

MEDIA STATEMENT

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MINISTER PATRICIA DE LILLE (MP) PROVIDES FEEDBACK ON IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR COURT BUILDINGS REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Today, I am providing feedback to the media on the urgent repairs and maintenance to our court buildings across the country following my meeting on this issue with the Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, all regional court managers and Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) regional managers last week.

One of the priorities in the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is to ensure that when the public visits government buildings such as courts, Home Affairs offices and police stations that they walk into a decent and safe facility.

However, the complete opposite is what is happening at some of these buildings where members of the public are finding conditions in these government buildings to be unfriendly, ablution facilities are not working, buildings are dilapidated and unsafe. These unacceptable conditions are often the first impression that the public has of government.

The Department has now started a programme to make the interaction of the public with government friendlier, more comfortable and safe to demonstrate to the public who use these buildings every day that this government cares.

We have started with the repairs and maintenance to the courts because most of the complaints of the state of government buildings are about the courts.

Last week, I invited the Chief Justice to explain to the various DPWI and Justice Department officials what the impact of the inability to maintain and repair buildings is on the judicial process.

The Chief Justice said and I quote: "How you receive your clients dictates what they can expect from you. The National Prosecuting Authority, the Department of Justice, the Health and Social Development departments are all key role players in the greater justice system. All those processes that undermine the efficiency of these departments must be dealt with."

The Chief Justice also cited various cases which demonstrate the dire impact that lack of repairs and maintenance has on the public, their safety and the administering of justice.

Some examples cited by the Chief Justice was a case where he received calls from colleagues who were stuck in lifts, in a Durban court someone was able to walk into the building with a gun and shot his wife and brother-in-law.

The Chief Justice also told us about a roof that was leaking at the Constitutional Court and that in some court buildings, the configuration is such that the accused's stand is not far from the presiding officers and witnesses.

He emphasised that common sense dictates that the accused must be kept away from witnesses and the magistrate. Many people are also reluctant to come to court for maintenance case because there is no privacy and the same applies for protection orders.

From these examples we can see how severely these basic configuration and repairs and maintenance cases impact on the delivery of justice and ensuring people's safety. In some cases it is a matter of life and death.

The Department of Justice has given DPWI department R531million for upgrading of infrastructure and new accommodation for courts.

I have met with all regional DPWI and court managers again today to prioritise and agree on an implementation plan for repairs and maintenance but also to look at the causes of why our buildings are in such state.

I have also received feedback today on some of the repairs and maintenance that have been done since the initial meeting last week.

I have received feedback and introduced consequence and contract management processes.

Some of the problems that have been resolved in the past week include:

Durban

- There are 14 courts with lifts. At Durban Magistrate's court which is a busy court with 11 lifts. At any given time, one or two lifts are not working. We have a term contract to service the lifts and today I received feedback that all lifts are working.
- The rat infestation problems and plumbing issues at the Pinetown Magistrate's Court has been resolved.

Cape Town:

- Term contracts for all air conditioning systems for the courts in Cape Town. Regional managers will be visiting the courts to constantly check on these repairs.
- At the Cape Town High Court we are replacing two lifts and this will be completed next week.
- The Labour Court requires additional accommodation, we have started engaging them to procure additional accommodation from existing DPWI resources.

Johannesburg:

- For repairs to various lifts at court houses, the tender has been awarded and contractors will be on site next week, 16 August.

- At the Brakpan court where the court was burnt, the repairs were done within two months

These are just some of the updates I received from all regions across all provinces today but there are problems everywhere and we are tackling all of them thoroughly from prevention, the planning and procurement processes, right through to proper implementation of these repairs and maintenance.

We are using the courts to show how we can make public buildings more user-friendly but we are also improving systems and methodology to prevent this from happening again and to be more proactive.

There is no reason for the status quo to continue and for the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure to constantly be blamed for the state of buildings and for the department to continue having a bad name.

We are going to start remedial action now with projects that are moving at a slow pace.

As for service providers who are taking us for a ride, those days are also over.

We are going to look at each project and what the problems are with delivery and we are going to implement remedial action.

There is also the issue of unscheduled maintenance. In this regard, the DPWI are going to fund R10million to the Department of Justice to be used by Justice for day-to-day emergency maintenance repairs in collaboration with the DPWI.

With these maintenance and repairs programmes we are going to change impression we leave on the very citizens we've been called to serve.

Like I said last week: "Khawuleza! The patience of our people is running out!"

We must make public buildings pleasant, comfortable and with conducive conditions.

These buildings are the faces of government.

The DPWI has budgeted R2.5 billion for repairs and refurbishment during this current 2019/20 financial year.

Thus far, the Department has only spent R24 million in the first quarter of this year.

Just around 10% when the figure should be at more than 25%. We must work harder and faster because the lives of our citizens are at stake.

These spaces are a litmus test for citizens to be able to ascertain whether government is, in fact, working for them.

Again, I have been drilling the Batho Pele principles of putting the people first into the officials at DPWI.

We simply must do better and I will be tracking this from my office regularly to ensure that we get it right.

Members of the media, I am going to talk straight and tell you that the leading cause of these problems is corruption.

Investigations by the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) have found that over 300 people in the DPWI have companies that they set up to be corrupt and we are dealing with them. This disgraceful practice is coming to an end.

So while we are cleaning up the department, we also have to deliver better public buildings and turn them into more comfortable spaces for when the public interacts with government.

The Special Investigation Unit (SIU) also has an existing proclamation for the DPWI up until 2020 to investigate allegations relating to the day-to-day maintenance projects in the department.

They can also institute civil litigation to recover state funds lost or to prevent future losses.

In terms of an earlier proclamation of the SIU, the unit also investigated fraudulent invoices submitted by suppliers for payment, procurement irregularities in rewarding contracts, irregular awarding of tenders and conflict of interest amongst others.

The SIU also investigated allegations of cover quoting, where one company submits different prices under different company names but ultimately it is the same company.

Other findings by the SIU include that 3 570 officials have an interest in entities and are still employed in DPWI with no record of a declaration or permission being granted by the department.

I am making this public because the days of this department funding corruption is coming to an end.

There are also many suppliers that are sharing the same address and the same banking account.

The SIU have also made some criminal referrals to the NPA valued at over R71 000.

To date the SIU have finalised 356 cases.

There are also matters that have been referred for disciplinary action. In many cases, officials who have been found guilty have been dismissed.

I have just told officials that it is not worth their while to lose their job for quick buck rather than doing an honest day's work to support their families.

I also said that we know a lot more than they think and they will be court in court soon, the very same courts that are not being repaired and maintained so they must stop their shenanigans. We must bring ethical leadership back for the sake of the people we serve.

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