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STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND AGRICULTURE

Public hearings – a crucial role of legislatures

“The role that standing committees in legislatures play, is a crucial one,” says Beverley Schäfer, Chairperson of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament’s Standing Committee on Economic Development, Tourism and Agriculture.

“Predominantly it involves oversight of the department they are responsible for, including making recommendations on the structure, functioning and policy of the department. However, the work of committees is not restricted to government alone,” says Schäfer. “Committees may investigate any matter of public interest that not only falls within their scope of responsibility, but also any matter that has a provincial impact, even if it’s beyond the oversight authority of the legislature”, she says.

“The standing committee recognises the seriousness of human trafficking, and also recognises government’s steps to tackling such a horrendous human rights crime in South Africa. Complaints regarding the amended visa regulations raised with the committee, stem from stakeholders across many different sectors of the Western Cape, and seem to suggest that the implications are far reaching. These complaints must be heard and investigated as to the impact that they may be having here in the Western Cape”, says Schäfer.

Key stakeholders have been invited to engage with the standing committee over these concerns over two days of public hearings next week. Representatives from government associations, business, tourism, education and legal sectors will be making oral submissions. “The committee has also advertised for written submissions from the public and any associations from across the Western Cape that feel they have been affected by these new regulations,” says Schäfer.

Minister Gigaba is expected to attend the hearings on 26 September and answer questions regarding the concerns raised by stakeholders and members of the public.

“While we acknowledge the minister’s postponement of the date of implementation of the unabridged birth certificate requirements, we know that this is only one aspect of the amendments and we are still being flooded with complaints.”

Issues regarding in-person applications for visas, the fact that maths and science teachers have been eliminated from the critical skills list, and reported concerns into the loss of investment, and ultimately job creation, in the Western Cape economy have been raised,” says Schäfer.

“The minister has always publically stated that he is open to engagement and we as a standing committee believe that this opportunity to engage directly with him will be a very valuable one.”

The standing committee will be tabling a report based on the information gathered at the hearings this week, and may decide to make recommendations to the National Assembly in terms of section 104(5) of the constitution,” says Schäfer.

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