

Budget Debate on Vote 22: Correctional Services

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Honourable Members

Today we must discuss the performance of the Department of Correctional Services, and the role of the Honourable Lamola as Minister. While Mr. Lamola was appointed to this role with much promise and fanfare, his tenure has been marked by a number of significant failures and shortcomings.

One of the key areas where Mr. Lamola has failed as Minister of Correctional Services is in his inability to address the issue of corruption within the Department. Despite promising to root out corruption and to promote transparency and accountability within the Department, Mr. Lamola has failed to take any meaningful action to address the endemic corruption that has plagued the department for many years. As the tawdry details of the long running Bosasa saga unfold, it is clear that the entire Department requires an overhaul, introducing measures to improve controls and accountability.

The corruption within the Department of Correctional Services has had a devastating impact on the lives of inmates, who are often subject to physical abuse, neglect, and other forms of mistreatment at the hands of other inmates, and also prison officials. This abuse is carried out with relative impunity. While the Office of the Inspecting Judge has the mandate to investigate and make findings in this regard, the Minister and the Department have demonstrated a distinct lack of enthusiasm in establishing the Judicial Inspectorate as an independent and properly resourced entity. Mr. Lamola has failed to address this issue, and as a result, the abuse of power and violation of human rights within the department has continued to go unchecked. This matter should have been attended to long ago, and if we are to see any accountability, it must be done with some urgency.

Furthermore, Mr. Lamola has failed to address the issue of overcrowding within South African prisons. Despite acknowledging the severity of this issue, he has failed to implement any meaningful solutions to address it. This has led to continued and chronic overcrowding, which has made it impossible for officials to provide inmates with the resources and services they need to live in a safe and healthy environment. Overcrowding is endemic in South African prisons, with overcrowding in prisons being measured at as much as 33%. Correctional Centres in the Eastern Cape are 63% overcrowded, while the Western Cape is at 49%, and Gauteng prisons are overcrowded by 45%. This leads to numerous related complications and makes a mockery of any attempt at rehabilitation. It affects the health of inmates, and also has a negative effect upon those whose task it is to guard them. Inmates are routinely locked

in their communal cells for upwards of 20 hours daily, only being let out for 1 hour of exercise and for meals, which often take the form of all three daily meals being served in one sitting.

Another area where Mr. Lamola has fallen short is in his lack of action on the issue of rehabilitation and reintegration. While he has acknowledged the importance of these issues, he has failed to implement any meaningful programs or initiatives to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. This has contributed to the incredibly high rates of recidivism within the South African criminal justice system, which has further compounded the already dire situation within the Department. This will continue for as long as only a fraction of the budget is spent on rehabilitation programmes, the rest being spent on Bosasa and other similar projects.

No discussion of the Department of Correctional Services would be complete without reference to the recent and continuing Thabo Bester debacle. At the outset, I must express my deep concern and disappointment over the handling of the Thabo Bester saga by the Minister, the Department of Correctional Services and G4S.

The case of Thabo Bester, who was granted parole by the Correctional Services and then went on to commit numerous violent crimes, is a tragic example of the failure of our criminal justice system. It is a failure that has cost innocent lives and brought grief to families and communities and shines a glaring light on our inability to address Gender Based Violence in South Africa.

But this failure is not just about Thabo Bester. It is also about the Department of Correctional Services and G4S, who were responsible for his supervision and monitoring. It is clear that both these institutions have failed in their duty to protect the public.

G4S, the private company responsible for the monitoring of Bester, failed to detect his criminal behaviour and prevent him from committing more crimes. This failure is a clear indication of the lack of supervision of the company's employees. While rampant corruption is obvious, with the contracting company taking a devil-may-care approach, accepting no liability for this entire debacle, they also take a rather casual approach with regard to vetting and monitoring of staff members. But the total and absolute failure of the entire security cluster to act in anything resembling a responsible fashion after the escape of Bester is breathtaking. In the full knowledge that the body found in the cell was not that of Bester, in the face of the ineluctable conclusion that Bester had escaped, no effort was made to re-arrest him. But more importantly, no effort whatsoever was made to warn, inform, support or protect any of his surviving victims. In a country where we have just passed significant laws to combat Gender Based Violence, where women are raped and killed on a daily basis, the leaders of our Security Cluster just looked the other way. This is a shameful indictment on the Ministers involved and their departments.

In conclusion, Mr. Lamola's tenure as Minister of Correctional Services has been marked by a number of significant failures and shortcomings. He has failed to address the issue of corruption within the Department, has not taken meaningful action to address overcrowding, and has failed to implement programs to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. It is time for Mr. Lamola to take decisive action to address these issues and to ensure that the Department of Correctional Services is able to carry out its vital role in a responsible and ethical manner. It is time for him to do his job.