

MEDIA RELEASE	PSA concerned about growing prison-overcrowding crisis
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about persistent overcrowding in South Africa's prisons, which hampers the effective management and rehabilitation of offenders and compromises the safety and well-being of inmates and correctional staff.

Recent reports from the Portfolio Chairperson on Correctional Services reveal that South Africa's correctional facilities accommodate approximately 150 000 inmates, despite having only 105 000 beds. This resulted in more than 40% overcrowding during the 2023/24-financial year.

Alarming, this figure includes nearly 15 000 foreign nationals, 600 of whom are serving life sentences. The Department of Correctional Services spends R500 per day per inmate, which is a significant financial burden. The situation is exacerbated by the Department's high vacancy rate, leaving staff unable to maintain an adequate inmate-to-officer ratio and complicating efforts to manage overcrowding effectively. Key contributors to the crisis include a significant number of awaiting-trial detainees who cannot afford bail, sometimes as low as R1 000, and remand detainees held without bail options.

The PSA acknowledges the Department's efforts to mitigate overcrowding through measures such as community corrections programs, parole, correctional supervision, and redistribution of inmates between facilities to balance the inmate population. However, these measures have proven insufficient as overcrowding nears the critical 50% mark.

Resolving this issue requires a collaborative and comprehensive approach involving all stakeholders. Proposed solutions include implementing a sustainable framework to create work opportunities and provide offenders with market-related skills as part of their rehabilitation. Additionally, utilising inmate labour for maintenance and renovation of facilities, reducing dependency on the Department of Public Works, addressing the incarceration of foreign nationals, and transferring mentally ill inmates to mental-health institutions could significantly alleviate the pressure. The PSA urges policymakers and stakeholders to support and prioritise initiatives aimed at addressing the growing overcrowding crisis in correctional facilities.

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