

MEDIA RELEASE

PSA welcomes Portfolio Committee oversight visit to various Correctional Services centres: Calls for further interventions

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) welcomes the recent week-long oversight visits to various Correctional Services centres by the Portfolio Committee but calls for further interventions.

Five Correctional Centres were visited, and findings paint a concerning picture, necessitating more oversight visits to grasp the challenges faced by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). Overcrowding remains a major concern. The PSA has continuously been highlighting this pressing matter, without much action from the DCS. The visits exposed the reality, including the high number of foreign nationals in these facilities. A case in point was a juvenile facility with 525 juveniles of whom only 125 were South Africans. Centres' non-compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* was also identified. Inmate violence also remains a reality at many of these facilities.

The fact that the DCS experienced a R11.5 billion budget cut over five years is catastrophic. In addition, the inefficiency of operations and systems was identified as being problematic, which may be attributed to incompetency. The PSA is, however, of the view that a shortage of staff cannot be discounted.

The PSA noted that the Portfolio Committee has granted the DCS three months to address the concerns raised by it. The PSA is aware of the many challenges faced by the DCS. The Portfolio Committee is thus urged to frequently undertake oversight visits to gain a full understanding of these matters. The DCS should not only focus on the few centres that were visited by the Committee. It must conduct a proper analysis of all challenges and compile a plan to attend to these soonest. Treasury should further be made aware of the impact of its questionable decision of cutting budgets rather than supplementing these if the DCS is to achieve its constitutional mandate. The high number of foreign nationals, including juveniles, in South African facilities is extremely concerning and complicated. A multi-pronged approach by various government departments and entities responsible for border management and immigration is necessary to address this matter.

Despite these challenges, the PSA is confident that cooperation between relevant departments to address deficiencies hampering service delivery, and the efficient functioning of the various departments will render positive outcomes. The PSA will continue to hold departments accountable.

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