel Mputing.*

“We will prove to be stronger, because throughout history humankind has survived plagues. This will also come to pass. We should remain strong, hopeful and united as a nation and observe all the required rules and regulations as stipulated,” said Mr Masondo.

After these stirring words, Mr Masondo got down to business. He mentioned various matters related to the NCOP’s administration of committees and oversight obligations in its second parliamentary programme. In addition, it was noted that the joint committee meetings between the NCOP and National Assembly (NA) often clash, leaving the NCOP with no option but to miss some meetings. The problem affects a small number of NCOP members who serve on cluster committees, rather than individual committees, as is the case in the NA.

The House Chair of the NCOP, Mr Jomo Nyambi, reporting on how committees have fared with virtual meeting said:

“Many of them went well, without any major disruptions, and there were no security threats reported.” He assured members that Parliament was “ready to defuse such if they ever arise.”

There was, however, a common view that joint committee meetings between the NCOP and NA need to be synchronised better. There was also a view that the NA and NCOP committee Chairs should be seen as equals and not allow the former to be seen as having undue prominence over the NCOP.

The NCOP planned to host the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) and the Department of Health respectively, to interrogate and assess the impact of their interventions and responses to Covid-19. “These presentations will give the NCOP members an opportunity to interact with the ministers, and they will be allowed to have a thorough discussion with them to assess

their respective responses to the Covid-19 pandemic,” says the Chief Whip of the NCOP, Mr Seiso Mohai.

NCOP member Ms Cathleen Lubuschagne registered an opposing view that NCOP members cannot exercise effective oversight over these Ministers because the rules and regulations of lockdown were never presented to the NCOP before they came into effect. “If we need real accountability, the rules should have been tabled before Parliament. Whatever they are going to tell us cannot be contested because it is now law.”

Mr Mohai interjected: “If we understand the architecture of the NCOP well, we are not acting on our own. If ministers come before us, they must be held accountable. And I am of the view that there are elements in their presentations that will enrich and capacitate our understand of the scope of their work, and how to use that to hold them accountable as members of the NCOP.”



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# NCOP meets deadline of passing 2020 Division of Revenue Bill

*The National Council of Provinces (NCOP) held its first virtual plenary recently to approve the 2020 Division of Revenue Bill; the ratification of two SA treaties with Bangladesh; the provisional suspension of a Pretoria chief magistrate; and the removal of a Johannesburg magistrate.*

The 2020 Division of Revenue Bill provides for an equitable division of funds raised nationally among the national, provincial and local spheres of government, and also enable allocation of funds to fight Covid-19. The Bill also provides for determining each province's equitable share of revenue and for any other allocations to provinces, local government or municipalities from the national government's share of the revenue. Also specified are the conditions of those allocations. The Select Committee on Appropriations recommended that the NCOP agree to the Bill without amendments and the House agreed.

The plenary of the NCOP also considered and adopted two reports of the Select Committee on Security and Justice, which recommended the removal of an additional magistrate from Johannesburg and the provisional suspension of a Pretoria Chief Magistrate.

Having considered the report, tabled by the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services on 27 November 2019 on the suspension from office of Ms I Meyburgh, according to section 13(4) (b) of the Magistrates Act, 1993 (Act No. 90 of 1993), the committee recommended that the NCOP resolves not to restore Ms Meyburgh to the office as Magistrate. The House adopted the committee's recommendation.

On 25 February 2020, the Minister of Justice also tabled a report informing the NCOP of the provisional suspension from office of the Chief Magistrate of Pretoria, Mr Desmond Nair, pending the outcome of an investigation into his fitness to hold the office as Magistrate as required by section 13(3) (b) of the Magistrates Act. Having considered the report from the Minister the Select committee on Security and Justice recommended that the NCOP confirm Mr Nair's provisional suspension from the office of Magistrate. During the plenary the House confirmed Mr. Nair's provisional suspension.

The NCOP plenary also ratified two treaties between the Government of the Republic of South Africa and the Government of the Republic of Bangladesh, as required by section 231(2) of the Constitution, 1996, which states that "an international agreement binds the Republic only after it has been approved by resolution in both the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces". The NCOP assigned the Select Committee on Security and Justice to consider the two requests, tabled on 11 March 2020, that Parliament approves the ratification of the Extradition Treaty (and the Explanatory Memorandum to the Treaty) and the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters (and the Explanatory Memorandum to the Treaty) between the

two governments. Having considered the requests, the committee recommended that the House approves the ratification of both Treaties in terms of section 231(2) of the Constitution.



