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TO ALL MEDIA HOUSES
PRESS RELEASE

NO EMBARGO

The Al Jama-ah Party's leader meets with Saudi Arabia ambassador to address the current challenges faced by South African pilgrims:

Al Jama-ah Party's leader, Hon M.G.E Hendricks who is Deputy Minister of Social Development met with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's ambassador, His Excellency Mr Faisal Alharbi, in their discussion, the Deputy Minister to raise the growing concerns of South Africa's *Hajj* pilgrims.

The party acknowledges that the South African Hajj and Umrah Council (SAHUC) – despite its controversial operations in dealing with *hajj* matters – has been a key player in this arena for several years; as a result, this has escalated to differences of opinion within the Muslim community leaving many issues unresolved.

Hendricks made a direct appeal to ambassador Faisal Alharbi to consider the relaxation of the strict visa rules for those applying to perform *Hajj*; that the *Hajj* visa be granted to all South Africans who wish to perform this sacred journey this year; and that the *Nusuk* platform accept all applications that meet the financial requirements.

As Deputy Minister, Hon Hendricks took a step further by requesting the Kingdom to consider donating and funding the *Hajj* of 2000 needy South Africans who are receiving a social grant. "Amongst South Africa's social grant recipients, there are a sizeable number who are Muslims; and they, will never have the financial ability to afford the *Hajj*. For many South African Muslims it took 40 years or more to save to go on *Hajj*," explains Hendricks.

According to Hendricks, the Ambassador has agreed to a short term solution and a sustainable one for the medium term. "I was shocked at the misleading narratives in the media after the ambassador took me into his confidence," adds Hendricks.

Hendricks intends to meet with both the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperations and the Director-General of Home Affairs for further discussions on the matter.

Issued by Asghar Khan on behalf of Al Jama-ah

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