

We are a nation at war

By **Andrew Whitfield** MP - DA Shadow Minister of Police

***Note to Editors:** The following speech will be delivered today during Parliament's debate on the State of the Nation address and is under embargo until delivery.*

Mr President, no nation can truly be free when organised criminals capture and control the state and the economy at the expense of hard working, law abiding citizens.

No nation can truly prosper and unlock opportunities for all its citizens when they live in fear, held captive by violent criminals who face little to no consequences for their criminal actions.

And no nation can be at peace with itself when 56 people are brutally murdered and 105 people are violently raped every single day.

The truth, Mr President, is that we are a nation at war.

It is a war between the law abiding constitutionalists who believe in the rule of law and the criminal populists who would see the very institutions designed to uphold the rule of law burned to the ground.

The panel of experts report into the violent unrest which took place in July last year confirms what most South Africans have known for some time: there is a crisis within the SAPS and your Minister and National Police Commissioner are at its centre. Leadership instability, corruption and political interference are deeply embedded in the senior management culture at SAPS leading to low morale and low conviction rates.

At the heart of this crisis is the collapse of Crime intelligence. Among the myriad of issues facing this division stretching back to the dark days of Richard Mdluli, is the recent fact that in the build up to the July unrest your Minister refused, since December 2020, to approve the secret service budget only signing off on it on the 2nd of August 2021, weeks after the violence broke out in KZN and Gauteng. Meanwhile, the National Police Commissioner has been playing musical chairs with former head of crime intelligence, General Jacobs who was suspended, then brought back and then appointed to the head of SAPS inspectorate far removed from the intelligence environment in which he is an expert.

The Panel of Experts report said the following about crime intelligence:

"There are good officers in this section of the police who are dedicated to their work but are frustrated by the instability at the top, including that introduced into police structures by the instability within the governing party."

The conclusion is clear: the ANC is directly responsible for the crisis within the SAPS and can therefore not be trusted to restore its credibility.

Mr President, if however you are serious about rooting out the rot within SAPS I suggest you start at the festering wound that is the Central Firearms Registry. The assassination of Colonel Charl Kinnear, the release on parole of Colonel Christiaan Prinsloo, the removal of General Vearey and the suspicious redeployment of General Jacobs all have one thing in common: the criminal gun running syndicate at the Central Firearms Registry. This is where you will find your smoking gun. This is the nexus of criminality and corruption within the SAPS and it requires your immediate attention.

While there have been some long overdue improvements in the DNA forensics environment in relation to contract management and the procurement of consumables, the real DNA backlog remains far higher than the 58,000 case exhibits you celebrated last week. Your figure refers only to the historical DNA backlog ringfenced in March 2021. Every day since then new case exhibits have been accumulating at the labs with the cumulative backlog estimated to be well over 200,000 case exhibits!

In your speech you promised 12,000 additional SAPS personnel but continuous baseline reductions to the SAPS compensation budget makes this a pipe dream. The fact, Mr President, is that since 2016 there has been a nett reduction of more than 11,000 personnel and SAPS is required to continue reducing personnel from 175,000 this financial year to 162,000 by 2024. (10 years ago there were more than 200,000!)

Whichever way you look at it the nett result is less boots on the ground, not more.

Mr President, the leadership instability at the very top of the SAPS needs decisive action not delay tactics. While you have been busy playing 'Bad Cop Bad Cop' with the national commissioner and the Minister, thousands of hard working and dedicated good cops are suffering under a top-heavy SAPS management of Generals and Brigadiers, many of whom have been promoted way beyond their capability. Your commitment to make leadership changes within the SAPS is welcomed, Mr President, but is only you who has the power to appoint the Minister and the National Police Commissioner and only you who has the power to fire them!

We agree that it is time to build consensus. Consensus on new solutions to overhaul the SAPS with extreme urgency. The top heavy, centralised policing structure has proven not to be effective. It is time to explore how provinces and local governments can play a more active role in keeping our communities safe. The top down model of policing in SA is broken and more needs to be done to empower local law enforcement and metro police to keep our communities safe.

We can move SAPS into the 21st Century by introducing modern, cutting edge training for all police officers especially our detectives; by signing the nearly ten year old draft agreement with the FBI to make use of their CODIS software to take our National DNA Database to the next level; and by introducing a targeted programme to recruit specialist skills from among experienced former police officers to bolster priority crimes investigations.

There is an abundance of solutions Mr President, you need look no further than the DA's Blue Book, but implementation begins and ends with leadership.

The battle lines have been drawn and this year the constitutionalists among us need to rise up together and fight to defend the rule of law against the criminal populists who seek to undermine it.

You simply cannot build consensus with criminals, Mr President.

It is time to pick a side!