

SAPS needs qualified leadership, professional management and executive oversight, not more politics

By Andrew Whitfield MP – DA Shadow Minister of Police

A professional police service characterized by high levels of discipline, merit-based appointments and a capable, fit for purpose senior management which inspires confidence through its ranks and in the public by reducing violent crime.

This is the future of policing we deserve and **this** is the future of policing for which we must fight.

Not even the Minister can deny that the last decade of policing in South Africa has seen the most basic policing functions immobilized by political interference, corruption and incompetence at the highest levels. A lack of professionalism, broken management systems and a deteriorating quality of investigations have all contributed in taking SAPS to the brink of collapse.

The chain of command has been compromised by politics and the promotion of unqualified cadres above qualified, capable police officers giving rise to declining levels of morale, poor performance and even corruption.

And what has the solution been to this long list of institutional and systemic failures?

More money.

Between 2012 and 2022 SAPS' budget increased by 65% from R62 billion to R100 billion.

Over the same period SAPS has had six national police commissioners and murders increased by nearly 40%.

In 2021 SAPS had an opening balance of R1.53 billion in irregular expenditure with more than R3.4 billion in irregular expenditure still under assessment by the Auditor-General.

Contingent liabilities are up from R7.4 billion in 2020 to R8.2 billion in 2021 with a total of 52 203 civil claims valued at R60 billion still pending.

Spending on training and development has declined from 100% in 2018 to just 8.9% in 2021.

As a consequence SAPS' performance has declined from achieving 78% of its targets in 2018 down to 74% of targets achieved in 2021 with detective services performance declining most dramatically from 83% in 2019 to 58% in 2021.

So the budget has increased and the performance has declined, proving that throwing more money at the problems is not a solution to the challenges faced by SAPS.

In 2021 SAPS conducted an Organizational Climate Survey in which just 22% of SAPS members agreed that SAPS cares about their well being while only 16% of respondents that SAPS does an excellent job in communicating changes that affect employees.

The survey also revealed that 68% of SAPS members are dissatisfied with opportunities for future career progression while 77% are dissatisfied with the process used for promotions in SAPS.

Declining morale has a direct bearing on declining performance and this is where the new national police commissioner needs to allocate his time and resources. Far from the gaze of the cameras and the news media is where the solutions lie to repairing this broken institution. The new commissioner must avoid being dragged across the country from crime scene to crime scene by the Minister. He must rather dedicate his time to repairing the internal deficiencies of SAPS which have given rise to declining performance and morale within its ranks.

We know the long list of problems – DNA backlogs, firearm license chaos, police clearance certificate congestion, high crime rate, low conviction rates, corruption and ill-discipline. Behind these problems are people who have either been thrust into positions beyond their capability or people who suffer from debilitatingly low morale, using outdated systems and often working in buildings which should be condemned. Simply throwing money at these problems without analyzing and repairing the root causes will see performance continue to decline and crime continue to increase.

The Minister often criticizes the opposition for only pointing out the problems so today I offer 10 'not so sexy' solutions for the Minister and I challenge him to spend his last two years in office implementing them. They won't get you headlines Minister, but they will fix the problems.

1. SAPS must take the outcomes of their organizational climate survey seriously and intervene with urgency to address the shortcomings identified by members. This must include a more transparent and merit based recruitment and career progression process.
2. Recruit for specialist skills in investigations to improve quality of police work and improve the conviction rate should be high up on the agenda. Many excellent police officers have left the service over the years and they should be brought back to assist on cases and train other officers.
3. Amend SAPS act to ensure that the appointment process of the national police commissioner is transparent, merit based and insulated from political interference.
4. Introduce an independent discipline management unit to guarantee a culture of consequence management for rogue officers.
5. Amend the discipline regulations to prevent SAPS from reinvestigating IPIDs findings and undermining IPIDs independence and authority.
6. Modernize the training of officers across all divisions in order to improve outcomes and for goodness sakes fix the dilapidated and disgraceful SAPS training academies
7. Demilitarize SAPS to rebuild public trust and improve the quality of policing
8. Strengthen community policing partnerships with NHWs, CPFs, NGOs, churches, private security, local law enforcement and Metro Police will go a long way to improving outcomes and rebuilding trust in the communities SAPS serves.
9. Develop targeted strategies need to be developed to match with the complex range of local challenges in communities across the country.
10. Devolve policing powers to provinces for more accountability and better oversight

These are actionable solutions which require political will and hard work. Channeling resources and time into these solutions will yield a more professional and more effective police service which will achieve better outcomes.

Honourable Minister, there are many hard working and dedicated officers who deserve so much better and could do so much more if given the space and the opportunity to lead. We owe it to them and the people of South Africa to fix SAPS.

Chasing cameras to crime scenes is not going to get the job done.