



Unclaimed Corpses: PSA Puts Spotlight On Electronic System, Foreigners

The Bulrushes - 2 Mar 2023

Unclaimed Corpses: PSA Puts Spotlight On Electronic System, Foreigners
WhatsApp Share TelegramEmail Johannesburg – With nearly 1 000 unidentified corpses lying unclaimed in mortuaries in Gauteng, the Public Servants Association (PSA) has put the spotlight on the electronic system introduced over two years ago. The PSA, on Thursday, said it was not surprised to learn that there were some 938 unclaimed bodies in Forensic Pathology Services (FPS) mortuaries in Gauteng. The union said dealing with such a high number of unclaimed bodies has severe financial implications for the already compromised resources of the Gauteng Department of Health (GDoH). The FPS mortuaries with unclaimed bodies include: Bronkhorstspuit (8), Ga-Rankuwa (69), Pretoria (263), Germiston (127), Heidelberg (9), Sebokeng (94), Springs (49), Carletonville (45), Diepkloof (49), Johannesburg (187) and Roodepoort (38). “The number is not far from the 1 173 unclaimed bodies that were reported in 2021 when the GDoH undertook to introduce a new, improved electronic system to fast-track the claiming of bodies at its mortuaries,” the PSA said. “To date, nothing has been done to that effect.” When the electronic system was introduced, the plan was that if a body was not claimed within seven days, fingerprints would be sent to the criminal record centre and the Department of Home Affairs to assist with identification. The results would then be shared with South African Police Services (SAPS) as the body will be in their possession and they must give approval for a

pauper's funeral. "Failure to capacitate the FPS mortuaries by means of staffing and implementation of the improved electronic system is, however, just part of a bigger problem," said the PSA. "The Department of Home Affairs and the SAPS are also severely understaffed, which causes delays in undertaking the necessary action for processing unclaimed bodies." The union said the problem was compounded by "a large number of undocumented foreigners in the country owing to government's failure to ensure proper border control". However, the union did not say how many of the unclaimed bodies were those of foreign nationals or how they were identified as such. The PSA said the government's inefficiency to deal with various matters compromises the capacity of state institutions to render professional services. "Failure to ensure the capacitation of state institutions will always be at the detriment of citizens and the Department of Health will, unfortunately, continue to experience a high number of unclaimed bodies, which depletes resources," the PSA said. "This reality will only change when government is prepared to ensure that public institutions are operating at full capacity." The PSA urged the Departments of Health and Home Affairs to fill vacancies in their establishment and improve the linkage of their IT systems to ensure efficient handling of unclaimed bodies and alleviate pressure on employees. Last month, the Gauteng Health Department appealed to people who have missing family members to visit FPS mortuaries. "If the body is still unidentified after 30 days after exhausting means of identification, pauper burial processes are used for the final burial of the deceased," the department said.