

COVID-19 UPDATE

FROM THE DESK OF MINISTER LAMOLA

Dear Department of Correctional Services (DCS) Colleague,

As the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, I want to extend words of appreciation to every single DCS staff member who is dedicated to the course of working against Covid-19 in all our correctional facilities and offices across the country.

The professionalism with which DCS officials continue to conduct themselves, during this era of Covid-19, has heralded new levels of dedication and patriotism in the department. It is through hard work, and relentless efforts, of our staff that we have not recorded any positive case of Covid-19 thus far in any DCS centre or office across the country.

DCS officials have understood that the Covid-19 pandemic calls for a rigorous departure from the business-as-usual approach. They have responded in a befitting manner worthy of compliment. We implore all officials to continue providing the astute leadership that is prevalent across all spheres of DCS, as this will lead to renewal and total transformation of our department.

Together, we managed to deal with certain initial challenges of inadequate supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PEP) due to the high demand world-wide. Centres, Management Areas, Regional Offices and Head Office worked together and adopted interim measures to share limited resources at their disposal and this proved to be effective. We have been informed that procurement of PEPs and other essentials has been effected, and currently bulk distribution is taking place. This will enable us to continue responding appropriately to the pandemic.

We want to emphasise that working against Covid-19 and preventing its spread require a collective effort by all of us. South Africans from all walks of life must adopt the vigilant practice of good hygiene, sneezing into their elbows instead of hands, refraining from touching their faces and washing their hands frequently. Failure to observe these preventative measures will lead to the spread of Covid-19 which will be catastrophic.

South Africa is currently in a nation-wide lockdown in response to the pandemic. The lockdown has caused disruptions in our daily lives, but it is necessary to save the lives of our people including our officials and offenders. We are encouraged that most South Africans are adhering to the lockdown restrictions and, where necessary, law enforcement agencies are also hard at work to enforce the lockdown.

During the lockdown, some of the restrictions, relevant to DCS, that we have gazetted include the following:

- Restrictions pertaining to the placement, movement and release of inmates;

- Correctional Supervision and Parole Board Sitzings will be suspended except in circumstances mentioned in the gazette;
- Day parole granted to sentenced offenders is suspended;
- Temporary leave in terms of section 44 of the Correctional Services Act (CSA) shall not be granted to sentenced offenders;
- Transfer of inmates shall be limited and must be referred to the Chief Operations Commissioner for consideration and approval;
- Referral of remand detainees to court for consideration of their length of detention and bail review will continue; and
- Notwithstanding the provisions in the Regulations regarding the suspension of visits by members of the public to correctional centres and remand detention facilities, inmates may communicate (only in urgent matters in accordance with the Directions issued by the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services published under Government Gazette No. 43191, Government Notice R. 440 of 31 March 2020) with their legal representatives telephonically through the Head of the Centre, where circumstances and resources permit.

In all our centres, we are continuing to implement the decision to prohibit visits. This is a correct decision, and it is one of the factors that has led to the zero record of Covid-19 cases in our centres thus far. When we took the decision, our critics accused us of radicalism but we are vindicated as this measure continues to protect both officials and offenders.

To all DCS officials who cannot be on lockdown, due to nature of your work which is classified as essential and critical, we want to emphasise that your efforts and commitment envision the correctional services we seek to create in this administration. This is a correctional services committed to creating safer communities, a correctional services that prioritizes the wellbeing of offenders, a correctional services that is free from all manner of indignities, a correctional services that is free from endemic maladministration and corruption as well as a professional correctional services where our staff is one of our highest priorities.

We have always impressed upon both Departments in our Ministry, Correctional Services as well as Justice and Constitutional Development, to adopt an integrated approach in your work. During this pandemic, we are impressed by the intertwining of plans by both departments in the fight against Covid-19. The utilization of Audio Visual Remand Technology for postponement of cases is an area that needs continued exploitation beyond the pandemic. We must earnestly mod-

ernise and use technology, which must be linked to other departments in the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) Cluster. This will make an impact and be effective in the fight against crime.

Having observed the good work by our officials during the pandemic, which must be replicated in the department's day-to-day operations, there are, however, worrying traits by few officials that have not escaped us. This behaviour captures the essence of what we stand against, and it must be uprooted.

We have witnessed a few DCS officials running explicit social media campaigns against preventive measures employed in our centres. This campaign is centred on spreading falsehoods, and we strongly denounce it. We urge you to refrain from engaging in behaviour that has a potential to undermine the good work that is done to fight against Covid-19. Such behaviour creates panic to those with loved ones in our centres.

Where there might be shortfalls, let us use internally established channels to robustly engage and take corrective actions if needs be. My office, as the Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services, is also open for engagements.

Together, let us heighten the level of communication to officials and offenders so that they are enlightened and do not rely on fake news. Let our work embody the clarion call by President Cyril Ramaphosa for all South Africans to work together, to contain the spread of the disease and alleviate its effects on our people.

*Ha Khensa! Re a leboga!
Siyabonga! Baie Dankie! Thank You!
Ro Livhuwa! Enkosi! Re a leboha!*

Best wishes,

RONALD LAMOLA

