



NEWS RELEASE

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CoRMSA condemns xenophobic speech by Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs

JOHANNESBURG – CoRMSA and its partners are deeply concerned about the misinformed and xenophobic comments which could amount to hate speech made by the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs, Ms Maggie Maunye on 29 June 2011. These comments were made after a briefing by a delegation of the Department of Home Affairs to the Portfolio Committee. Ms Maunye’s comments on Tuesday last week suggested that foreign nationals coming to South Africa are using up the country’s resources and prevent citizens from enjoying their freedom.

“We are deeply concerned by the ill-informed and inflammatory comments that were made by Maggie Maunye on foreign nationals in South Africa. At a time when South Africa is working hard to uphold the values of the Constitution, such comments cannot be expected from a Senior Parliamentarian whose first responsibility is to uphold the Constitution and to protect the rights of all within South African borders,” said Sichel’mpilo Shange-Buthane, the Executive Director of the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA). “The South African constitution is seen as one of the best on the continent and in a young democracy like ours, it is regrettable to hear a portfolio committee member questioning human rights laws and the country’s constitution labelling them ‘an excuse to accommodate foreigners’” Shange-Buthane continued.

It is three years now since unprecedented violence against non-nationals swept through South Africa. Recently, violence against foreign-owned shops was witnessed in several parts of the country, including Katlehong, Kagiso, Ramaphosa, Freedom Park, Diepsloot, Orlando East in Soweto and Port Elizabeth and this has resulted in the death of several foreigners over the last year. There are currently already tensions in various communities across the country and statements like this risk adding fuel to an already tense situation.

Shange-Buthane argued that, “Foreigners are not using large amounts of government resources as echoed in Ms. Maunye’s briefing. They actually seek very little help from the government. They are not even entitled to a number of social grants like citizens.

With effective justice systems and proper documentation, many refugees for example would be able to manage on their own without becoming a burden to the government. And most of them would contribute to the economy of this country in one or another way.”

We also feel that Ms Maunye’s reference to Spain shows her lack of knowledge about issues of refugees. It is totally unlawful in international law to send a refugee back to a country in which they would be persecuted. Just because Spain violates this law does not give South Africa the right to act equally badly.

CoRMSA and other civil society organizations call upon the South African government, especially the Department of Home Affairs, to publicly distance itself from these disturbing and incorrect statements that are likely to intensify discrimination and may spark violence where peace and the rule of law should prevail.

We also call upon Ms Maunye to unconditionally apologise to all foreign nationals and South Africans for her xenophobic statements. We also challenge the Portfolio Committee to join us for a workshop in which the human rights of immigrants and refugees will be discussed and a greater understanding of the legal issues will be explored. CoRMSA and partners feel that such a workshop hosted by CoRMSA may hopefully lead to Ms Maunye and others accepting that the Constitution underpins our democracy rather than hinders it.

CoRMSA and partners further call for renewed efforts to ensure that work being done by various government departments to address xenophobia and other intolerances is coordinated and these are shared with all concerned while making sure that communities are part of these deliberations.

For more information please contact:

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