



MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19: PSA concerned about Department of Correctional Services readiness

DATE 13 April 2020

EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES Reuben Maleka
082 903 6808

The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) readiness and ability to combat the spread of COVID-19 amongst Correctional officials and inmates.

The DCS is yet to roll out personal protective equipment (PPE) at all centres. Centres that have received PPE, have indicated that the quantities are not nearly enough to sustain operations. Thermal scanners used for screening have also not been delivered to most Centres. PSA members furthermore informed the Union that the Johannesburg Correctional Centre, known as “Sun City”, staged its COVID-19 readiness for the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Ronald Lamola. It appears that the “hand sanitisers” that were used during the Minister’s visit last week were tap water. Gloves and masks were barely enough and were provided only to officials who came into contact with the Minister.

The Department’s plan to prevent the spread of the virus amongst offenders included to maximise the movement of offenders in Centres. After the PSA’s intervention, the DCS agreed that inmates should rather be occupied constructively. The PSA presented a list of functions to the DCS that is deemed not to be critical during the lockdown period and will assist in preventing unnecessary exposure of officials. These officials should rather be used in case of emergency in the event of an outbreak of the virus in Centres. The DCS unfortunately does not share the PSA’s view and most provinces, are still contravening new directives and are exposing officials unnecessarily. Over the last few days, two Correctional Centres and the DCS head office in Pretoria confirmed COVID-19 cases. The virus has now also alarmingly also spread to inmates.

The PSA is convinced that the DCS is ill-equipped to deal with the virus in the Correctional Centres. It is unfortunately only a matter of time before most Correctional Centres will be affected. Severe understaffing and overcrowding in all Correctional Centres, will contribute to possible devastating effects on Correctional Centres.

The PSA again stresses that drastic plans need to be implemented to ensure that only utmost critical functions are performed by DCS officials as part of longer-term plans to address management of the pandemic in Correctional Centres. The PSA again calls on the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services to act swiftly and also ensure that all Correctional Centres are equipped with the required PPE without delay.

END