# Parliament playing its part to prevent the abuse of women and children during lockdown

*The Ministers of the Departments of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities; Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs; Basic Education; and Health appeared before the Members of the National Assembly (NA) to answer questions to determine the effectiveness of their departments' responses to challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, writes Abel Mputing.*

Questions to the Minister of Women in the Presidency, Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, included a question on whether her department was considering any measures during the lockdown to ensure that women do not fall victim to gender-based violence. In response to that, Ms Nkoana-Mashabane said they work with women who go door to door in the communities to assist vulnerable women to report cases of abuse. The department started doing this when her department realised that some of the lockdown regulations inadvertently subjected women to abuse.

Ms Nkoana-Mashabane was also asked to elaborate on what her department is doing to inform the victims of gender-based violence about the assistance available to them to improve their plight. She said that, apart from the publication of the regulations, the department uses various forms of communication, including radio, to communicate with the public in their languages to explain the department's interventions to curb gender-based violence. "We also have a command centre where we share resources with the Department of Social Development as a means to alleviate their plight," she explained.

The lockdown has also contributed to a rise in hunger

and poverty. In response to a question about how many women have been assisted by the department to combat this, Ms Nkoana-Mashabane explained that her department is working with other departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). "As of last week, we donated valuable goods to women who are victims of gender-based violence. Women in distress need more than food. We also assisted them with emotional and moral support. We have since formed a council that includes NGOs, the South African Police Service, and the departments of Justice, Public Service and Social Development to come up with a coordinated intervention to fight this scourge."

Questions to the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, included one on how the department intends to mitigate possible civil claims

against local authorities who wrongly prevented businesses from obtaining permits to operate.

"There are clear guidelines of what kind of businesses will be allowed to operate in which stage of a lockdown," she responded. "These are gazetted regulations. If there was a confusion regarding that, please bring it to the relevant authorities. It's the first time we experience this situation. If there are problems, they must be brought to our attention."

She was also asked about the High Court ruling against municipalities that may be introducing their own permitting systems for NGOs and businesses distributing food to communities during the pandemic. Ms Dlamini-Zuma was asked if the court order has been brought to the relevant municipalities. She responded that this responsibility does not reside with her department.



**Ms Maite Nkoana -Mashabane - Minister in the Presidency**

However, if there are such occurrences and court rulings, the department would bring them to the relevant municipalities' attention.

To Dr Zweli Mkhize, the Minister of Health, questions focused on the modelling and data regime used in his department to determine responses to the pandemic. "There are optimistic and pessimistic models that we use," the Minister responded. "They are not all cast in stone. They are guides on how to deal with various scenarios. Generally speaking, different models have different projections. These projections are being challenged and are open for debate. We look at them to get a sense of the problem at hand and to take aspects we think are significant, but we believe that the models' accuracy will improve as time goes by."

On the question of increasing the rate of testing for

coronavirus, Dr Mkhize said a protracted protocol governs diagnostic testing equipment. "This involves their licensing and validation, but the current lack of diagnostic equipment is a global problem. This equipment is critical in assessing the rate of positivity. Lack of internal capacity to manufacture our own diagnostic equipment is something we must as a country start focusing on." On what his department intends to do to curb the spike of infections in hotspots around the country, he said full-time teams of health experts have been sent to these hotspots, accompanied by the deployment of Cuban doctors. "Twenty-eight of them will be deployed in the Western Cape. They will be focusing on the eight zones currently identified in the Western Cape and they have been seamlessly integrated there now." 🇿🇦



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— MS MAITE NKOANA-MASHABANE



# Reviewing the 1994 Women's Charter

*Parliament is engaged in a programme to gather information about the plight of women in every district across the country as part of an ongoing process to review the Women's Charter, writes Sakhile Mokoena.*



*This was the announcement made by the Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), Ms Sylvia Lucas, in a video conferencing engagement on the Women's Charter Review in the ZF Mgcawu District Municipality in the Northern Cape.*

"2019 marked 25 years since the adoption of the 1994 Women's Charter for Effective Equality. This milestone necessitated a 25-year review of the entire women's rights regime, in order to

take stock of and assess the achievements garnered since 1994. The objective was also to critically assess the systemic weaknesses that continue to impede the realisation of gender equality in South Africa," she said.

The Deputy Chairperson said 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the year was earmarked to be a ground-breaking one for gender equality. However, with the outbreak of Covid-19, even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being eroded. Instead, said Ms Lucas, the pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities and exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems that continue to amplify the impact of the pandemic on women.

"Across every sphere," Ms Lucas continued, "from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impact of Covid-19 is acutely

exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their gender."

In the coming months to mitigate the pandemic's effects on women, Parliament will be criss-crossing the country, district by district, gathering information on the very specific challenges that women are facing in each district and locality. "We will also seek to find ways of turning theory into practice and to change gender relations for the better. We will do this by embarking on a robust review process of the Women's Charter, which will be underpinned by a strong law reform element.

