



**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**REMARKS BY THE NATIONAL COMMISSIONER, MR MAKGOTHI
THOBAKGALE**

**10th POPCRU NATIONAL CONGRESS
THE INKOSI ALBERT LUTHULI INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE
9 NOVEMBER 2023**

Programme Director

POLICE AND PRISONS CIVIL RIGHTS UNION President Cebekhulu

POPCRU National Office Bearers and Members of the National Executive Committee;

Distinguished Guests;

Delegates;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good afternoon!!

One is truly honoured to stand before you today at this 10th Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union National Congress. A platform where delegates converge to reflect on the course of the National Democratic Revolution and to discuss critical issues facing the organisation, and the broader community that we all serve.

From a Correctional Services perspective, this national congress provides us with a unique opportunity to reflect on the opportunities and challenges in the delivery of our mandate, paying a specific attention to our officials as the aorta of corrections in this country.

Mr President, allow me to reiterate the statement of fact, as I have raised it before. POPCRU has a long and proud history of advocating for the rights and welfare of our members, as well as striving for justice, equity, and safety within the criminal justice system. We know the challenges we face are considerable, but our collective commitment to these principles is unwavering.

Having a partner like POPCRU is essential as you have been relentless, advocating for a better outlook for Correctional Officials in this country. The work of correctional officials is multifaceted and demanding in nature.

We have repositioned the correctional system to have a stronger imprint within our centres and beyond the walls of correctional facilities. It is our considered view that the impact of our work ought to reach the entire fabric of society. Our resolve is that, when we invest in rehabilitation and reintegration, we contribute to safer communities, thus reducing the burden on our criminal justice system.

Programme Director, the past two weeks have been challenging to my office. One of the longest serving members, 35 years in Correctional Services, was gunned down in a hail of bullets. Mr Kunene oversaw Internal Security at Barberton Maximum Correctional Centre in Mpumalanga.

We are still hurting from that incident, and we are keeping a close attention to the investigation as it is a priority for us that those behind this barbaric act be brought before justice.

As if this was not enough, just last Monday, 30th of October, the Head of Waterval Maximum Centre, Ms Daphney was attacked with a spray of bullets riddling her vehicle as she was driving home. Fortunately, she survived.

I am only mentioning the two cases in an effort to highlight the type of war that we are facing. Those hellbent on their nefarious criminal acts are now targeting our officials as they perceive them to be standing on their way. A highly

coordinated criminal justice system is an answer to the war we are confronted with, and I am happy to say that at a cluster level, there is synergy to this effect.

The voice of POPCRU has been pushing through the rafters and it is our quest that it shall persist with the same gusto in ensuring that we continue to fight and protect our workforce. We remain stronger together and it is our unity that shall make a difference.

We are in unison in terms of improving the working conditions, ensuring fair and equitable treatment, and providing a voice for those who might not have one. We have worked together on outreach programmes, fostering positive relationships with the communities we serve.

The Department of Correctional Services is located at the tail end of the criminal justice system, meaning, the pulse of the state is best expressed in our environment. Allow me to pick two pressing issues that are challenging our country. These being crime and unemployment.

The two are deeply interconnected, and they have a significant impact on the social fabric, economic stability, and overall well-being of our country. Therefore, it is essential that we recognize the gravity of these challenges and work together to find sustainable solutions.

What makes the situation even worse, crime is leaving behind a number of victims. Instead of crying and mourning, we decided to embark on an empowerment programme that involves the parolees/ probationers, victims of crime and members of the community.

Mr President, I must indicate that we were really pushed hard by what we experienced when we had a community imbizo at Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape. We needed an empowerment drive so that we could divert people from crime, heal the broken souls and address unemployment.

We identified the mobile phone industry and Digital Terrestrial Television as an opportunity for our country. This is a niche market that is being manipulated by other people. We decided that we are going into it full force, through a partnership with Human Capital Learning Solutions, Vaal University of Technology and the NYDA.

Those that have completed training on ICT programmes and qualified as technicians for Cell Phones repairs and Digital Terrestrial Television are now standing at 208, and the programme is ongoing as we speak. We appreciate the role of merSETA and SASSETA in funding of these initiatives. Surely, we need to push the boundaries and find solutions for our country.

Esteemed Guests, overcrowding in correctional facilities remains perennial and continues to stretch the Department's resources, hampering efforts of rehabilitational programmes.

The 2019 Special Remission of Sentences coupled with the 2020 COVID-19 Special Parole Dispensation, gave a short-lived reprieve. The inmate population increased by 13 833 from 143 223 to 157 056 inmates during the 2022/23 financial year. We had another Special Remission of Sentences in 2023, and what we have since observed is a '**rapid increase**' phenomenon in terms of inmate population after the conclusion of special remission measures.

