

Budget Vote : Correctional Services

UCDP : Hon IC Ditshetelo

Tuesday, 12 April 2011

I'd like to start off by congratulating the Minister in her taking the decision to appoint a Ministerial task team to conduct an audit of various categories of inmates. Indeed this is a brilliant step as we have for a long time been faced with the problem of overcrowded prisons with new convictions coming in daily. Particularly, I like the approach that seeks to determine status of vulnerable inmates like women and children, if we understand that each individual's problems reflect on ills harboured by our societies, therefore we must seek to protect the vulnerable that have fallen off the side of the law without encouraging the conduct.

Also to be applauded is the reported progress in getting inmates involved in work to help communities with maintenance of schools and government departments. Of course we believe that inmates must be prepared for integration back into the society and therefore this kind of contribution is welcome.

We would appreciate more details on Imbeleko as the plight of mothers with babies in detention has been a cause for concern for many years now.

Starting the financial year with a deficit of R438.8 Million points out the long standing problems the Department has had over many years. For over 8 years now the Department has had qualified audit reports and it is difficult to note the areas of progress when the report still comes back qualified. It is no surprise therefore to note that the Department had overspent with R169.7 Million. However we hold our breaths that the move to hire hundreds of interns towards Asset Management Force shall yield desirable results.

I fully agree that having inmate population of 18-25 years of 56 520 is a serious cause for concern and again reflects on the decline of societal values which therefore becomes a national concern. Any attempt towards studying this phenomena deep and finding solutions, cannot lie with just one department but has to be a concerted effort from all departments and other stakeholders. I applaud the Department for having and maintaining 15 youth development centres.

The indicators in the annual report and Budget vote tell very little on the health status of inmates especially HIV positive inmates and whether those that qualify for ART treatment are receiving consistently. The number of inmates participating in literacy programmes and skills development programmes has decreased significantly with a decrease of 6900 in skills development programmes in 2010. The cause has not been set out and it does not seem like the Department is paying attention to this.

The main challenges to the prison system are defined in the White Paper as being overcrowding; the state of DCS infrastructure; institutional "prison culture"; corruption; training for the new paradigm, and "structuring [the department] for the new paradigm". Conspicuously absent from this list is human rights violations and an explicit mention of meeting the minimum standards of humane detention. Presumably the latter can be read into challenges around infrastructure and overcrowding. These are significant challenges, yet the White Paper gives scant attention to human rights issues and deals in far more detail with rehabilitation. Moreover, compliance with the Correctional Services Act is not a stated outcome of the White Paper, although several selected references to the Act are made. It is therefore not surprising that the Department finds itself continuously in litigation.

The Strategic Plan states that between 60% and 65% of offenders with release dates will undergo a release preparation programme. Given the total number of releases provided (approximately 15 000 per annum), it is evident that this does not refer to all sentenced releases but only to offenders serving sentences of longer than 24 months.²⁰ The average number of all sentenced releases for the past five years is roughly 55 000 per annum, meaning that the true figure is that about 27% of released offenders will undergo a release preparation programme and that nearly three quarters of released offenders will not. As an absolute minimum, a basic release preparation programme should be provided to all offenders. It is unacceptable that the DCS is effectively ignoring nearly three quarters of its mandate in respect of sentenced offenders by not providing them with a basic release preparation programme.