**African Christian Democratic Party**

 **18 May 2023

ACDP Parliament
Debate on Budget Vote 22: Correctional Services
Speech by ACDP Chief Whip, Steven Swart MP**

**ACDP concerned that R509m budget cut will compromise the rehabilitation and safe custody of inmates**

“House chair/ honourable Minister,

The Department of Correctional Services was in the news for all the wrong reasons following the brazen escape of Mr Thabo Bester after a faked suicide, which only came to light earlier this year, despite taking place in May last year.

Once the DNA and Post Mortem Reports were available in June last year, it was clear that Bester had not died in the fire, but had conspired with officials in an elaborate escape plan, under the guise of a faked suicide.

The ACDP was deeply concerned that the public, and in particular rape victims were not advised of Bester’s escape once evidence was available. It appears that there is no policy in place in this regard. Imagine if rape victims had seen Bester walking about in public when he was supposed to be serving a prison sentence.

The Inspecting Judge Cameron explained that JICs had tried its best to expedite SAPS and DCS investigations, but very little was done. Investigations were only expedited after overwhelming evidence provided by Groundup journalists resulted in growing public outrage.

Once tracking and tracing was eventually commenced earlier this year, Bester and his accomplices were arrested, thankfully before any further rapes took place. As more information emerges, the ACDP trusts that all those corrupt officials who facilitated Bester’s escape will face the full force of the law. We also commend those SAPS investigators who successfully prevented the removal of the burnt body by Nandipha Magudumana, who we now know is that of Mr Katlego Bereng. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family.

The ACDP notes that as a result of this scandal, and other complaints, the Department has served the Mangaung Correctional Centre with a 90 days-notice to terminate the contract. The Committee will need to monitor progress in this regard and obtain updates on plans to take over the two private facilities at the end of both contracts.

The ACDP notes with concern the reduction in the budget allocation by R509 million in the 2023/24 financial year. The Department will need to reprioritise their plans and in doing so, not compromise to ensure that the rehabilitation of offenders and safe custody of inmates is not compromised.

The ACDP is fully aware of the severe overcrowding at many of the correctional centres, which negatively impacts on attempts at rehabilitation. One of the ways of addressing this is to reduce the number of awaiting trail detainees, many of whom may be not guilty of the crimes they are charged with. Many such detainees have bail set of less than R300 but could not afford even that amount. When the Committee visited a facility recently, there was a remand detainee with bail of R100 – costing the department more than R350 per day. The ACDP shares concerns that with overcrowding, injuries as a result of assault will increase in correctional centres.

I thank you.”

(Check against delivery)

**-ENDS-**