

MEDIA RELEASE PSA concerned about high number of COVID-19 cases at Johannesburg Prison

DATE 10 February 2021

EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing thousands of Department of Correctional Services employees, has noted with serious concern the high number of COVID-19 cases for employees and inmates at the Johannesburg Prison as well as the lack of the Prison management to manage and protect prison staff.

On 12 January 2021, the Unit Manager of the C2 Section in Medium A tested positive for COVID-19 and was quarantined. No other staff members in the same unit were quarantined even though they were in direct contact with him. The PSA brought this to the attention of the Area Management and the Medium A Management Team. Staff members were informed that the Department would send them for tests should they become ill. No further action or screening of staff was done, except to take their temperature daily with a faulty scanner. On 25 January 2021, an inmate had to be removed and isolated from other inmates in Unit C2 of Medium A after he tested positive. In testing all the inmates in the same cell, 17 more cases were confirmed.

Despite the high number of confirmed cases, prison management has failed to take any precautions. These sections were not placed under quarantine nor was any deep cleaning or decontamination done. The Department indicated that all remaining inmates would be tested but so far, tests have not been conducted. It also came to the PSA's attention that two other staff members at Medium A tested positive during the week of 25 to 28 January 2021 but that the information was withheld from staff by management.

The Johannesburg Prison has lost three staff members in January 2021 owing to COVID-19. The actions of Prison Management in handling this situation are inappropriate and are endangering the lives of staff working at various centres. South Africa remains in the grips of the pandemic and the total ignorance by the Prison management raises serious concerns. The PSA has brought this dangerous situation to the attention of management and should they fail to attend to this according to the health prescripts for COVID-19, the PSA will consult with an intention of taking legal action.

END