

MEDIA RELEASE

COVID-19: PSA strongly condemns for the release of 24 000 more offenders

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The Public Service Association (PSA), representing thousands of members working for the Department of Correctional Services, is extremely concerned by the call made by the South African Prisoners' Rights Organisation (SAPOHR), to release a further 24 000 inmates under the pretext of containment of virus infection.

The department's recent decision to release 19 000 offenders is clearly a poor reaction, to recent uncalled-for violence and arson meted by inmates as a ploy to have early freedom, while the rehabilitation process is ongoing. The department lacked proper plans to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Correctional Centres and succumbed to the premature release of inmates. The call by SAPOHR, to release a further more offenders is typical conduct that emulates victory against the Department of Correctional Services, poor planning and response to COVID-19 and it has presented an opportunity for prisoner organisations to simply take advantage of the situation and call for release of multitudes of inmates prematurely.

The pandemic cannot be used to gain freedom into a society from which one was removed for the safety of the public and other reasons. The release of offenders will compromise the current gains the President has made when instituting the National Lockdown in March. Small and big businesses are incurring huge losses, owing to the lockdown, unemployment has reached record level, under the current economic conditions, it will only be a matter of time before they return to crime in a desperate attempt to survive. If South Africa's response to COVID-19 is to release a multitude of offenders, then the National Lockdown should rather be recalled.

The PSA calls on President Ramaphosa not to release offenders in an attempt to contain the pandemic in correctional facilities.

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