Our considered view is that there is a need for minor offences to be given attention and possibly be diverted to community-based restorative justice structures. In addition, effective utilization of secure care centres in communities for children and young offenders is ideal in terms of reducing overcrowding. Critically, offenders with mental illnesses and drug addiction ought to be diverted to appropriate medical or community-based rehabilitation centres.

Programme Director, in this rapidly evolving world, where technology and social dynamics are constantly changing, we are giving attention to our IT

systems. We must evolve with the times. This requires ongoing training and professional development, and we have committed ourselves to that.

Another important area where we have recorded good progress is on the streamlining of posts for effective delivery of services. Through the approval of a macro structure, Correctional Services is now able to optimise the organisation, management and communication.

The work function and responsibility are to become structured and measured the same way at facilities of the same outlook, such as the big five. In essence, this will mean that facilities like Durban Management Area will have Head of Centres at Director level, just like Johannesburg and Kgosi Mampuru II facilities.

Furthermore, the ongoing process shall remove unnecessary fat, and redeploy officials to roles that will make DCS more efficient. This will be largely covered by the micro structure as the second phase.

The micro structure will also cure the anomalies as covered in the Resolution 2 of 2009, looking at Centre Based 2-1 and 3-1. The creation of these posts will add another layer in terms of upward mobility for serving officials. This is one area that had been a song, and we are thrilled by the fact that there is now practical and noticeable progress.

Delegates, Correctional Services is currently implementing the clauses of Resolution 2 of 2009, as it relates to the creation of supervisory posts that were formerly known as Warrant Officers or CO1. It is a cohort that should oversee Case Management Committees, Records and Visits. A total of 39 trainers are to be reclassified from the Public Services Act to Correctional Services Act.

This initiative will ensure that the department produces a ready-made cadre to provide needs-based rehabilitation programmes to inmates. Another important

area to highlight is the pay progression for the 2022/23 financial year, that shall benefit 30 358 qualifying officials, and this will cost the state R154 589 089.86.

And what has been a thorny issue for years, the 735 ring-fenced students known as Group 2 of 2008 - I can report to this congress that this matter has been resolved by aligning the 735 to Group 1 of 2008.

President, this national congress has received sufficient gospel on the austerity measures and how the latest budget cuts are impacting in our programmes as entities of the state. With only a staff complement of 38 000 and the ever-increasing inmate population, we approached National Treasury, joined by other Departments in the security cluster and pleaded that we be spared.

We are grateful to National Treasury for at least cushioning the Correctional Services with R800 000 000 for personnel. This allocation will go a long way in ensuring that there are boots on the ground. Yes, it is not sufficient but ***kobongwa okuncane, kubongwa okukhulu***. We do not want to overburden our officials, hence we push to patch wherever we can and we are forever grateful for their commitment.

The death grant is being reviewed in the Department. Hence we have started with an exercise of studying models that other institutions in our environment are utilising. We do acknowledge that what the families of officials receive at the moment is not sufficient.

We have already started with adjustments under the facilities fund, by means of merging widows and orphans fund. It is thus critical that officials outside the facilities fund do take up membership as there are more benefits for their wellbeing. The recent facilities fund AGM committed itself towards ensuring a healthy state of the facilities fund, capable of injecting sufficient support into the activities of correctional officials.

Esteemed Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, and Delegates, working in a correctional facility is a challenging and demanding profession, and it is essential that we prioritize the physical and mental well-being of officials so that they remain the best in serving our communities.

For Correctional Services, engaging in sports and cultural activities is not just a pastime, but a path to better physical and mental health, stress management, and personal growth. It enhances our ability to serve our communities effectively and fosters a positive work environment.

Hosting the Southern African Corrections, Prisons and Penitentiary Services Sports and culture Games proved that we are a fit for purpose workforce. The choral competitions in Gqeberha further indicated that our officials are talented in many aspects and such activities brought them together as an organisation.

However, the battle is not over yet. We still have a long distance to cover in addressing other maladies of mental health. The well-being of our officials does require all of us to work together and mobilise our resources. Organised labour has an important role to play in this regard.

Reaching out to the workforce and persuading them to take advantage of the well-being programmes is critical in this aspect. We must support one another and provide resources for coping with the stresses that our officials encounter daily.

In conclusion, let us keep the ideals of justice, fairness, and integrity at the forefront of our work. It is my belief that we can build a stronger, safer, and more just society. May this national congress bring us closer to the realisation of a better world, where the official remains the engine and pillar of success.

I thank you.