



**Ministry Justice and Correctional Services**

**Republic of South Africa**

**Address by Minister Ronald Lamola to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Meeting of the Group Friends on the Nelson Mandela Rules (17 July 2020) & Nelson Mandela International Day**

**Ambassador Gerhard Kuntzle**

**Ambassador Rapulane Molekane**

**Permanent Missions**

**Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Ms Ghada Waly**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

At this meeting, we gather in remembrance of a world icon, Tata Nelson Mandela, who had he been alive, would have turned 102 years tomorrow. Unfortunately, as fate would have it, today we laid to rest his daughter and Ambassador of South Africa to Denmark, Zindzi Mandela. She was a liberation fighter in her own right.

Her contributions towards the liberation struggle and the fight for the attainment of freedom and democracy in South Africa, through personal engagement from a tender age, will be cherished as long as we live. Zindzi's death has robbed South Africa and the international community of a diplomat par excellence. Her devotion to diplomatic services was exceptional and she will greatly be remembered.

**May her soul rest in peace.**

There are various activities lined-up across the world to honour Tata Mandela. One of the major events will be the 18<sup>th</sup> Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture which will be delivered by the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres tomorrow. The theme for the lecture is: ***Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A new Social Contract for a New Era.***

We are indeed looking forward to the lecture. In our context, the new social contract and era in correctional facilities manifests itself in the form of Nelson Mandela Rules which are the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 17 December 2015. In South Africa, these rules are a central tenant of our criminal justice system.

As part of implementing the Nelson Mandela Rules, the South African government is continuing to implement and strengthen measures to protect inmates from the ravages of Covid-19. There is no country that has been spared of the effects of Covid-19 and this extends to correctional facilities around the globe. Most of these facilities have been affected as a result of perennial challenges such as chronic overcrowding, which prevents the practicing of physical distancing.

In South Africa, we have 243 Correctional Centres, with a bed capacity of 118 572. Currently, we have an inmate population of 145 376, resulting in overcrowding of 22.61%. We are addressing overcrowding and in line with the United Nations advice, we have announced a special parole dispensation for low risk inmates.

This dispensation is targeting release of 19 000 inmates and we are busy considering their parole placement. Thus far, we have released just below 7 000 inmates into community corrections. After its completion, overcrowding would be reduced by 12.15%.

This is one of the measures we are cushioning in order to prevent the rapid spread of Covid-19 in correctional centres. Overcrowding reduction is important from a clinical perspective as overcrowding affects the quality of oxygen circulation within cells.

Government has adopted the Correctional Services Covid-19 Disaster Management Response Strategy. A strategy used to manage this global pandemic in all correctional centres. At the centre of this strategy, is the containment of Covid-19 and treatment of inmates who test positive.

The Department of Correctional Services has a team of healthcare officials dedicated to the wellbeing and healthcare of all inmates. These officials are armed with all relevant Personal Protective Equipment and fully adhere to the health protocols in treating positive cases of Covid-19. We have employed over 600 additional medical personnel to augment our response capacity on Covid-19 in all our correctional centres in South Africa.

All inmates, both sentenced and remand, have been given PPEs and those who tested positive have access to quality healthcare. Thus far, we have a total of 1 485 accumulative positive cases of Covid-19 for inmates.

This is equivalent to 1.02% of the inmate population. Of this number, we have recorded 1 231 recoveries, thus resulting in only 239 active cases in our centres. However, we have unfortunately lost 15 inmates who succumbed to complications of Covid-19. Most of these inmates had comorbidities such as diabetes, HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis and High Blood Pressure.

We have full confidence in our preventative and treatment measures and remain committed to protect inmates.

This is in line with the Nelson Mandela Rules which provide that prisoners should enjoy the same standards of healthcare that are available in the community and should have access to necessary healthcare services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status.

We have also prohibited visits to all our centres as a precautionary measure to curb the outbreak. This has been in force for the past three months. Inmates communicate with their loved ones through telephones and we have increased their access time for phones. We will review the decision at an appropriate time, but for now the prohibitions stands.

The South African government recognizes and affirms the right of inmates to inherent human dignity. Under this period of the pandemic, we are resolved to guarantee this right and our efforts are galvanised towards this course. This we do guided by what our founding democratic president, Nelson Mandela,

taught us when he said: ***No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.***

South Africa has made it its mission to translate these rules into a daily reality for inmates. We fully understand that the Mandela Rules should be part of much wider attempts to break the cycle of challenges that inmates are confronted with.

The Group of Friends of the Nelson Mandela Rules must provide possible solutions to abuses and inhumane conditions that inmates elsewhere are subjected to. The rules must find reflection in all correctional centres across the world.

They must lead to safe incarceration of inmates in an environment that is conducive towards their effective rehabilitation which must translate to social integration. Inmates must be empowered with programmes that will enable them to cope once released, this include increasing their employment prospects and them abhorring their criminal past.

We need a paradigm shift from society, they must see the importance of desisting from discriminating and stigmatizing against released inmates. This would go a long way in reducing recidivism. Society must have confidence in rehabilitation programmes of correctional services. This will only be practical if inmates become good ambassadors of progress in their communities.

Inmates must earn their second chance through deeds that will not erode public confidence in the system of corrections. In South Africa, inmates are also themselves contributing in the fight against this global

pandemic by producing Facemasks in workshops across our correctional centres. The facemasks are donated to disadvantaged communities and schools.

As a country, we are not only honoured, but we are proud that the United Nations saw it befitting to recognize Tata Mandela as the fit inspiration in the implementation of the Revised United Nations Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Prisoners.

As the world commemorates Mandela Day tomorrow, let us deepen the values that this icon stood for, which are freedom, selflessness, human dignity, forgiveness and creating a better world. We must in memory of Tata Mandela address challenges besieging the world. These include institutionalised racism, poverty, disease, patriarchy and underdevelopment.

Let us vociferously condemn incidences that we have witnessed in other parts of the world where innocent lives were lost as a result of actions with race connotations. Let us be in solidarity with the people of the world who are victims of great injustices, they yearn for justice and their emancipation cannot be delayed.

We can all make a positive change in areas we are entrusted with responsibilities. Let us build a cohesive society. It is in our hands to live in a way that respects and enhances freedom and democracy in the world.

I thank you!