

MEDIA RELEASE **COVID-19: PSA warns about time bomb at Western Cape Correctional facilities**

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EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) as representative Union of 50% of Correctional Services officials in the Western Cape, is concerned with the way the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) is managing the COVID-19 pandemic in the Western Cape.

The PSA approached the Regional Commissioner, Mr DJ Klass, with its concerns, but the inquiry was ignored. The PSA pointed out that labour relations and mutual trust between the DCS and the PSA in the Province are at an all-time low in this critical time when it is expected that communication should be a priority to allow the DCS and its Union partners to deal with challenges forthcoming as a result of this unprecedented crisis.

The PSA's concerns stem from the fact that employees at Community Corrections are expected to visit high-risk cases and it is expected of they must let released offenders sign monitoring lists, involving the handling of clipboards and pens between persons. Avoidance of physical contact is the key aim of the lockdown to flatten the curve of the spread of COVID-19. The maintenance of the current protocol of requiring offenders on parole to sign a document that is handed from person to person, is undermining and nullifying the purpose of the lockdown. This is amplified by the lack of protective equipment and limited sanitisers issued by the DCS. This senseless action imposed by the DCS in the Western Cape is posing a severe threat to all persons involved.

Inconsistent searching measures are also applied from prison to prison where in some instances employees are expected to search the inmates using only one pair of gloves issued in a week, with no facial protection or masks. The virus has already spread in more than 18 prisons in the United Kingdom with many correctional employees testing positive for the disease. This is a time bomb waiting to explode in overcrowded prisons in the Western Cape, where social distancing is impossible. The situation is unfortunately aggravated by the Regional Commissioner's "communication distancing", by not responding to the concerns raised by the PSA. Correctional Officers are on the frontline of this battle and the PSA calls on the Department urgently to open communication lines in the provinces to find amicable solutions for this critical situation.

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