

Pollsmoor plan 'shifts problem'

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SONKE Gender Justice has slammed the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) for shifting the problem of overcrowding at Pollsmoor Prison to other facilities.

DCS earlier this week told MPs that overcrowding in Pollsmoor has been reduced by 90%.

This comes after the Western Cape High Court had compelled the department to reduce overcrowding in Pollsmoor Remand Detention by at least 150%.

Judge Vincent Saldanha declared the conditions at the prison unconstitutional and ordered the department to reduce overcrowding to no more than 120% of its approved capacity – unless it can show “good cause” as to why it should not.

According to the department, the facility constructed in 1975 to accommodate 1 619 remand detainees had a total of 4 066 (251%) remand detainees by December 6, 2016.

The department told Parliament’s Portfolio Committee of Justice and Correctional Services that its action plan has halved the inmate population by a “staggering” 161.09%, as of May 8, 2017.

Sonke Gender Justice National Prisons Specialist Ariane Nevin said they were satisfied that the department was taking steps to fulfil the first part of the court order, which was to decrease overcrowding in the centre by June 2017.

“However, we are concerned that the problem has simply been shifted to other facilities inside and outside the province.

“Moreover, the second part of the court order, directing the government as a whole to develop a plan to address overcrowding in the long term, is equally if not more important, and we have not seen as much progress in this regard as we would like.

“It would require that the whole of the justice and sec-

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urity sector, as well as health, public works and treasury, work together to address the causes and consequences of overcrowding, many of which are not in the control of correctional services alone,” said Nevin.

The portfolio committee urged the department to work closely with the justice cluster in order to find lasting solutions to the challenges of overcrowding as this is not only a DCS problem.

The Sonke Gender Justice and Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) filed an application with the high court to compel the government to address “the extreme overcrowding and inhumane conditions” suffered by detainees awaiting trial.

In a statement yesterday, Department of Correctional Services spokesperson Singabakho Nxumalo said the past 42 years has seen new courts being built in the Cape Metro, thus significantly increasing the offender population in this centre.

“As a result, a number of services were compromised and these were highlighted greatly by the Cameron’s report.

“In order to create more bed space in the Cape Metro, Pollsmoor, Goodwood and Malmesbury correctional facilities have been earmarked to largely accommodate Remand Detainees.

“As a result, sentenced offenders have been diverted to other centres in the province and the Northern Cape and Free State,” said Nxumalo.