

**MINISTRY OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES**

**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Address by the Deputy Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Honorable Thabang Makwetla.**

**Wheelchair Handover, Mpumalanga Province, Ehlanzeni District Municipality.**

**Venue: KaMashego Community Hall, Ward 22, City of Mbombela.**

1. **March 2019.**

MEC of Mpumalanga Department of Social Development, Ms Busisiwe Shiba.

SAPS Mpumalanga Provincial Commissioner: Lt Gen B M Zuma

Executive Mayor of Mbombela, Cllr Sibusiso Mathonsi

The Speaker of Mbombela, Cllr Mandla Msibi, Diphala

Chairperson of the Disability Forum, Mr Mlombo

The Chief Operating Commissioner, Mr Mandla Mkabela

Acting Regional Commissioner of LMN Region, Mr Phiko Mbambo

Area Commissioner of Barberton Management Area, Mr Takalani Mashamba.

Senior Members of the Department of Correctional Services

Representatives of government

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today’s gathering is not only significant for the Department of Correctional Services. It serves as a platform to indicate that we all have a role to play in building South Africa to be a country that must at all times, seek to uplift the plight of our people towards a better life for all. It is particularly an honour for me to join the community of Pienaar under the leadership of Msogwaba Traditional Authority today. Given that this is a very significant year for all citizens of South Africa as we celebrate 25 years since the first democratic elections, and are having our sixth general elections on the 8th of May.

The Department of Correctional Services is an organ of the state that plays a crucial role in the advancement of democracy, and in our fight for a crime free South Africa that offers equal opportunities for all. The department operates within the criminal justice value chain and is responsible for Remand Detention (for people awaiting trial), Incarceration (after sentencing), Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration of offenders.

The aim of the Department of Correctional Services, as outlined in the Correctional Services Act and operationalized in the White Paper on Corrections; is to contribute toward maintaining and protecting a just, peaceful and safe society. Our aim is not to punish, but to detain inmates in safe custody, whilst maintaining their human dignity and developing their sense of social responsibility. The DCS is committed to promoting the general development of all inmates and persons. In order to prevent repeat offending and reintegrate offenders back into society as law abiding citizens, who contribute positively to the advancement of the country and their communities.

The democratic government of South Africa, led by the African National Congress, has long committed towards working with communities and all citizens to redress the injustices of the Apartheid legacy. And to build a developed society founded on strong moral and ethical codes. Crime is a big problem in South Africa, and Pienaar is reported to be having the highest crime rates within the region of Ehlanzeni. The rate of crime speaks to many socio-economic issues, including but not limited to; poverty, high unemployment rates, lack of skills and low levels of education.

We need to reduce the high levels of crime in our efforts to build a prosperous South Africa; which can only happen if we deal with the socio-economic inequalities in society. The structure and interventions of the DCS are driven by this understanding of a need for a multi- disciplinary and cross sectorial approach. Which must include a focus on partnerships with communities and organisations to form a developing, cohesive and caring society.

This approach requires an investment in skills development programs for offenders; and interventions that build their social resilience and provide them with hopes, dreams and talents they may not have realised they had before their time with the DCS. The Department currently Offenders skills development programs in multiple disciplines. For example Welding, Food Handling, Hair Dressing, Garden Maintenance, Plumbing, Livestock Farming, Agriculture, Brick Making, Baking and so on. We also offer opportunities for offenders to complete their schooling and study further to obtain higher education qualifications.

I emphasises this point especially because the youth population in Correctional Centres is increasing and this is extremely worrying. It is important for the department to ensure that offenders, especially young people, are given access to education and up-skilling opportunities. We will not realise our mission of rehabilitation in order to break the cycle of crime; if we release offenders back into society, to the very same conditions that led to them committing the various crimes that resulted in their incarceration.

Empowering Offenders with the ability to access economic opportunities, and equipping them with the skills required to improve the conditions within their communities is absolutely critical. If we are to successfully realise a crime free and developed South Africa.

I am aware of the difficulties of finding employment in South Africa especially with a criminal record. This is why the Department of Correctional Services in partnership with various agencies of government and other sectors; have started programs that offer entrepreneurial skills to Offenders. The DCS must work harder and create projects for ex-offenders where they can be recruited for work. There must also be programs and interventions that encourage them to start businesses and create jobs. These interventions must have high impact and be designed based on the profile of the population trends within Correctional Centres.

This partnership driven multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial approach of the Department of Correctional Services, is the reason we are here today to donate wheelchairs to 58 people living with disability. This project was conceived and launched in 2013; by Mr Jack Klaas who is the Regional Commissioner of the Western Cape Management Area. RC Klaas, headed the call of Thuma Mina and approached partners outside the Department of Correctional Services; to donate wheelchairs for people with disability in our communities. Since inception; we have donated over two thousand wheelchairs across all provinces of South Africa except the North West.

