



## Border Control Operational Coordinating Committee (BCOCC)

299 Bronkhorst Street  
Nieuw Muckleneuk

Tel: 012-422-5060  
Fax: 012-452-9686

Pretoria, 0181

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### **MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE BORDER CONTROL OPERATIONAL CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE (BCOCC) ON SECURITY AT O.R. TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

**DATE: 10 MARCH 2008**

For some time there has been a persistent and worrying trend in media reporting that link incidents of violent crime in Gauteng to suspected criminal syndicates at O.R. Tambo International Airport (ORTIA).

These media reports repeatedly and confidently stated that officials from various state institutions at ORTIA were colluding with suspected organised crime syndicates to prey on travellers and members of the diplomatic community who arrive at the airport.

The BCOCC, the principal coordinating structure responsible for integrated border management in South Africa, views these media reports in a very serious light. Part of the BCOCC mandate is to coordinate law enforcement operations among border management agencies in order to combat all forms of illegal activity.

Of concern to the BCOCC is the fact that allegations in the media of criminal collusion – based largely on speculation and without the benefit of proper investigation – negatively informs public perception domestically and internationally on the state of security at ORTIA.

The BCOCC is aware that no investigations so far have concluded that any customs official/s of the South African Revenue Service (SARS), national immigration branch officers of the Department of Home Affairs, officials of the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) or members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) were cooperating with criminals by distributing information or identifying international travellers as potential victims for criminal attacks.

Over recent months the agencies mentioned have conducted comprehensive investigations into the conduct of their personnel at ORTIA. Also several cases of robbery; including statements to SAPS by victims of crime have been investigated.

To date no evidence could be found to substantiate allegations that passenger information was leaked to criminals or that there was a definite link between incidents of crime and travellers arriving at ORTIA.

Since 2004 SAPS, SARS, ACSA and the Department of Home Affairs have integrated their efforts to combat criminal activity; including trans-national crimes; at the airport. This approach primarily resulted in serious and violent crimes being eradicated in and around the airport itself.

It is important that consideration be given to the following:

- Firstly, the infrastructure at the ORTIA – where 52 000 people daily pass through the international terminal - is not conducive to allow criminals the opportunity to operate in a manner suggested by the media.
- Secondly, in the cases that have been reported in the media where “victims alleged they were followed from the airport and robbed...” the value of the items taken is not of an extraordinary nature for it to warrant organised criminal syndicate involvement

Also, to highlight a few cases:

- In the case of South African Ambassador to the United Nations, Dumisani Kumalo, investigations established that the suspects were on foot when the robbery was committed. In this case Mr. Kumalo had confirmed that he was not followed from the airport.
- In the case of Zimbabwean national, Ms. Abigail Chiwara – “whose customs declaration form was found in her driveway, allegedly dropped by the robbers during the robbery...” – these allegations have proven to be false. Subsequent investigations established that the alleged victim did not hand in her customs declaration form at ORTIA. This contradicts allegations in media reports that the customs declaration form was handed to the robbers by SARS customs officials,
- In the case of Mr. Morgan Tsvangirai, the Zimbabwean politician - Mr. Tsvangirai was not a victim of robbery as suggested by the media.
- The matter of the Japanese diplomats that were robbed - towards the end of 2007 – reports in the media suggested that the victims were followed from the airport and robbed. In this case, a security guard from the embassy and two men from Mamelodi were arrested.

A task team has been established at Gauteng provincial level comprising seasoned Organised Crime Detectives and Intelligence officers. Pro-actively, patrols have been stepped up on main roads leading to various suburbs and the city centre.

Also, of particular concern to the BCOCC is the notion that in about 80% of cases reported to SAPS – based on the notion that robberies may be link to ORTIA operations - the complainants afterwards refuse to cooperate with SAPS investigators.

Media reports to date have unnecessarily raised public alarm about the state of security at ORTIA and have adversely affected South Africa’s international standing.

The BCOCC wants to appeal to the media – the South African media in particular - to employ some sense of fairness, responsibility and objective logic in news construction when reporting on incidents of crime.

Under the authority of the BCOCC, all organs of state involved in border management, will continue to implement and improve security measures at all national key points like ORTIA. In this regard the BCOCC has developed the National Integrated Border Management Strategy – adopted at the January 2008 Cabinet Lekgotla – which *among others* addresses issues of protection of facilities, transport modes and personnel at Ports of Entry as well as people and goods in transit.

As a further precautionary measure, SARS Customs has redesigned the declaration form to exclude the address field passengers must complete upon entering South Africa. From 17 March 2008 the new forms will no longer be issued to travellers onboard international flights. The new form will be issued by SARS Customs after landing.

**ENDS.**

***For further media enquiries, please contact the following officials—***

***For SAPS: Senior Superintendent Vishnu Naidoo – 082 567 4153***

***For ACSA: Solomon Makgale – 082 781 8863***

***For SARS: Adrian Lackay – 083 388 2580***