

## **Minister Masutha updates nation on key developments in DCS**

Minister Michael Masutha briefed the media on 29 June 2017 about a number of important developments in DCS. He spoke at length about parole considerations for lifers, political offenders and the review of the parole system. He also gave an update on progress made with the investigation into the regrettable incident at Johannesburg Correctional Centre, Medium B that hogged media headlines in recent days. Minister Masutha apologised to the nation for the incident that led to public outrage. The minister said 10 officials fingered in the alleged flouting of DCS policies and procedures have been served with letters informing them of the intention to suspend. Three other officials were off-duty and will be served when they return to work. The minister furthermore noted his concern over an increasing number of court cases by offenders serving life sentences. He said a common allegation was that he caused unnecessary delays in processing their parole applications. Minister Masutha said he has expressed the urgency for the department to beef up its legal capacity and its legal administration.

### **Parole consideration for lifers**

The minister explained the distinction between lifers who are eligible for parole consideration under the *Van Vuuren* versus the *Van Wyk* judgements. In the *Van Vuuren* judgement, lifers sentenced before 1 October 2004 were eligible for parole consideration after serving 20 years. There were 369 offenders belonging to this category at the time of the judgement in 2010. Of these, 276 have been placed on parole.

The cumulative effect of the *Van Vuuren* and *Van Wyk* court judgements, as well as the President's special remission of sentences in 2012 meant that offenders belonging to the *Van Wyk* category became due for parole consideration much earlier. To date, 1 412 offenders belonging to the *Van Wyk* category have been considered for parole, the minister said.

The minister indicated that of the 1 124 applications brought to him for consideration since assuming office in May 2014, he placed 291 on parole.

He mentioned the work that has been done to expedite the completion of professional reports and recommendations on the risks and rehabilitation of lifers due for parole consideration. He underscored the importance of the restorative justice approach when considering applications.

### **Political offenders**

Minister Masutha said he established a Ministerial Task Team on Political Offenders in December 2014 to consider inmates whose offences were deemed to be politically motivated and who were recommended for presidential pardon by the reference group established by former President Thabo Mbeki in 2007. Overall, 2 109 applications were received by the group, of which 149 cases were recommended for pardon. Of these, only 12 are still serving their sentences following the recent release of 39. The minister has tasked the team to trace the remaining 1 960 applicants and the co-accused of the 149 who were recommended for pardon. Some recommendations were excluded due to their offences being sexual in nature (65), and others were excluded because they were denied amnesty by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (139).

## **Position Paper on Parole Administration in South Africa**

The minister said currently there were consultations with relevant role players on a Position Paper on Parole Administration, in view of transforming the country's parole system.

Minister Masutha ended the briefing by announcing the impending retirement of Mr Zach Modise as the National Commissioner of DCS at the end of August 2017.