"While we identify the daily structural barriers to gender equality. We will also focus on reviewing the policies and legislation currently in place, with the aim of identifying gaps in legislation for amendment," Ms Lucas explained.

Other participants in the virtual summit included

the Statistician-General, Mr Risenga Maluleke; the Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Prof Hlengiwe Mkhize; the Mayor of ZF Mgcawu; as well as legislators, councillors and members of civil society.

Deputy Minister Mkhize said the process of reviewing the Women's Charter was an opportunity to reflect on how far the country has come in implementing the commitments made in Beijing 25 years ago, and to also look at new commitments. She spoke strongly against sexual harassment in the workplace, places of worship, and at home, and other violations like rape and femicide, saying these further stifle progress that women make to move forward to be respected in society.

"If we want to tackle poverty, women have to be at the centre. Also our cultural practices such as ukuthwala (a forced or arranged marriage) should not be holy cows. They

must be questioned. They force young girls to leave school early and become perpetually dependent on abusers," the Deputy Minister argued. She also said since the Women's Charter of 1994, there was a need to take a careful look at the national gender machinery, which seeks to end all forms or gender inequalities in South Africa. 🌐



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**"IF WE WANT TO TACKLE POVERTY, WOMEN HAVE TO BE AT THE CENTRE."**

■ MS SYLVIA LUCAS

# Africa Day: Parliaments must help silence the guns on the Continent



Prof Adekeye Adebajo

*The keynote address at an Africa Day lecture hosted by Parliament on the theme Silencing the Guns: creating conditions for Africa's development to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa, was given by Prof Adekeye Adebajo, the Director of the Institute of Pan-African Thought and Conversation, based at the University of Johannesburg. He provided a contextual overview of Africa's quest to bring about peaceful and democratic transitions in its nation states, writes Abel Mputing.*

In his opening remarks, Prof Adebajo claimed that "African ancestors are angry because things are not working. Institutions are decaying, a situation that is tantamount to Chinua Achebe's 'things fall apart' metaphor." Part of the responsibility for this lies with the devastating effect of slavery and colonialism, which "have ravaged the continent's future and plunged it into an endless quagmire of instability".

He continued: "This is a legacy that goes back to the Berlin Conference [held from 15 November 1884 to 26 February 1885] that justified slavery and colonialism. This event allowed European powers to impose their own governance systems, which politicised the demarcation of African borders, which in turn has resulted in the loss of millions of Africans defending these artificial borders."

Citing the late Kenyan-born academic Prof Ali Mazrui's haunting question, "who will keep peace in Africa now that the Europeans have left?", Prof Adebajo lamented that the African Union (AU) "still acts like a military guinea pig... without the necessary logistics and financial muscle to

undertake its peace-keeping role".

According to Prof Adebajo South Africa's importance in southern Africa cannot be discounted and its "energetic role in peace-making cannot be overlooked." After its first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa was no longer a destabilising force, but rather a country that played a huge role in peace-keeping missions in Africa. "It should be noted that [former President] Thabo Mbeki played a significant role in this regard in countries such as Burundi, Zimbabwe and Lesotho."

Mr Mbeki's peace-making missions were historically inspired by the ideology of Dr Kwame Nkrumah [the late first Prime Minister and President of Ghana], who advocated "for the establishment of an African High Command Force that would be charged with keeping external forces from interfering in African military affairs".

Although this ideal has not come to fruition, regional military entities emerged to broker peace in regional conflicts to foster peace and stability with relative success. While South Africa was heeding a call for African

peace-making missions in Africa, Prof Adebajo said: "Nigeria, an economic superpower, was not living up to expectations. It was instead plagued by its own internal conflicts, and this has brought about doubts whether Nigeria could really be a force of stability or instability."

In addition, the ongoing instability in the Great Lakes region, characterised by the long-running wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is an indication of Africa's failure in its noble quest to "silence the guns" as a precursor to peace and political stability. "The DRC, with all its riches, has been infested by genocide, based on Belgium's social engineering. The 20 000 United Nations (UN) Forces there has observed the slaughter of DRC's civilians rather than stopped it," he commented.

"So bad are conditions in Africa that many Africans, especially the youth, spare no effort to traverse the treacherous seas to reach Europe in search of a better life," he added.

He commended South Africa's role in inserting the African

agenda on the UN Security Council's agenda. "The focus that South Africa brought on the plight of the people of Congo has shown its resolve in upholding the African agenda at all cost in this UN organ." Nonetheless, he decried the fact that most "African military resolutions in this UN organ are still being drafted by Britain and France". These countries, in his view, are no longer superpowers.

"Nonetheless, South Africa has brought the agenda to silence the guns to the centre of the implementation of peace-keeping missions in war-torn Africa," he said. One of President Cyril Ramaphosa's successes as the chair of the council "was to deal with the marginalisation of the AU in peace-keeping missions in Africa in the UN Security Council".

