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'FREE JOHN BLOCK'

Supporters call for Block to be freed

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SUPPORTERS of former ANC provincial chairperson John Block believe that political forces are making a concerted effort to keep him behind bars at all costs.

They indicated that in his generosity, Block had supplied equipment for inmates such as soccer balls, gym equipment and outfits for the football teams and was also presenting programmes to uplift prisoners.

A march took place from the Upington 26 monument to Upington prison on June 19, calling for the most recent fraud charges against him, relating to the Kimberley mental hospital, to be immediately dismissed.

The peaceful protest went ahead despite Block's family distancing themselves from the event and branding the march as "fake" on social media.

A petition was handed over by the Paballelo community to the Department of Correctional Services, the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).

Community members stated that Block was "publicly humiliated", where he was arrested and transported to the Upington Magistrate's Court on May 30 by a large contingent of security and police officials wearing bulletproof vests.

"Block is not serving a sentence for a violent crime. Our police stations do not have resources, yet a convoy of 20 vans and 100 police officers were available to arrest comrade Block, who was already in state custody."

The community stated that the real benefactors of the mental hospital fraud were escaping prosecution while easy targets were being harassed and victimised.

"Block is a model inmate who is doing good work within the centre. Why is he the only one that is being persecuted, where are the other accused who were involved? If Block is a high-risk inmate, why is he not being held at a maximum security prison?"

The memorandum questioned why the matter was being prosecuted 20 years after the alleged incident and accused the NPA and Hawks of "playing politics".

The community members added that the Upington Correctional Centre did not have a parole board and that they were waiting for upcoming court dates to hear legal presentations as to why Block should be released on parole.

Block is expected to appear along with his co-accused - the former HOD for the Department of Roads and Public Works, Patience Mokhali, and the director of Babareki Consulting Engineers, Tshegolekae Motaung - in the Kimberley Magistrate's Court on July 11 in connection with the

Kimberley mental hospital matter.

The original cost of construction of the hospital ballooned from R290 million to R1.8 billion and it took 14 years to complete.

Mokhali and Motaung were released on bail of R10 000 and R50 000.

Department of Correctional Services spokesperson Singabakho Nxumalo indicated that Block did not qualify for parole at this stage.

He stated that Block was not being offered any special privileges at the correctional centre.

"All inmates are detained in a correctional centre as directed by the courts, and the incarceration of the said inmate is as per his incarceration classification. Inmates are not allowed to conduct business while incarcerated in a correctional facility."

Nxumalo referred media enquiries as to how he was sourcing equipment for inmates at the centre and if it was considered to be a donation, to Block's legal representative.

Nxumalo said that the department was tasked to provide appropriate security risk management measures to ensure public safety.

"While this forms part of the rationale of the particular sentence handed down in court, the department must balance this responsibility with the need to provide circumstances appropriate to rehabilitation. Security risk management and needs-based correction inform incarceration classifications and the community correctional supervision classifications of offenders.

"In line with the offender rehabilitation path and the sentence plan of the inmate in question, needs-based correction is duly provided as per his incarceration classification."

The regional spokesperson for the NPA, Mojalefa Senokoatsane, explained that all accused charged in the matter were charged based on available evidence.

"The NPA has a responsibility to prosecute without fear or favour and without prejudice, so all the work it does is done to fulfil that legal mandate. It is the duty of the NPA to protect all victims of crime and the vulnerable.

"We are not politicians but public servants and therefore politics is something completely novel to the NPA.

"We are unable to comment about other issues raised therein as the matter is now sub judice."

Hawks provincial spokesperson Captain Tebogo Thebe pointed out that perpetrators could be charged at any time.

"Crime does not lapse nor does it have a duration. According to our investigations, criminality occurred and the role-players thereof were arrested. This has nothing to do with any specific individual or individuals."

He added that any further arrests would be determined as the investigation unfolded.

