

Uproar over poor state of prisons

'West Bank facilities still plagued by overcrowding, ailing infrastructure'

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The West Bank Correctional Services Centre which includes prison facilities in both West Bank and Mdantsane, is experiencing intense challenges, ranging from overcrowding to ailing infrastructure.

This was revealed during Thursday's site inspection of the facility by the portfolio committee on the Department of Public Works (DPW).

Portfolio committee chairperson Humphrey Mmemezi, said the visit was a follow-up on last year's inspections.

The correctional centre, designed to accommodate a total of 1,652 inmates currently has 2,666 offenders.

Last year the DPW found that the impact of overcrowding prison affected water consumption, electricity usage, as well as health and increased criminal activity inside the facility.

"The sewerage is leaking; electricity is not working as it should. Even where prison warders are staying, the infrastructure and sanitation are bad. We are not happy at all. In a space of a year, things are still as they were," Mmemezi said.

He urged the department of correctional services to fill vacancies to speed up efforts to transform the prison into a cor-

rectional facility to rehabilitate offenders.

"The vacancies must be filled. They [correctional services] have given us a report that they have already filled 70 posts throughout the Eastern Cape and are now trying to fill another 80 skilled positions."

Mmemezi said correctional services should make use of the skills that were available – offenders that had the skills, needed to be used to work in those projects run at the facility.

"Correctional services must reflect that they are a correctional centre, you can't have inmates that sit for three years doing nothing and when they come out they are still as criminal as they were before."

Acting regional commissioner for DCS Nozipiwo Dumbela, said overcrowding had a negative impact when it came to rehabilitating offenders.

"... the high crime rate in our society brings overcrowding to us as correctional services. We can build more correctional centres but there are social economic issues that all of us have a responsibility to address so we can be in a position to make sure we all feel safe."

She said they were in the process of fixing the prisons ailing infrastructure.

"The infrastructure is not an overnight process. We have appointed contractors but there are certain processes that need to be followed for approval."

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