He also commended the South African Parliament's mission to ensure that the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum "has a peace and security mandate to help to silence the guns". The AU's failures to achieve this cause should be recorded, but its progress should also be noted. "Currently, the AU has had

interventions that brought stability and that uprooted unconstitutional replacements of governments. Under its stewardship there are now more regular democratic elections, and there is now a rotation of ruling parties, this is an indication of political tolerance and democratic maturity in Africa by and large." 🌍



**PARLIAMENT**  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**"WHO WILL KEEP  
PEACE IN AFRICA  
NOW THAT THE  
EUROPEANS HAVE  
LEFT?"**

— PROF ADEKEYE ADEBAJO

# ‘Let’s promote and defend a common African position’ - With these words, the NCOP Chairperson marks Africa Day

*The Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), Mr Amos Masondo, responded to the Africa Day keynote address delivered by Prof Adekeye Adebajo and hosted by Parliament. Speaking on the topic “Galvanising Pan-African unity to realise the African agenda”, Mr Masondo stated that the quest for an African identity and emancipation from colonialism, racial exploitation and social ills is at the centre of the African Union’s (AU’s) programme of action. “The AU strives for continental unity to fight against all forms of exploitation, inequality and its related attributes.” **Abel Mputing reports.***

However, unity among African countries to achieve political emancipation, cooperation and a better life for all Africans is also one of the AU’s primary objectives, he commented. The launch of the AU in 2002 was “a blueprint for the expression of the African agenda, which later culminated in the inception of Agenda 2063”.

For the first time in history, African states agreed in principle on the need to “accelerate economic integration, promote and defend African common position, peace and security and democratic principles and institutions”. The formation of the AU heralded the continent’s appetite “to play an active role in the global economy, but also to establish instruments that would

advance good governance such as the African Peer Review Mechanism”, Mr Masondo explained. This was a determination on the part of Africa to be proactive even in its marginality, and asserts its relevance in global affairs.

The AU also sought to champion African identity by promoting African languages as economic tools, rather than peripheral mediums of socialisation. “At the centre of this quest is the promotion of African historical and cultural heritage and to offset foreign languages as mediums of Africa’s economic and intellectual activity, the result of which is the establishment of the African Museum Project,” he said.

All these advances are integral

to the AU’s 2063 Agenda, which serves as a “strategic planning instrument for the development of Africa – and for repositioning Africa as a significant player in global affairs,” Mr Masondo continued.

These important interventions will galvanise African unity and form part of the AU’s tangible contribution to what the continent wants to achieve in accelerating Africa’s economic growth. Mr Masondo concluded by stating that the Pan-African Parliament has been instrumental in initiating discussions on how to conduct oversight over the AU’s resolutions, and how it can contribute to resolving the challenges facing Africa today. 🌍

## Covid-19 lockdown will negatively impact government plans and budgets for 2020

*Reduced economic activity due to the national lockdown, implemented to curb the spread of Covid-19, has resulted in a huge decline in revenue collection. This will inevitably affect budgeting and funding of government programmes, **writes Sakhile Mokoena.***

The Minister of Finance, Mr Tito Mboweni, revealed this to a joint video conference meeting of the Standing Committee on Finance and the Select Committee on Finance. The National Treasury and the South African Revenue Service appeared before the committees to brief them on their strategic plans and budgets.

“This is a very difficult time and we need to sharpen

our minds in finding solutions to lift us from the crisis. The biggest challenge has been the lack of revenue collection, due to reduced economic activity, and this will affect our plans to fund government programmes,” said the Finance Minister.

Responding to a question on whether he will push for the reopening of more industries in order to get the economy back on track, Mr Mboweni said, “The quicker we get to



Mr Amos Masondo, NCOP Chairperson

level two the better, but we must not be reckless. We need to find a balance between the economy and the health of the people.”

The Chairperson of the Select Committee on Finance, Mr Yunus Carrim, questioned the Minister on whether it was reasonable to “restrict the tender for the procurement of masks to only small businesses, given the fact that the small business sector can only produce 45 000 masks”.

Mr Dondo Mogajane, the Director-General (DG) of the National Treasury, played down the claims that the tender was restricted to small businesses only. “We are very clear in terms of the instructions that we issued. It is important that small businesses should play a role in our economy and we should

encourage them to flourish. Institutions and government are encouraged to buy from small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs). We understand that the demand is very high. For instance, the Department of Education will order millions of masks. Suppliers can register on its database,” the DG said.

Mr Mboweni also dismissed the claims that the tender for masks was restricted to small businesses, saying there should be no impression given that the government is excluding large companies from the procurement of health gear. He also added: “The notion that masks are only going to be bought by government is wrong. That notion must be discarded. People who can afford must buy their own masks, and I think we must support all

enterprises.”

