

SAPS forced to limp along without leadership

By **Okkie Terblanche MP** – DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Police

Honourable Speaker, honourable members and fellow South Africans,

Here we are yet again, another annual debate on the allocation of money for the South African Police Service (SAPS) to make it possible for this essential Department to fulfil its Section 205 Constitutional responsibilities.

This is done with a purposeful anticipation and hope that this time round it will yield the desired results. Unfortunately, history has taught us that it remains an impossible dream.

The following budget allocations were made to these two important departments to fulfil their responsibilities:

- Vote 24 Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) received a main appropriation of R357.2 million in 2022/23. Taking inflation into account the budget decreased by 3.37 %.
- Vote 21 Civilian Secretariat for Police (CSPS) received a main appropriation of R152.3 million in 2023. Once again, taking inflation into account the Department's allocation decreased with R5.3 million or 3.5%.

The obvious questions regarding both Departments are, what were they both expected to do and how did they perform during previous financial years.

The majority of both Department's budgets goes towards compensation of its employees.

The IPID Act provided the Directorate with an extended mandate, which focuses on serious crimes committed by members of the SAPS and the MPS. It further obliges the SAPS and the MPS to report on matters to be investigated by the IPID and the status of implementation of disciplinary recommendations made by the IPID upon the completion of those investigations.

In terms of section 28(1) of the Act, the Directorate must investigate:

- a) Any deaths in police custody;
- b) Deaths as a result of police actions;
- c) Complaints relating to the discharge of an official firearm by any police officer;
- d) Rape by a police officer, whether the officer is on or off duty
- e) Rape of any person in police custody;
- f) Any complaint of torture or assault against a police officer in the execution of their duties;
- g) Corruption matters within the police initiated by the Executive Director, or after a complaint from a member of the public or referred to the Directorate by the Minister, a MEC or the Secretary for the Police Service; and
- h) Any other matter referred to the IPID because of a decision by the Executive Director or if so requested by the Minister, an MEC or the Secretary for the Police Service as the case may be.

Section 28 (2) further provides that the Directorate may investigate matters relating to systemic corruption involving the police.

The Directorate's most important task is to investigate these allegations and criminal cases. This seems to be an impossible task due to serious personnel shortages.

IPID conveyed the following information to the Portfolio Committee on Police on 20 April 2022 during their Budget and Annual Performance Meeting:

- On that day, they had a backlog of 37 116 cases;
- They had received more than 5 000 new cases for the month but only managed to complete the investigation of 4 121 of which 53% were backlog cases. This means that 1 937 new cases are just added to the ever-growing backlog list;
- Considering the serious backlog, each investigator effectively has 250 cases to investigate. An impossible task.

This Directorate is led by a person with no investigative experience and despite numerous promises and undertakings, the lack of these vital skills has started to show, as was expected.

The sad reality is that performance indicators and targets decreased, or remained unchanged in 10 out of 13 indicators while only three increased.

Victims in 37 116 cases committed by police officials are still awaiting justice while these perpetrators remain on the payroll, employed by the taxpayer.

This important Directorate has now also joined the ranks of the infamous backloggers. Another failing entity, another toothless bulldog, desperately barking without the necessary bite.

The CSPS is another slow performer. At the moment, their impact on the ground is still unclear. They are only theorising about a suitable measuring tool whilst essential legislating, policies etc. are not forthcoming within acceptable time frames. The following deliverables still lack momentum:

- Improving community participation in the fight against crime;
- Improving community-police relations;
- Facilitating collaboration, coordination and integration on safety, crime and violence prevention within all spheres of government; and
- Ensuring a transformed and accountable police service.

By now, Minister Cele is notorious for not filling vacant posts timeously. This Department is limping along without a leader, despite timeous reminders by the opposition.

Please Minister, it is time to fill this post. Your Departments are not firing on all cylinders.

The country is waiting.