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PRESS RELEASE

CAPE TOWN

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PRESS STATEMENT: Government Authority Undermined as NGO Issues Hajj Announcement

On 15 July 2025, the South African Hajj and Umrah Council (SAHUC), an NGO, released a statement to the Muslim community allegedly based on information from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. It is both inappropriate and a serious breach of diplomatic protocol for an NGO to perform the role of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), the official arm of government responsible for international relations.

In an unusual and concerning development, DIRCO issued a media statement on 30 days later titled "Submission of Final Report by the Ministerial Committee on the Efficient Management of the Annual Hajj and Umrah Pilgrimages to DIRCO." However, the third paragraph of this statement contains critical details about the upcoming 2026 Hajj that appear to be copied word-for-word from SAHUC's earlier statement issued on 15 July 2025.

DIRCO's statement reads:

"The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has announced a new operational framework for the facilitation of Hajj from South Africa, effective from 2026. Under this new model, the traditional use of licensed tour operators will be discontinued. Instead, all service contracts will be signed directly with Saudi service providers, who will assume full responsibility for service delivery within the Kingdom. Coordination will be managed through the NUSUK Masar electronic platform, under the oversight of the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah."

This excerpt has no relevance to the stated heading of DIRCO's press release and is identical to SAHUC's earlier communication. This raises serious concerns:

Who is dictating official communication to South Africa's Muslim community – DIRCO or SAHUC?

Hajj Watch, and by extension many within the Muslim community, are alarmed by what appears to be DIRCO abdicating its responsibilities to SAHUC. This suggests that SAHUC is acting as a subcontractor in managing South Africa’s diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. DIRCO’s silence on this issue is deafening, and its failure to assert authority has created confusion and undermined trust.

The Muslim community deserves clear, accurate, and timely information – not duplicated press releases and backdoor communication. Most importantly, they require assurance that the 2026 Hajj will be managed transparently, efficiently, and free of confusion.

We call on DIRCO and relevant government authorities to clarify their position, re-establish their leadership in this matter, and restore confidence in the pilgrimage process.

Issued by:

Hajj Watch

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