



The public works minister and the Chief Justice lead a press briefing at the National Prosecution Authority offices.

Millions for court buildings

'The state of our government buildings dictate the impression we leave on the very citizens we have been called to serve.'

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng addresses delegates at a joint meeting between the departments of public works and correctional services and the Office of the Chief Justice at the NPA building in Silverton, Pretoria.

Reitumetse Mahope

More than R260-million has been set aside to repair and maintain outdated and rundown court buildings across the country.

Addressing the media in Tshwane on Tuesday, Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille said: "Far too often, citizens are forced to do their day-to-day business in dilapidated, outdated and rundown government buildings."

She said the state of the country's courts impacted negatively on the justice system.

"We are here today to bring home a very important issue – how the state of our government buildings dictate the impression we leave on the very citizens we have been called to serve."

She said when citizens used these spaces, they did not have a pleasant first impression of government.

"So, we need to make these public spaces a pleasant, comfortable experience with conducive conditions."

De Lille said she had received a series of complaints from across the country about the state of court buildings.

"In some cases, lifts and air-conditioners are not working.

"In Pinetown, there are reports that rats are eating the lunch and snakes are eating the rats.

"Coupled with this, there is a persistent stench of sewerage."

In the Pretoria High Court, the basement, which was supposed to be a parking area, ended up being a filing room.

Spokesperson for the judiciary, Nathi Mncube, who is based in the Chief Justice's office, said: "It appears that the original design of the building (Pretoria High Court) did not make provision of archiving space. But it is important to note that the parking area was never used as parking.

"It has always been used as an archive area for High Court files."

Mncube said the Office of the Chief Justice identified a need to explore short, medium and long-term solutions to address the current challenges.

He said the identification of an off-site storage facility, in collaboration with different government departments, was also being looked into to address the immediate filing challenge faced at the court.

Files lying on the floor were in the process of being sorted and cleared to alternative locations.

De Lille said court staff, including prosecutors and magistrates, had threatened to take strike action to protest against the

rundown courts.

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng welcomed the commitment from the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to look after the buildings, saying the state of court buildings affected the administration of justice.

He said some of the buildings were not suitable to be used as courts.

Mogoeng said going forward, senior public works officials must make themselves available for meetings to discuss building maintenance.

"The justice system is highly compromised by the poor maintenance of buildings. Power outages affect court cases. It is time that we buy and own these buildings," he said.

The minister and her deputy are expected to meet with 200 regional court heads, 15 district heads and 11 regional managers soon.

De Lille said after getting the courts in order, "I will be in talks with the minister of home affairs, the minister of police and various other colleagues to see where the department of public works can improve spaces".



The Pretoria Magistrate's Court.