Members of Parliament also asked about progress on the establishment of the State Bank and the Sovereign Wealth Fund, plans which were announced in the Budget Speech in February. Mr Mboweni explained, that although the situation had changed since February, “we remain committed to the establishment of the State Bank and the Sovereign Wealth Fund. However, our financial position is not good and our ability to capitalise the State Bank remains challenged.”

South Africans will only know which government programmes will be prioritised when the National Treasury presents the supplementary budget in the next few months. 🇿🇦



Mr Tito Mboweni

## Working remotely a new normal – Q&A

*Working remotely is now the “new normal”. Insession writer, Mava Lukani talked to the Secretary to the National Council of Provinces, Adv Modibedi Phindela about the challenges and opportunities it presents.*



Adv Eric Phindela - Secretary to the NCOP

### What are the technical challenges that come with working remotely?

Working remotely was always going to present some problems taking into consideration that Parliament has never attempted it before. We have always depended on the physical presence of the Members and employees in the precincts to transact the business of Parliament. It appears that, although it entered our minds, working virtually had been a far-fetched possibility until the world was hit by the current pandemic.

We have never taken time to orientate Members and employees on the possible virtual platforms that can be used to conduct for instance,

virtual committee meetings or sittings, in the event that Parliament was faced with a national disaster. As such, operating virtually is a new experience to both Members and employees.

### What about legal and procedural issues in working remotely?

We designed Rules of Virtual Meetings and Sittings, which are intended to deal with both the legal and procedural aspects of virtual meetings and sittings, and to complement the existing Rules. The Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces is authorised to fashion rules for an eventuality not foreseen by the Rules.

### Parliament provides

### translation and sign language services to members and citizens. What are the multilingual sign language tools that Parliament is using for interpretation and assistance to deaf people?

Since the current situation is unprecedented, we are still in the process of exploring several possibilities in relation to the interpretation of proceedings of committees and Houses. The current platforms do not seem to be fully equipped to cater for the diverse languages of South Africa. One must also bear in mind that these platforms have not been designed for parliamentary proceedings and processes. However, I am sure we will reach the desired destination as we proceed.

### Public participation electronically and via Parliament TV Channel 408 is limited under these conditions, as Channel 408 broadcasts one meeting at a time and the majority of citizens don't have access to DStv. What is your comment on that?

Facilitation of public involvement is a constitutional injunction. Parliament has different platforms through which the public can follow its proceeding and participate in its processes and those of its committees. Channel 408 is but one of them.

### Have programme committees taken a position on House sittings, especially for questions to the executive and other priority

### issues such as legislation and the budget?

Other than that Parliament is operating virtually, nothing has really changed in its programmes. Sittings and committee meetings continue as programmed by the programming committees. To date, committees of the two Houses have had more than 100 meetings combined. The National Council of Provinces will have a sitting to finalise both the Division of Revenue Bill and the Appropriation Bill. The National Assembly will also continue with questions session and a sitting to finalise the Appropriation Bill.

### How will the Mace and Black Rod be managed under these circumstances?

Considering that we are operating virtually, technology should be able to deal with those issues. It should be possible to display the Mace or the Rod to symbolise the Sitting of the House irrespective of where a Presiding Officer is located. In terms of the Rules of Virtual Meetings and Sittings, the venue of a sitting is deemed to be in the chamber in Cape Town.

**Rules on virtual meetings are clear about voting in meetings. Are there any challenges with this?**

Members will cast their votes like they normally do in the ordinary course of events. Where the platform allows for electronic voting, they will cast their votes electronically. Where the platform doesn't allow for that, Members will cast voice votes.

**The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) is assisting parliaments throughout the world. Have you received any assistance or guidance from the IPU?**

All parliaments around the world are faced with a similar situation of either operating fully virtually, partially virtually or not operating at all. Since the lockdown, our Parliament has been operating fully virtually.

There are of course other permutations that are in the offing and we can learn from other parliaments. We continue to consult with the provincial legislatures, other parliaments as well as other parliamentary institutions like the IPU and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association from which we can learn. Considering that this situation is not going to end tomorrow, I am sure there will be a lot of developments in this area.

**What do these developments tell us about the future of parliamentary business in this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)?**

When one spoke of virtual sittings and virtual committee meeting in not so a distant past, that sounded like a dream that could not be realised. It seemed impossible. I am in fact happy that the sittings and committee meetings are materialising under these different circumstances. This is the reality today and in the immediate future. We have slowly but surely adapted to doing business differently without departing from the constitutional obligations of Parliament.

The thought that we could have just sat back and said we will wait for the virus to run its course is frightening. Instead, both Members of Parliament and employees have adapted and forged ahead with the business of Parliament. I hope that we do not revert to the old way of doing things once the situation stabilises and we return to office. We must accept that this is going to be, as they put it, "a new normal".

