

Crime must fall by transforming the SAPS

Sowetan, pg 13, 4/4/17 (opinion)



Nkosinathi Nhleko

Charge offices are now referred to as client service centres

Many South Africans still refer to a police station as a charge office. This is one of the reasons the SA Police Service is transforming what used to be called a charge office into a customer service centre.

A charge office says much about our recent past. It suggests that the facility was nothing else but a place where people were charged for all manner of crimes.

We also know that in the days of apartheid many of our people's human rights were violated. They were meant to terrify people so that they stop fighting for non-racism, non-sexism and birth of a society of equals.

Also, police stations were notorious for torture, detention without trial and horrific incidents of deaths in detention. In short, police facilities were major instruments in the abuse of human rights.

As we marked Human Rights Day two weeks ago in honour of innocent people murdered by police in



The service centre - a new development in crime fighting in South Africa - at the new police station in Diepsloot, north of Johannesburg. /PETER MOGAKI

Sharpeville in 1960, President Jacob Zuma used this historical day to pay tribute to Steve Bantu Biko.

It was apt and reminded all that Biko was a freedom fighter who died at the hands of apartheid police. Despite a chequered past, the SAPS is an integral part of our society and derives its mandate from the constitution.

The SAPS is part and parcel of the commitment of all our people to ensure that we all live in a peaceful, secure and safe society.

Whenever we open a police station, especially in poor and socially depressed communities, it is a genuine response to the needs and demands of the citizens. It is

a gesture of friendship and solidarity in the fight to make SA safe and peaceful.

Against all odds, the ANC government continues to serve all our people. Police stations being built for our people are not for the SAPS but for the full benefit of our citizens. Police stations must not be ivory towers and citadels of corruption and wrongdoing. Together with the communities they serve, we must take good care of our police stations.

We now call former charge offices customer service centres because we believe members of the SAPS are servants of the people. Being servants of the people means that we must be dedicated,

humble, reliable and trustworthy. The SAPS has a major role in contributing to human dignity and the protection of human life.

We must always be willing to go an extra mile, serve and protect our people no matter the challenges. We must have the full confidence of our citizens and ensure that in our customer service centres, we cannot tolerate arrogance, laziness and disrespect.

A police officer who is rude does not represent the SAPS and our government.

The fight against crime in our communities is not just a responsibility of the police but must involve all citizens.

We must expose criminals in our communities. Our

homes, schools and places of worship must play an even bigger role in keeping the broader society safe.

We must never allow anger and frustration with criminals to make us take the law into our hands. When we assault suspects, destroy property, loot and burn, we are committing crime and may face the full might of the law. Street justice is not justice at all but a serious crime. The fight against crime requires faith.

We must never forget that faith is not a birth right. It is acquired through self-discipline, humility and the gift of wisdom. As Dr Martin Luther King succinctly put it: "Faith is taking the first step even if you don't see the whole staircase."

In the year of Oliver Reginald Tambo's 100th birthday, SAPS recommit to serving all citizens in accordance with the Constitution, Bill of Rights and the rule of law.

We are working to make SAPS a totally professional entity. The fight against organised crime is fundamental to making our freedom and democracy meaningful. Members of the Hawks and SAPS will continue to be restless agents for making our country free from crime and insecurity.

Finally, I also wish to salute the Hawks, SAPS members, Crime Intelligence and Free State Home Affairs officials for the arrest of 18 suspects for corruption at the Ficksburg Border Post a few days back. Crime must fall.

■ Nhleko is a former police minister and wrote this article before the reshuffle.