Government remains committed to fight for the rights and dignity of all marginalised populations in South Africa. This includes people with disability, women and children. People with disability are marginalized and excluded from full participation in society. They face multiple forms of challenges and discrimination in various social spheres. This includes access to health care services, employment and education. This initiative that brought us together today is important because physical disability cannot and should not be a permanent obstacle to the progress and development of our communities. We must work together to change social attitudes towards disability, and create special projects and facilities to ensure equal access to economic opportunities for all.

The ANC government’s commitment to improving the lives of marginalised groups of the population is well laid out in the Constitution of South Africa and the country’s policy framework. However a lot of work and investment is needed to ensure that it is implemented effectively. It is a priority laid out in the ANC manifesto and in government’s plan; to ensure that people with disability have equitable access to education, health services, employment, social security and all the opportunities that come with living in a democracy.

Our objective is to make sure that people with disability stop being a perennial source of pain and suffering, especially for the elderly. Our legislative and policy commitments, coupled with revolutionary changes brought about by science and technology, will herald a new dawn in the lives of all marginalised populations. The coordinated efforts of the Department of Correctional services to donate these wheelchairs is a testament of this commitment.

These wheelchairs were donated by an organisation outside the DCS and were assembled by offenders as part of skills development and social reintegration. Offenders who were involved in this project have acknowledged that their actions were wrong and are now committed towards making a positive contribution in South Africa. This is a gesture to say, we are sorry for our deeds, kindly give us a second chance so we can amend our ways towards becoming law abiding citizens.

Events such as this are coordinated by the Community Corrections offices of the department. The objective of Community Corrections is to afford sentenced offenders an opportunity to serve their sentences in a non-custodial manner; to enable persons subject to community corrections to lead a socially responsible and crime-free life during the period of their sentence and in future; to enable them to be rehabilitated in a manner that best keeps them as an integral part of society; and to enable them to be fully integrated into society when they have completed their sentences.

Currently the office of Community Corrections in this area is responsible for approximately 200 probationers and parolees. They have reported to me that in this financial year, they have done the following to achieve their rehabilitation and social reintegration mandate. They have:

* assisted 75 parolees and probationers to find employment;
* facilitated the involvement of 324 Parolees and Probationers in community projects;
* held 94 Imbizo’s with communities to address various issues involving the work of the department;
* Facilitated restorative justice processes with 634 victims and 140 Offenders/ Parolees.
* Established 30 service points in Community Corrections within the LMN region.

They have also reported that the large majority, almost 99%, of their parolees and probationers are without violation. These offenders that I am talking about have to use the skills the department gave them to contribute to the development of their communities. Some of the projects they have been involved in include: building an old age home in Kabokweni; cleaning and maintenance of schools and tribal offices in the area; fencing, cleaning and maintenance of home based care centres; community vegetable gardens.

Offenders can only continue doing positive work for the community if you encourage them and accept them back into your community, back into your family and support them as they strive to make the best of the second chance they have been given.

The government is investing a lot of money and resources to break the cycle of crime and improve the socio-economic situation in our communities. The DCS has come a long way in our transformative mandate to implement a correctional system and contribute to the fight for a peaceful and crime free South Africa. It is important for the DCS as the department that deals with offenders to work closely with communities. I urge you to get to know the department better and understand the work that we do because the department and Offenders can achieve much more with your support. There are many success stories of people who are ex-offenders and have proven that people can change.

I would like to congratulate the Department of Correctional Services for putting together this successful and impactful event. And I want to urge officials of the Department of Correctional Services to continue working hard to rehabilitate offenders, and reintegrate them as productive citizens and active community members. I ask you again as community members not to neglect people who have offended you. Provide them with the support they need to make better life decisions. To the offenders: your participation is appreciated and I would like to encourage you to accept your sentences, use your time with DCS productively and strive to do better everyday.

Allow me to unreservedly thank all community care-givers and organisations that work tirelessly to assist people with disabilities to live fulfilling, and productive lives. I also wish to express my gratitude to all correctional officials and the partners of the department across all sectors; who contribute towards the constitutional imperative of building an inclusive society. As history illustrates; we have fought hard and made many sacrifices for the democracy we enjoy today. We still have a lot to do but we have come a long way. Remember to exercise your democratic right and protect our country by casting your vote on the 8th of May.

I would once again like to extend my sincerest gratitude to all of you for making it possible for us to have this event today, and providing me this opportunity to be part of a noble cause. It is my wish and hope that this is not the end of our journey of philanthropic activities that benefit people with disabilities. I look forward to being a part of many more initiatives like this in the future.

I thank you all.