It gives us an opportunity to revisit our systems, process, facilities and where money is allocated. For instance, more money may have to be allocated to mobile electronic equipment, data and connectivity instead of to travelling, accommodation and paper. A new policy framework may be required to regulate working from home.

While Members may continue to conduct physical site visits, Parliament may continue to have virtual sittings without Members returning to Cape Town every week.

It may be that not everybody need work from the office, even if this situation changes. It may well be that there is no need for the number of offices that are currently in existence. Even if there may be a need for office space, it may not necessarily be in the current configuration. It may be that it is only a working space rather than an office that is required

for certain categories of employees. The circumstances under which we are currently operating proves this point.

What it means is that

Parliament must invest in technology and modernisation to meet the needs of virtual operations. I hope that this situation expedites the migration to a modern

Parliament with technology as an enabler. 🌐

# Parliament repositions itself to carry on with its mandate under lockdown conditions

*Undoubtedly, Parliament's capacity to continue functioning during the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic tested its tenacity to uphold its constitutional mandate of holding the executive accountable, and continue unshaken in upholding its principle of being a people's Parliament, writes Abel Mputing.*



The declaration of the National State of Disaster by President Cyril Ramaphosa caught everyone off guard, including Parliament. It had to figure out, at a lightning speed, how to balance the dictates of the National Disaster Act while exercising its legislative and oversight mandate over the executive. It soon became obvious that Parliament was thrown head first into the eye of a storm.

A situation that called for innovative thinking that involved the harnessing of technology to restore its constitutional mandate under very trying and abnormal conditions. This was done to quell the growing perception at the time that Parliament has summarily delegated its legislative mandate to the

executive. Many decried that Parliament's inactivity at the time had unduly surrendered the checks and balances that govern the prescripts of the separation of powers as mandated by our Constitution. This perceived legislative and oversight void created a swelling discontent and murmurs of the rise of an autocratic state were also gaining ground.

But that was not the case, as Presiding Officers (POs) explained in their media statement during their first media briefing during level five of the lockdown. They offered a plausible explanation: "During the outbreak of this pandemic, Parliament did not want to be seen as interfering with the

responsibility of the executive to implement measures for which the National State of Disaster has been declared. It remains the responsibility of the executive to deliver much-needed services to save the lives of individuals."

However, it had to find a balancing act between that and the declaration that "Parliament is an essential service, in terms of the lockdown regulations, and has the authority to execute its oversight functions during a lockdown or social distancing period".

At first it was thought that this could be done through, for example, individual MPs (Members of Parliament) carrying out constituency work in various communities

and holding the executive accountable for implementing measures designed to overcome the state of disaster. The view at the time was that the responsibility to conduct oversight was not limited to committee meetings.

In March, Parliament took a decision to suspend the programme of its two Houses. The decision was taken a few days before the start of the constituency programme of Parliament. The POs added: "It was as a precautionary measure relating to Covid-19, to drastically limit the numbers of people at the parliamentary precinct in Cape Town and at the off-site parliamentary activities."

But it soon turned out that committee meetings and plenaries are the most effective ways of holding the executive accountable, especially when one considers the far-reaching decisions that the executive had to take on an almost daily basis to arrest the spread of the pandemic. Constituency oversight mechanisms appeared insufficient for the task at hand.

New innovative ways had to be found that would enable Parliament to undertake its constitutional responsibility within the prescripts of the lockdown rules and regulations. This led to the inception of virtual Parliament. The media statement of the POs expatiated on that. "Parliament is exploring effective means of conducting virtual Parliament work, in case the need for social distancing in the country takes longer. Currently, virtual parliamentary committee meetings are possible."

The aim was to ensure that "committee observations, including their interventions, will be kept on record and followed up where appropriate. And Parliament will still, after this period, be able to hold the executive accountable, in the usual ways, over how it executed the State of National Disaster."

According to the POs, a number of virtual meetings took place where innovative discussions took place on how Parliament should carry on with its business remotely. Those meetings included meetings of the POs, forums of party chief whips of the NA (National Assembly), the NCOP's (National Council of Provinces') chief whip and provincial whips, and the Speakers' Forum.

Those meetings considered an amended framework for administering the business of oversight committees and plenary sittings, as well as an adjusted programme for the lockdown period ahead.

The POs assessed how Parliament could best resume its business, and benchmark best practices by other legislatures around the world in the fight against Covid-19.

They said: "For Parliament, there has never been a more important time to work in an extraordinary manner and intensify our technological capabilities for our transition to an e-Parliament and to ensure that the execution of our constitutional responsibilities continues uninterrupted."

Necessary information and communication technologies were put in place, enabling parliamentarians to connect to the virtual meetings of oversight committees and other parliamentary structures from their homes, spread across the country.

