



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES: REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSIONER

**Speaker's Notes for the National Commissioner of the Department
of Correctional Services Mr. Z.I. Modise**

Ex-Offenders Work Session

Kgosi Mampuru II Management Area, Tshwane, Gauteng

15 February 2016

Programme Director:

Chief Deputy Commissioner for Community Corrections: Ms. Pumla Mathibela

Distinguished Correctional Services Managers

Community Leaders and Activists

Representatives from Business and NGOs

Our Partners and Service Providers in the Corrections Business

Our Offenders and Ex-Offenders

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

On Thursday, 11 February 2016, South Africa commemorated 26 years since the founding father of our democracy, the late Nelson Mandela, walked out of Drakenstein Correctional Centre a free man after 27 years of incarceration. That day marked a giant leap in the long walk to freedom, not only for Nelson Mandela but for the people of South Africa. Just like many freedom fighters of his time, our former President had a dream of a free, and just, country. His release meant that the struggle would continue until we establish a peaceful, and safer, South Africa for all, where all human life is valued. Our freedom was not free. It was attained through bloodshed, and the loss of many lives. Hence, it is our duty to value, and protect, our freedom at all cost.

Ladies and gentlemen, on 23 and 24 July 2015, our Deputy Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Honourable Mr. Thabang Makwetla, convened a historic two-day Ex-Offenders Conference. It was a great success considering that it was the first of its kind, with more than 500 delegates from across the country. The conference was aimed at identifying the role that ex-offenders can play within communities to: (1) curb criminality; (2) ease the process of social reintegration of parolees and probationers back to society; and, (3) to identify opportunities, and partnerships, that can empower ex-offenders to be self-sustaining and contribute positively towards the economy of the country.

At the conference, we adopted nine (9) resolutions for implementation. I am pleased to report that, as part of these resolutions, on 26 and 27 January 2016 we launched South Africa's first two Ex-Offenders Desks at Patensie, and Jeffrey's Bay, in the Eastern Cape.

At Patensie, a community member donated her property, which was previously used as a tavern, to house the Ex-Offenders Desk. At Jeffrey's Bay, the property being used for the Ex-Offenders Desk was previously owned by different church ministries which provided various community projects. Both dwellings were renovated, and refurbished, by parolees and probationers from Humansdorp Community Corrections. Building materials were donated by local businesses.

We have long said that corrections is a societal responsibility, and that the business of rehabilitating, and reintegrating, ex-offenders cannot be left solely to government. What happened in Patensie, and Jeffrey's Bay, demonstrates what is possible when we forge partnerships with communities, faith-based organisations, municipalities and NGOs.

Programme Director, parolees and probationers are human beings regardless of whether they became offenders. Having received a second chance, many ex-offenders have transformed into law-abiding citizens who contribute positively towards building a safer South Africa where all can live in peace and harmony. Ex-offenders have the potential to become both employers and employees. Through education and skills development programmes that they acquired while incarcerated, many are able to come out as changed individuals ready to reverse their history of thuggery, and malevolence, into inspirational success stories.

As DCS, our mandate is to invest in rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes, aimed at breaking the cycle of crime, as outlined in the National Development Plan, towards ensuring that all people in South Africa are, and feel, safe. The White Paper on Corrections states that “no correctional system can achieve its objective if it does not have a range of healthy external relationships such as families, communities, private sector, non-governmental, faith-based and community based organisations as well as other government departments”. We have the responsibility to ensure that the programmes we offer to offenders, while incarcerated, create an environment that fosters self-discipline, social independence, ongoing family support and community support. We should also work together with communities, and victims of crime, to nurture the spirit of forgiveness, and reconciliation, between the offended and the offender.

This mission of reconnecting ex-offenders, with their families, victims and communities, becomes more urgent when parolees are placed under community corrections. Many South Africans know about the uphill struggle ex-offenders face. We know how often they have to confront prejudice and suspicion. For all the extraordinary work that you do as ex-offenders, you remain engaged in a constant battle to make your voices heard. It is for this reason that we convened the Ex-Offenders Conference last year. And, yes, it was a resounding success. This was because of your full participation, and energy, to declare that you are capable citizens of this country, fully equipped to make a difference - irrespective of your past deeds.

We are gathered here today to conceptualize appropriate strategies, and programmes, that will empower ex-offenders to become economically active and self-sustainable. We are here to deliberate together and find ways to develop partnerships, between ex-offenders, government and civil society, that would enhance, and sustain, initiatives and interventions to combat crime. We believe that, as a collective, we can change mind-sets, and stereotypes, such as the belief that “*once an offender, always an offender.*”

Through our partnerships and efforts, we want to instil faith in our communities to be part of the corrections system of our country. The establishment of this movement must produce excellent results, which will not only bring positive change in the lives of ex-offenders but also bring hope to communities for peaceful, and safer, environments. Our long term successes should include having ex-offenders at the forefront of fighting crime, and substance abuse, within communities. We should see many businesses owned by ex-offenders flourishing, creating employment for fellow ex-offenders and community members, while alleviating poverty and unemployment. We want to further see zero cases of recidivism.

To all ex-offenders, parolees and probationers amongst us, and those that are out there, I want to personally plead with you to embrace this second chance offered to you in bettering your lives. There are better options that each of you can take rather than living a life of crime. Most of you are smart and intelligent.

You just need to tap into your inner self to discover your passion, and potential, which can bring a difference to yourself and your community. It is time for you to say NO to crime and violence, and to work together with society, and security agencies, to fight this scourge that is destroying our country. You can put an end to lawlessness, and become agents of change. Each and every one of you can brighten the corner where you are.

Pope John Paul II once said: “We are still a long way from the time when our conscience can be certain of having done everything possible to prevent crime and to control it effectively so that it no longer does harm and, at the same time, to offer to those who commit crimes a way of redeeming themselves and making a positive return to society. If all those in some way involved in the problem ... tried to develop this line of thought, perhaps humanity as a whole could take a great step forward in creating a more serene and peaceful society”.

In conclusion, it is important that interventions which facilitate the social reintegration of offenders, and reduce the rate of re-offending, meet the needs, and aspirations, of all beneficiaries, including offenders, victims and communities. We are hopeful that the launch of South Africa’s first Ex-Offenders Desks in Patensie and Jeffrey’s Bay, today’s working session and other upcoming projects will be part of such initiatives, and will help us to learn some primary lessons that can inspire, and guide, us in designing measures, and strategies, that could be adapted for use across the country.

Let us continue to work

together in bringing the change that we want to see in our communities, and our beautiful country, for a better future for our children and generations to come.

THANK YOU.