

Budget Debate on Vote 28, 24, 21: Police

Speech by Andrew Whitfield MP

DA Shadow Minister of Police

Chairperson allow me to begin by expressing my sincere condolences on behalf of the Democratic Alliance to all of the families who have lost loved ones in service of our country through the South African Police Service. We stand together with the hard working, honest and professional police officers who put their lives on the line every day to protect their fellow citizens.

The shocking spike in police killings underscores, perhaps more than anything else, the near complete collapse of the security establishment in our country. When criminals don't fear consequences from the state they become emboldened to commit more crime and even to attack the state by killing police officers.

I would also like to take this opportunity to call on the Minister to commit meaningful action to his tough talk from previous budget speeches where the Minister has had a lot to say about police killings without any plans in place to stop them.

Budget speech after budget speech since your appointment in 2018 have left South Africans with a trail of broken promises and higher levels of violent crime. In the last five years there has not been a demonstrable improvement in outcomes that make South Africans safer and if South Africans are not safe, they are not free.

Safety is a prerequisite for progress and prosperity. It is the foundation upon which citizens can pursue their dreams and realise their talents. Without safety our nation cannot prosper.

The National Development Plan tells us that

"In 2030, people living in South Africa feel safe at home, at school and at work, and they enjoy a community life free of fear. Women walk freely in the streets and children play safely outside. The police service is well-resourced and professional, staffed by highly skilled officers who value their work, serve the community, safeguard lives and property without discrimination, protect the peaceful against violence, and respect the rights to equality and justice."

Honourable Members, 2030 is just 6 years away and South Africa's safety and security environment has deteriorated dramatically since the NDP was adopted by government in 2012. It is safe to say that the vision of the NDP will not be realised because government has been soft on crime and softer on the causes of crime. We have a government that talks tough

and acts soft. A government that has lost control of law and order and allowed criminals to run rampant across our communities.

Minister, when you took office in 2018 the President promised to halve violent crime in a decade. Half way through that decade and violent crime is on the increase with murder up 20% since 2018; violent crimes against women and children continue unabated; organised criminal syndicates have become more sophisticated and better resourced than our own state security agencies resulting in kidnappings having nearly doubled from 5 693 in 2018/19 to 10 826 in 2021/22.

In every budget speech since your appointment as Minister you have dedicated your department's budget to the fight against Gender Based Violence yet murders of women and children have increased by 28% and 17% respectively since you took office.

We have repeatedly heard the President promise more boots on the ground but this too has been a broken promise. In 2011/12, the SAPS had 157 518 SAPS Act members, which had decreased to 140 048 in 2022. These are the real numbers of the boots on the ground.

And while you will inevitably stand up at the end of the debate and tell us of the thousands of recruits to be deployed you won't tell us about the net loss in personnel as a result of the restructuring of SAPS which is seeing skills and experience being lost every year.

You want proof of this claim, then you need look no further than your own budget

In this budget **Compensation of employees** has decreased despite promises of increased recruitment. In real terms, the budget for compensation of employees decreased with R4.9 billion compared to the previous financial year. Less money means less boots on the ground.

Visible policing receives more than half of the department's budget allocation yet when you talk to community members across the country and they tell you they never see the police it would be more appropriate to rename this programme Invisible Policing.

What is shocking is that for the third consecutive year, the largest decrease in the department's budget is in this core service delivery programme. This Programme's appropriation has decreased with R3.3 billion.

Our detectives are overworked and underpaid with almost every detective I speak to telling me they have over 200 dockets on their desk at any given time. We are losing valuable skills and experience in detective services because these SAPS members don't feel valued or supported.

The result of this is a continued decline in the performance of the Detective Services Programme, and subsequent decline in detection rates. It is the reason we see low conviction rates resulting in criminals no longer fearing the criminal justice system due to the low probability that they will ever face consequences.

Our Community Policing Forums are not adequately resourced and supported by the Civilian Secretariat or the SAPS. Many CPF members complain that SAPS simply does not attend meetings and refuses to convene elections. In eKomani in the Eastern Cape some CPF sectors are recognised while others are not. This is contrary to the ethos of community and partnership policing and must be addressed.

The SAPS reservist programme has been gutted and remains a missed opportunity for the department to augment the service with critical skills. The department also needs to urgently develop a plan to bring back former SAPS members with specialist skills to strengthen investigations and train inexperienced officers to improve the quality of police work in order to improve conviction rates.

All of the indicators which point to the realisation of a safer South Africa for all and the fulfilment of the NDP are failing. The budgets don't match the promises nor do they support the plans and the facts, well they speak for themselves.

South Africans will not forgive this government for compromising their safety and security and that of future generations. In 2024 the people of South Africa will vote for a safer South Africa under a new government with the DA at its centre.