After Parliament had set up the technological infrastructure for virtual meetings, virtual sittings of committees ensued. After the POs announced the resumption of the business of Parliament under virtual conditions in April, the teleconference of the Portfolio Committee on Health where the committee was briefed by the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize and Prof Salim Abdool-Karim of the National

Command Council on Covid-19, on the latest developments relating to Covid-19, marked the beginning and a forerunner of virtual meetings. Parliament has had well more than 200 virtual meetings of its oversight committees, a significant milestone which demonstrates the resilience, tenacity and agility of the national legislature's systems to fulfil its constitutional obligations even under difficult conditions.

In those virtual meetings, committees have conducted effective oversight over the departments of government and their entities, particularly on their response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Asked about whether joint virtual meetings allow both members of the NA and NCOP to exercise oversight properly as they don't have the same mandates, the House Chairperson of the NCOP responsible for committees, Mr Jomo Nyambi, said: "The mandates of both the NA and NCOP are indeed distinct, but the story does not end there. The analysis becomes complete and instructive when we add that these mandates are interdependent. What happens in the joint virtual meetings is that each committee is able to take from the Minister what is relevant to it, and no single committee gets prejudiced by that arrangement."

Furthermore, Mr Nyambi said: "This frees time for Ministers to get along with the business of leading the charge in the fight against Covid-19 and any other business as per their mandate. Members of Parliament in general also benefit from the aforesaid arrangement as time becomes available for them also to concentrate on such other matters as may be required of them. This includes Members' training, law-making and constituency work."

He said the story of the NA and NCOP with their distinct and yet complementary mandates needs to be repackaged for clarity: "Members of society do not, honestly, care about these distinctions. All they see are Members of Parliament who should be responsive and amenable to the needs of communities," said Mr Nyambi.

In its first virtual plenary, the NCOP was briefed by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and the Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize on Covid-19's impact and how government measures to curb its spread are being implemented across the three spheres of government.

In its second virtual sitting, the NCOP approved the 2020 Division of Revenue Bill which was tabled by the Minister of Finance in February when he delivered the 2020 Budget Speech.

According to the POs, because of its technological infrastructure, Parliament is at a much better position to ensure that even under virtual conditions, Parliament's constitutional obligations towards the public, of openness, transparency and public involvement – though changed drastically – remained uncompromised during this period of a national lockdown.

All virtual meetings continue to be open to the media

and the public, and are broadcast on a wide range of platforms which include the Parliament TV Channel, regional TV stations, streaming on YouTube channels, social media and community radio stations.

The NA also held a successful hybrid sitting where governance and social services clusters appeared before the members of the NA for questions and answers. The departments making up the clusters are Basic Education; Health; Higher Education; Science and Technology; Human Settlements; Water and Sanitation; Social Development; Sport, Arts and Culture; Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs; the Ministry in the Presidency; Public Service and Administration; and Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

The hybrid sitting consisted of members of the NA physically present in the Chamber and others who participated via a video platform. The sitting was attended by 297 MPs – 250 of them participated through the virtual platform, and 47 were in the NA Chamber in Cape Town. The questions to the Ministers related to the government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Reflecting on the first hybrid sitting of the NA in a Programme Committee meeting of the NA, the NA's House Chairperson responsible for committees, Mr Cedric Frolick, said members' attendance in the sitting's question and answer session was high, when compared to pre-Covid-19 sittings.

The transition to virtual Parliament has not been without its own challenges. This was always expected because Parliament was delving into an uncharted terrain. But the shortcomings that have been experienced thus far have not by no means outweighed the good that has been achieved through virtual platforms.



Most importantly, according to the POs, the glitches are not unique to the South African Parliament. They said the challenges of poor connectivity and unsuitable use of online video platforms are not dissimilar to those experienced by other parliaments throughout the world.

In its second hybrid session recently, the NA passed the Appropriation Bill as required by section 213 of the Constitution and section 26 of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA). The plenary also considered the Bill's accompanying Votes and Schedules.

When passing the Bill, the two Houses of Parliament authorise the allocation of money from the National Revenue Fund to fund the state requirements for the 2020/21 financial year, while also prescribing conditions for spending the funds to be withdrawn for the financial year (before the commencement of the Appropriation Act) and to provide for matters incidental thereto.

To date, the rules of both Houses of Parliament have been amended to cater for the new virtual regime. "There are now amended rules to cater for virtual meetings, and procedures for the management of virtual meetings and guidelines for use of video conferencing platforms were created in preparation for the phasing in of the new communications technology that will be utilised to conduct parliamentary affairs in the foreseeable future.

