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**Author:** Theolin Tembo

PRISON

# Calls for foreigners to serve sentence in own country

THEOLIN TEMBO  
theolin.tembo@meltwater.co.za

CHAIRPERSON of the Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services, Kgomo Anthea Ramolobeng, said that the committee remains concerned about the number of foreign nationals in the country's prisons, and ideally wants them to serve out their sentences in their own countries.

Ramolobeng was addressing the media and stakeholders at the Peace and Security Cluster Committee Chairpersons' briefing on Monday, July 7.

Ramolobeng began her address by saying that the committee was pleased with the Department of Correctional Services reviewing the Correctional Services Act, 111 of 1998, as it will allow them to provide input on areas that they believe should be amended or strengthened, including Section 73 of the Act, which deals with the management of foreign national inmates in the country's facilities.

"We heard during the budget debate that the minister indicated there were 24 000 foreign national inmates in correctional centres across the country, which costs the state R11 million per day.

"The committee is seriously concerned that our correctional facilities have so many foreign nationals, but our country has not entered into an inmate exchange programme with any country.

"We intend to review this provision specifically as it relates to the incarceration of foreign nationals. We want to provide for foreign nationals serving life sentences to serve their sentences in their countries of origin due to the costs associated with housing foreign inmates in correctional facilities," Ramolobeng said.

"We encourage the minister to consult further with the Minister of Home Affairs regarding the intention to review this provision."

Ramolobeng also addressed the remanding of detainees with bail of less than R1 000, where she said that the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) reports a total of 166 008 inmates in correctional centres nationwide, comprising 104 117 sentenced inmates and 61 891 remanded detainees.

"Remand detainees are the biggest contributor to overcrowding in correctional centres. We are concerned about the staggering cost of keeping and maintaining remand detainees in correctional



PRISONERS at Goodwood Correctional Centre during an oversight visit. | BRENDAN MAGAAR | Independent Newspapers Archives

facilities, which costs the department R482 per day and over R13 000 monthly for each detainee.

"Taking into consideration the pressing issue of overcrowding in our correctional facilities, many remand detainees are in the centres for months and years simply because they cannot afford to pay bail, which at times is as low as R300," Ramolobeng said.

"We cannot have a system that further perpetuates the injustices that our constitutional democracy so desperately tries to correct. It is in this context that we congratulate the Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services for their efforts to undertake a feasibility study on a pilot bail fund project for remand detainees with a bail amount of R1 000.

"Although this is a band-aid to the pressing challenge of overcrowding,

we trust it will, in the meantime, assist with the immediate decongestion of our facilities as we work toward a more sustainable solution while also addressing the unintended consequence of discriminating against offenders based on their socio-economic status," Ramolobeng said.

She explained that there are two legislative provisions intended to assist with managing overcrowding in correctional facilities, but in reality, they are producing very minimal results.

The committee is also calling on the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, as well as other key stakeholders, to take seriously its relationship with the DCS, "because most of its challenges do not emanate from DCS not delivering on its mandate".

The committee has raised concerns about the state of correctional facilities

they've witnessed during oversight visits to some of these facilities, particularly regarding the maintenance of infrastructure by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) and the condition of the kitchens.

"The DCS has informed the committee that DPWI has devolved maintenance of infrastructure to the DCS. However, this is done without proportional budget allocation to DCS. DCS has informed the committee that a total of R842 125 349 was processed and paid to DPWI under the auspices of User Charges Allocation in the 2024/25 financial year," Ramolobeng said.

She stated that the committee has since resolved to request that the Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure appear before the committee on 15 July to discuss this matter and other infrastructure challenges faced by DCS.