Democratic Alliance media statement by

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**DA parly question reveals staggering 8 388 DNA forensic case backlog for KZN**

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A written parliamentary reply to questions posed by the Democratic Alliance (DA) has revealed that KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) currently has a staggering 8 388 DNA forensic case backlog – dating back as far as February 2020.

According to the May 2021 reply (view here) – signed by provincial Community Safety MEC, Peggy Nkonyeni, KZN SAPS Commissioner Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi and other police top brass, the cases have not yet been analysed at the forensic services laboratory (FSL) in KZN. This must take place before they can be sent to the SAPS Biology Section in Pretoria for final testing.

Further shocking information contained within the reply includes;

* A total of 5 400 of the cases relate to sexual assault
* The provincial unit currently has 20 staff vacancies
* As many as 24 items of specialised machinery are currently not functional and;
* The backlog comes despite a supposed 35-calendar day turnaround for results.

The DA is horrified by these findings. Given the information provided, it is little wonder that so many people are suffering while criminals are essentially being given a licence to murder and rape with impunity.

The fact of the matter is that if you were the victim of rape in February 2020, without the DNA evidence in place, the perpetrator is probably still walking free to potentially commit more crime.

The DA regards SAPS inability to process this critical evidence as a crime against humanity. Continued delays in DNA testing will delay justice for the thousands victims of violent crimes.

According to the reply, lack of capital resources including laboratory consumable, personal protective equipment (PPE), calibration and service maintenance of equipment, stationery and toners is behind the accumulation of cases.

When it comes to human resources, while the MEC has stated that the unit has the necessary competencies for analytical work, the reality is that it is still short-staffed by 20 people which includes 12 administrative officers, four supervisors, three Captains and a Lieutenant-Colonel. This is bound to have a very real impact on the functioning of the unit.

Further compounding the issue is the impact of budget cuts to SAPS on the increase in crime. Particularly, it’s impact on the police’s ability effectively detect crime. This while KZN’s Community Safety Department continues to receive the smallest budget of all provincial government departments and while it does not even spend its full budget. This is a travesty.

It is not rocket science to address the issues that continue to plague SAPS - it is simply a matter of ensuring that the budget is prioritised to ensure that there is sufficient capacity, resources and maintenance. In this regard, attention must be given to;

- Urgent filling of critical vacancies

- Prioritize training of SAPS and detectives

- Increase visible policing and;

- Ensure that SAPS vehicles are on the road and not in repairs.

Finally, government must urgently negotiate with private laboratories so that serious crime, in particular crimes against our most vulnerable, are prioritised.

The DA at a national level has repeatedly called on SAPS to urgently investigate such partnerships to address the forensic backlog. This seems to have fallen on deaf ears. There appears to be a similar pattern in KZN, with the MEC and her Department declining to respond to the DA’s question in this regard.

This is typical of the ANC-run government which does not fix what is broken and instead continues to lead victims of crimes to believe that it cares.

If government cannot correct the main function of SAPS and put criminals behind bars, then its ongoing assurances of commitment to the safety of women in particular amounts to very little. There is no point in apprehending criminals if they are not convicted and women will continue to be misled.

This ANC government is failing the people of KZN when they are at their most desperate.  The DA can no longer sit in the provincial Legislature listening to politicians encourage victims of Gender-Based-Violence (GBV) to come forward and press charges, when the current system merely prolongs their pain and suffering.

SAPS can no longer delay tackling the country and our province’s DNA backlog crisis. It requires absolute urgency.

The DA will always be in the forefront, pushing government to do right by the citizens of our country, particularly our women, children, elderly and LGBTQ communities.