In addition to that, a technological business case is being developed by parliamentary officials to garner cutting-edge technological wherewithal and know-how that would assist them in monitoring and evaluating the efficiencies and deficiencies of various virtual systems at its disposal,

in order to create a seamless operation that would be viable for the foreseeable future. 🌐



## Committees in brief

*Parliamentary committees held more than 190 virtual meetings in May. More than half of those meetings were joint meetings of portfolio and select committees. The month of May is traditionally budget voting month in the parliamentary calendar. Government departments and their entities presented their readjusted annual performance and strategic plans and budgets to meet the new Covid-19 realities before the parliamentary committees.*

Committees also heard of various government departments', government entities', municipalities' and non-governmental organisations' plans to mitigate the spread of Covid-19. Among the municipalities that presented plans to curb the spread of the coronavirus were the Covid-19 hotspot Metros: The Cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and eThekweni.

The Portfolio Committee on Employment and Labour; and the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, Economic Development, Small Business, Tourism, Employment and Labour held a joint virtual meeting to receive an update from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).

The UIF informed the committees on its performance during the lockdown period. The committees followed up on its commitment to monitor the UIF's implementation of the government's benefit scheme. This scheme is

made available to employers, through the UIF, in order to keep companies afloat while Covid-19-related lockdown regulations are in place.

The Portfolio Committee on Trade, Industry and Competition; together with the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, Economic Development, Small Business, Tourism, Employment and Labour were assured by the Minister of Economic Development that each and every step the government takes to open the economy is carefully considered.

The committees heard that the R500 billion Covid-19 stimulus package that was announced by the President is not elitist, as it includes the UIF, which is an "absolute lifesaver" for low-income workers.

The Chairpersons of committees commended the responsible and decisive manner in which the government is dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. "We know that the lives of our people come first and we will

be guided by this principle. At the same time, we recognise the difficulty in the balancing act of keeping our people safe and reopening the economy, as these are interlinked."

A joint meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Public Works and Infrastructure; and of the Select Committee on Transport, Public Service and Administration, Public Works and Infrastructure noted the responses of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) in relation to Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) beneficiaries, quarantine sites and the Beitbridge Border Fence Erection Project.

The committees are, however, of the view that the safety of EPWP beneficiaries may require attention with regards to personal protective equipment, as vulnerable people cannot be allowed to fall ill while working. The committees are also pleased with the instruction from the Minister of DPWI, Ms Patricia de Lille, that during the Covid-19 lockdown period,



all EPWP beneficiaries under contract should remain as beneficiaries, and that the beneficiaries would be able to draw from the UIF once their contracts expire.

The Minister informed the committees that she has requested the Auditor-General (AG) to assess whether the department complied with the Public Finance Management Act and the National Treasury emergency procurement regulations with

regards to the Beitbridge Border Fence Erection Project. The committees have been informed that the AG has requested more time to investigate the matter.

The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Ms Faith Muthambi, conveyed a message of appreciation to the Minister of the Department of Cooperative Governance (Cogta), Ms Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, for that department's "sterling" work on the drafting of regulations for the national lockdown and guiding the country on those regulations.

Ms Muthambi said: "Regrettably Minister, there was no opportunity for us as the committee to be consulted when the country moves to level three and that is a matter that concerns the whole committee. It doesn't put the committee in a better position to exercise its mandate."

Furthermore, Ms Muthambi told Minister Dlamini-Zuma that the committee is expected by Parliament and the people to have a meaningful and insightful contribution to the national lockdown regulations. "That is a justifiable expectation, because we are the custodians of the Disaster Management Act. Based on that, Parliament should be at the forefront during consultations for regulations," added Ms Muthambi.

A joint meeting of the Portfolio Committee on Social Development and the Select Committee on Health and Social Services has called for the Department of Social Development to partner with local community-based organisations, including faith-based organisations, in the coordination and distribution of food security programmes.

The committees recently met with various non-governmental organisations

involved in food distribution during the Covid-19 pandemic. The organisations included the Gift of the Givers, the Solidarity Fund, Food Forward South Africa and the South African Red Cross Society. The committees commended these organisations on their good work in distributing food to the needy.

The organisations all voiced a desire for better co-ordination between themselves and the department in relation to food distribution. The non-governmental organisations have called for the development of a multisector plan that will outline the roles of government and civil society as well as regulate their coordination.

The Portfolio Committee on Tourism; and the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, Economic Development, Small Business Development, Tourism, Employment and Labour were briefed by the Department of Tourism on its strategic and annual performance plans. The committees heard that tourism is the most affected sector due to the lockdown. Because of this, the committees appealed to the department that whilst the revised strategic and annual performance plans indicate that the target of 21 million tourist arrivals will still be reached by 2030, it needs to focus on the factors affecting job losses due to businesses in the tourism sector that are closed.

The committees told the department that in the meantime it must continue to work closely with the Department of Home Affairs to ensure that the world-class e-visa regimes continue to be developed in more countries and implemented. 🌐

