



Ministry Justice and Correctional Services
Republic of South Africa

MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

12 April 2020

**STATEMENT: RESPONSE TO SUNDAY TIMES 'SUN CITY' ACCUSED OF STAGING COVID-19
PREPARDNESS 'ACT' FOR LAMOLA**

The Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services has noted an article published in the Sunday Times on both its print and online platforms. At the time of going to press, the publication had not considered our response.

Having noted that, the Ministry is of the view that the responses are in the public interest and should be read alongside the article. It is unfortunate that the unnamed sources have not expressed their concerns and the limitations of the department directly with the Ministry.

1. **Is the minister aware of the most of the staff at the prison are concerned by lack of PPEs and other necessary precautionary tools to prevent corona virus at this facility?**

The Minister interacts with officials and the leadership of the department regularly, the department has effected procurement of PPEs and bulk distribution was effected across all Centres in the country. Previously, centres adopted interim measures while awaiting delivery of essentials and these have been delivered. It should be borne in mind that the lack of PPE is a world-wide challenge and one of the mitigating factors we adopted was to allow Centres to share resources while we were awaiting delivery. However, we are committed in line with our strategy to prevent and combat the spread of coronavirus, to provide both officials and offenders with essentials to protect them against the spread of coronavirus. At

this stage, there is no shortage of PPEs across Correctional Centres, but we are aware of fake news that have been spread around this issue and we urge the media to apply caution to such news.

2. We have visited the facility independently from the visit led by the minister on Wednesday and there are striking contradictions. Why did the minister choose to do a pre-planned visit instead of an unannounced one to get the true picture of the situation?

The Ministry of Justice and Correctional Services on a regular basis conducts unannounced visits to Centres and we have also done the same with Johannesburg Management Area where we inspected all facilities. We gave instructions after the visit on the need to fully adhere to Covid-19 preventative measures. In the spirit of transparency, we wanted the media to inform the public about our preventative measures and we will learn from any shortcomings that might be brought to our attention and we welcome criticism as that will contribute to the enhancement of our measures.

Questions have been raised about the impact that the correctional system is likely to face during the state of a disaster. The complexity is brought by what has been happening in other countries as they battle the virus. As a Department, we continue to detail our plans and respond whenever clarity is sought. Correctional Services has been very transparent, and provides updates on the situation on the ground.

Our approach is focused on prevention, containment/treatment and disaster recovery. The Department activated Infection Prevention Control (IPC) measures at all management areas with specific directives to ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is available and has pushed for the sanitization of reception areas, cells, offices, vehicles and ablution facilities. Johannesburg Correctional is part of the big five centres in the country in terms of inmate population, it would be impossible not to give it attention.

3. Why were prisoners doing stan duty without protective equipment today and yesterday?

We are not aware of such and it would help if you could provide further clarity in terms of duties and protective equipment you refer to. As we have said above, both officials and offenders have essentials and PPEs that they use guided by the WHO, NICD and department of health in terms of preventing the spread of Covid-19. The protocol on the use of the PPE as recommended by the World Health Organisation can be read here https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331498/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPCPPE_use-2020.2-eng.pdf

There has been screening at Johannesburg and supplies are being provided continuously, both for inmates and officials. Improving personal and environmental hygiene, provision of personal equipment, sanitisation and decontamination interventions is what we have been doing and continue to do in Johannesburg. Hence we have to dispute the allegations made.

Where shortages are experienced, the Department has a system in place to assist correctional centres in need of stock whilst awaiting delivery. Centres have a flexibility to share resources and we continue to engage with our officials and inmates.

4. Why did non-essential workers at the facility only stop going to work this week when lockdown had been going on for more than a week? Is this not in contravention of the regulations?

We have essential and critical services employees in the department and the National Commissioner is empowered in terms of regulations to make a determination in terms of officials who constitute critical and must remain on duty throughout the period of lockdown. This is done in line with our objective of ensuring the wellbeing of both offenders and officials. A circular to all correctional centres was issued for facilities to identify officials who will be executing their responsibilities on-site and those who will be working from home. The Department even went further to secure appropriate tools that will enable officials to operate optimally when off-site.

5. The Prison school only closed this week. Is this not in contravention of the lockdown regulations?

A risk assessment was conducted at the school which is in the male section and has only 6 learners, in comparison to schools in the community, the risk of contraction and transmission seemed minimal. However after a re-assessment, it became apparent that closing the school would further reduce risks. It should be noted that a number of inmates in Johannesburg are enrolled for long distance learning.

6. Employees claim that the sanitiser that was being used before and post the minister's visit is "fake" such that national correctional services Commissioner, Mr Arthur Fraser, tested it with fire last week during his visit and agreed that it was fake. Is the department and correction services management aware of this?

All essentials we procure need to be at the required standard, in the event the essentials do not meet the required standards, those products are returned to the supplier. Where necessary the department reserves its right for defective products supplied.

7. Why are visitors to the facility not screened and sanitised as we have seen this yesterday and today?

Visits have been suspended for the duration of the lockdown and this was clearly explained as a measure to prevent and mitigate against the spread of COVID-19 in our centres. In case certain individuals do visit our centres on exceptional cases, we do adhere to preventative measures against the spread of Covid-19. We will never compromise on the safety of offenders and officials and the launch of the screening campaign will ensure massive screening of both offenders and officials as well as those who come to our Centres. We can assure the Sunday Times that all those who come at our Centres undergo all the preventative measures.

As far as our standard operating procedures entail, it is mandatory for everyone who enters the centre to be screened. The allegations raised would constitute a breach of the operating procedure and is a cause for grave concern. To this end the Department will institute an investigation.

8. Why is the prison's bail office still operational and having so many visitors daily who are not properly screened when there are other options to pay bail at the courts where there is fewer people that at this facility?

We have overcrowding, and payment of bail and fines which result in release of prisoners is not prohibited during the lockdown period. As referred to in question 7.

9. How many correctional officials who work at Joburg Prison have been self-isolated and or self-quarantined since the Covid-19 outbreak?

No positive cases of the coronavirus have been reported in Johannesburg correctional centre.

10. Why did a visitor who visited the facility to pay bail this week but showed symptoms of coronavirus when filling in the screening form get sent away? Has the prison's authorities followed up to ascertain the state of the said visitor who came into contact with its staff members?

Please refer to question 7

11. Why are family members of staff who resident at the prison's residential area going in and out of the prison premises without being screened and sanitised?

That is incorrect, all people entering the facility adhere to the preventative measures. They are however permitted to attend to the acquisition of essentials.

12. Why are new inmates mixing with old ones without proper screening and testing?

Newly admitted inmates are kept in admission cells for a period of 14 days before mixing within the general inmate population. This is to monitor them in case they show or develop symptoms related to COVID-19 or other illnesses.

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