

## Correctional services minister needs to tighten the lock on high-risk parolees

The sheer volume of parolees makes evaluation and monitoring a laborious task

02 April 2025 - 04:30By TIMESLIVE PREMIUM EDITORIAL



**A LIFE BEHIND BARS** Correctional services minister Peter Groenewald says rape, robbery, murder and culpable homicide are among offences committed by 30% of parolees released in the Cape Flats area between January 2024 and February this year.

*Image: Gallo Images/Thinkstock*

Sickening details of how double murderer Rassie Nkuna built a house and purchased a BMW and a Land Cruiser while in prison with the money he received from a cash-in-transit heist are revealed in a damning report exposing negligence at multiple correctional facilities and a lapse in the parole system.

Last week, Sowetan reported how Nkuna, who was serving life terms for the 2022 murder of his girlfriend Pretty Mazibuko and her police officer sister Marcia, was deemed high risk yet was granted parole.

He went on a killing spree which claimed at least six lives and was also allegedly linked to the murder of Hillary Gardee, the daughter of EFF deputy leader Godrich Gardee, in April 2022 while department of correctional services (DCS) officials failed to monitor him adequately. He is due to return to the Pretoria High Court on May 7, where he is standing trial for the double murder of Lucky and Sabeliwe Mogashoa.

Examples of this habitual criminal relapse were highlighted by correctional services minister Peter Groenewald recently when he said rape, robbery, murder and culpable homicide are among offences committed by 30% of parolees released in the Cape Flats between January 2024 and February this year.

In response to questions by DA MP Nicholas Gotsell in the National Assembly, Groenewald said of the 591 convicts released, 160 were classified as high-risk parolees. A total of 183 of the parolees had reoffended.

While these figures reflect the situation in the Cape Flats area, it is a microcosm of the recidivism crisis we face on a national scale.

It also comes on the back of an admission from police minister Senzo Mchunu there are 16,012 bail absconders — including those charged with murder and rape — from active cases in South Africa.

These are frightening statistics of those who walk among us and are responsible for the blood spilt in homes, schools, taverns, hospitals and offices.

Last year the Sunday Times reported how a recording of a phone call made from a jail cell revealed the ruthless mind of killer Mzukisi Ndamase, 46, who is believed to have ordered the massacre of 18 family members in Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape in September from inside Wellington Prison in Mthatha — because someone accused him of killing their child.

And he made no qualms about killing others when he would be released on parole within a few weeks — after being jailed for murdering a police officer in 2007. Thankfully his criminal ambition was thwarted and he remains in custody.

Another reoffender, Bongile Makhunga, 32, who murdered his girlfriend, Ingwe TVET College student Zihle Cebani was sentenced to life plus 30 years' imprisonment in January. He had been released on parole for killing another girlfriend in 2016 for which he had been sentenced to 15 years.

While parole is not an unequivocal right, most prisoners are offered conditional release to serve the remaining sentence in the community under the supervision and control of

the department to foster rehabilitation and reintegration into society, subject to evaluation and monitoring.

While many parolees grab this opportunity to transform their lives, the sheer volume makes evaluation and monitoring an arduous task.

And as the report in Nkuna's criminal life chronicles, this is the DCS' Achille's heel.

Groenewald has previously said South Africa's high recidivism rate — at 40%- 80% and one of the highest reoffending rates in the world — has forced him to prioritise the rehabilitation of inmates.

According to the department, the current inmate population is 156,070, which exceeds capacity by 49%. This leads to a lack of due diligence in overseeing an inmate's genuine readiness for parole.

However, a red flag has been raised by the Public Servants Association that while DCS will receive an additional R2bn in the 2025/26 financial year, amounting to a total budget of R29.2bn, staff numbers are set to decrease.

It said according to the latest Estimates of National Expenditure, DCS employee personnel numbers will decrease from 39,599 in 2024/25 to 39,204 in 2025/26, and to 38,882 in 2026/27.

The union is right — budgetary cuts to personnel would lead to increased workloads for remaining correctional officers, compromising safety, security and rehabilitation efforts in correctional facilities.

Since becoming minister Groenewald has put cases adjudicated by the parole board under the spotlight — including those of child killer Marius van der Westhuizen, Najwa Petersen, the murderer of legendary singer Taliep Petersen, and Alison Botha's attackers, Frans du Toit and Theuns Kruger, with positive outcomes.

This impetus towards righting the wrongs of our parole system and rehabilitating offenders is vital. The minister needs to stay the course.