

**Opening Remarks of ACSA Chairperson and Acting National
Commissioner of Correctional Services – South Africa: Ms
Nontsikelelo Jolingana at the ACSA Core Members Council (CMC)
held in Pretoria – Velmore Hotel in Erasmia on 2 April 2014**

Honoured members of ACSA Executive Committee

*Distinguished Core Management Council members from ACSA
member states and other Heads of Corrections and Prisons*

The secretariat of ACSA and special guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me to begin by welcoming all Core Management Council members of ACSA to South Africa and to this gathering. Your presence, despite your tight programmes and many urgent matters facing your institutions back home, is both humbling and heartening to us.

I thought I should remind this gathering that our theme leading up to the 3rd Biennial Conference of ACSA scheduled for July 2014 in Mozambique is:

**“Building a sustainable and humane correctional system in
Africa: A collaborative responsibility”**

Yesterday we had an ACSA Executive Committee meeting which paved a way for our meeting as Core Management Council members today.

These sessions will also lead us to the Ministerial Consultative Forum (MCF) meeting on Thursday and Friday that is convened by Minister Sibusiso Ndebele of South Africa as the current Chairperson of ACSA.

As the team seating in this meeting today, we constitute a strategic core of the African leadership in corrections and prisons, on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of translating numerous resolutions of conventions, protocols signed, and declarations made over years into practical programmes. Through these, our nations committed themselves to spare no effort in transforming the prisons inherited from colonial and repressive regimes to people's correctional systems that are effective in:

- Re-humanising our people, whose dignity was ravaged by repressive regimes, poverty, gross underdevelopment and massive inequalities;
- Rehabilitating offenders in order to effectively break the cycle of crime and build safer societies; and
- Promoting social re-integration of offenders to advance the reduction of re-offending rates in our societies.

Since the advent of freedom and democracy in our respective countries, we have made good progress in transforming our correctional or prison systems. For example:

- In most of our countries we passed pieces of legislation, policies and regulations that entrenched the human rights ethos and began in earnest with their executing.

In some instances we even built legislative, judicial and civil society oversight structures that promote good governance and accountability of correctional systems.

- We reduced overcrowding in, for example, South Africa by over 30 000 inmates since 2004 while the stance of tougher penalties for all categories of serious crimes remained unchanged, and
- The establishment of more humane correctional centres such as the open correctional centres of Zimbabwe.

The fruits we are harvesting today are borne from the seeds planted by our fore bearers, those who struggled for freedom and for the introduction of human rights based corrections legislation, to mention a few. We thank them for building a solid foundation from which we, as “younger lions” in leadership, can launch new and collaborative efforts to speed up change in African corrections and prisons. However, the road ahead remains long and difficult, still largely reflecting the character of the prison systems inherited with the following challenges continuing to bedevil African Correctional/Prison systems:

- Overcrowding in some instances with Remand Detainees constituting up to 97% of those incarcerated in some countries.
- Prisons are significantly under-resourced in many instances and remain the Cinderella institutions of the broader criminal justice systems. This is compounded by ailing infrastructure.
- The structural socio-economic factors are largely defining the profile offenders in our care, who largely come from certain segments of our society.

The above issues are among the key factors considered when many leaders in the world and our Founding Father of Democracy, uTat'uNelson Mandela said in order to know the character of a society and its level of civilization, one must look at its prisons.

Today, our people believe, enough is enough of the regurgitation of ideals and the rhetoric. This is a period when our peoples are expecting more focus on the execution of many of the conventions and protocols I have mentioned.

Theodore Roosevelt said:

“In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.”

We need to ensure that these meetings are enabled to make the right decisions. The last session of the MCF was in 2008 in Zambia. I am excited to confirm that 14 Ministers that are responsible for corrections / prisons have confirmed that they would attend this one and they have begun to arrive. We expect the MCF to give clear guidance on taking the transformation of corrections and prisons to a higher level.

It is this generation of leaders in our nations in general and in correctional services in particular that must plant and nourish their own seeds to build a better legacy for future generations. Robert Stevenson aptly emphasised this point when he said:

“Don’t judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant.”

I am sure I speak on behalf of all of us when I say I am happy to be part of this generation of ACSA leadership that stands on the shoulders of many giants of our struggle for freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. From the vantage point we occupy, we are ready to strengthen collaboration across the continent. We must take a series of steps and tools to translate our ideals into practical programmes that make a difference in people’s lives. We need to:

- Establish baselines on where we are, collectively and as individual members states of ACSA, share and align our visions and develop clear strategies and targets with monitoring and evaluation tools;
- We must build on the existing goodwill among member states of ACSA, to sign bilateral agreements that will promote information sharing, exchange of human capital, share pockets of excellence and build formidable correctional systems that comply with international and African instruments for management of offenders.

Uta'u Nelson Mandela said: "I dream of an Africa that is in peace with itself". He meant societies where all people including women, children and those with disabilities could go on with their normal activities without fear of crime. As leaders of our various correctional systems we are at the helm of institutions that constitute the last buffer of the state against crime. We are accountable for over 80% of the performance outcomes of these institutions. It all starts and ends with us as leaders.

I wish to wrap up my message with a quotation from the Father of African Renaissance; Nkwame Nkrumah who said:

"Revolutions are brought about by men who think as men of action and act as men of thought."

The Ministers and our people have trust in us, and we dare not fail them. Minister Sibusiso Ndebele always emphasizes that, as Correctional Leaders, Managers and Officials, we have no choice, but to succeed.

I declare this meeting, officially opened.

I thank you