

the heartland of Southern Africa - Development is about people

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **STATEMENT ON THE REPATRIATION OF DECEASED SOUTH AFRICANS FROM NIGERIA**

Members of the media

Nigerian Federal and Lagos State officials

South African High Commissioner to Nigeria, Ambassador Lulu Mnguni

South African Consul General in Lagos, Ambassador Sam Monaisa,

Members of the South African repatriation team, Good Afternoon

It is with great sadness that we gather here today on behalf of the South African government and the people of South Africa to receive the mortal remains of our compatriots.

Government wishes to extend its condolences to the families of all those who lost their loved ones in this tragic accident. This has been the most difficult and agonising waiting period. Government appreciates their patience and understanding. True to the commitment made by the President Jacob Zuma, we depart with the South Africans who died in the guesthouse of the Synagogue Church of all nations (SCOAN)

We also extend our sincere appreciation to the Nigerian government and its people. Their support enabled us to repatriate 26 of our injured compatriots a month ago. Twenty of these have since been discharged and re-united with their families.

The confirmed people who died were hundred and sixteen (116), with eighty-five believed to be South Africans. We later established that three of these were Zimbabweans and one from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who travelled with the South African group to Nigeria.

Over the last six weeks, the focus has been preparations to repatriate the deceased. The verification of the mortal remains has been the most difficult part. This was because of the gruesome nature of the accident, which made the identification process difficult. The verification process resorted to the DNA tests at the laboratory.

Our medical team working with the Nigerian medical team has done a sterling job in this regard. Today we still sad about the tragedy but somehow relieved that the long wait for a number of the families will finally end.

We can confirm that we depart with 74 South Africans. On arrival in South Africa, the families will be able to receive their loved ones to take them to their final ancestral resting places.

The charter plane will depart at 22:15, this evening to arrive at the Waterkloof Airbase on Sunday mid-morning. A short ceremony will take place at the Airbase, and thereafter the mobile mortuary trucks will leave to the respective provinces wherein the families will collect their deceased.

As I conclude, I would like to express our sympathies to the families of Nigerians and other nationalities who lost their lives in the guesthouse building collapse incident. The thoughts and prayers of the people of South Africa are with them during this difficult time.

Last, but not least, Government extends a word of gratitude to the High Commissioner Ambassador Mnguni; Consul-General Ambassador Monaisa and their staff; the staff at the National Joint Operations Centre (NATJOC) in Pretoria. This operation would not have been a success without the hard work and dedication of these public servants.

Yesterday we sadly, received news of the passing away of one of the medical team members. Mr Peter Fuhri was the Director in the Department of Health. He was responsible for the repatriation of the injured a month ago and he was to form part of the team that was to repatriate the deceased. Our thoughts and prayers go to his family.

Government also wishes to thank all South Africans, including the media in expressing our collective grief. Special thanks also go to the religious community for providing the spiritual support to the nation and in particular the affected families.

May the souls of all our departed brothers and sisters from all around our continent rest in eternal peace I thank you

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