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| **POLICE AND PRISONS CIVIL RIGHTS UNION** **POPCRU SUBMISSION** **ANTI-GANGSTERISM STRATEGY**A Submission prepared by the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union1 Marie Road, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 2000Tel: 011 242 4600; Fax: 086 625 3054; Email: gs@popcru.org.za**12 February 2019**  |

**Background**

We would first like to thank the Committee for inviting us to make submission on the National Anti-Gangsterism Strategy. We also like to applaud the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC) for the efforts put into developing this strategy.

With the strategy based on four pillars, Human Development, Social Partnership, Spatial Design and Criminal Justice Process, to ensure that gangsterism that is savaging our communities, is not only an issue to be addressed by only police officers, but all of us as communities, we want to reflect and share with the committee our inputs on how best we can combat gang criminal activities/gangsterism. Our submission therefore is structured as follows:

**Creation of the Task Team**

It should first and foremost be acknowledged that gangsterism is a sophisticated form of criminality. Gang members would always come together, in accordance with their skills, to plot and meticulously execute their hatched criminal activities. In countering and successfully thwarting their (gang members) missions, SAPS need to establish Task Teams which shall be dedicated to fighting gangsterism in all nine provinces.

The Task Team should be made up of officers with specialised training, particularly in intelligence gathering, so as to be proactive in dealing with this scourge. We further submit that to register sustainable victory over gangsterism we must build a dedicated task team that will be able to fight crime with modern mechanisms. We however want to submit that the establishment of this TT should be done in accordance with the legislative frameworks.

**Building relationship with communities**

The strategy encouraged strong social partnerships which would include amongst others, the establishment of the community safety forums and community police forums. However what we as POPCRU, find disheartening and leaving us pessimistic, is the feeble relationship currently existing between our communities and law enforcement agencies, in particular police officers. The relationship between the police and the community has collapsed and it needs to be urgently restored. Community Policing Forums which would serve as a link between the community and police officers and further to facilitate community involvement and participation are unfortunately currently dysfunctional. This collapsed relationship perpetuates serious mistrust between the community and police officers which result in police officers being perceived as enemies and subsequently attacked by community members.

Although the strategy mentioned this kind of relationships as mechanisms to potentially eradicate gangsterism in our communities, there is no where in which it explained how these feeble relationships are going to be strengthened and be made to work effectively. We therefore submit that these forums be resuscitated such that they can serve as vehicle that will help in combating crime and building a bridge between community and police officers in communities. It is inevitable fact that prevalence of any concerted criminal activity shall only be defeated or eradicated by strong partnership between communities and men in blue uniform. We however submit that all members of the CPFs and CSFs and other structures helping in the fight against crime be vetted such that these criminals do not harbour themselves within these structures to advance their own inimical activities.

**Lack of resources in Police Stations**

Though it is acknowledged by NAGS that gang-related incidents are prevalent across all provinces the reality is that the requisites resources needed to deal with this problem are still lopsidedly allocated. The uneven allocation of these resources is somewhat exacerbated by lack of proper spatial design and population dynamics in some of the areas. POPCRU has, on numerous occasions, raised a grave concern on the fact that the South African Police Service’s human and physical resource allocation has been, and continues to be, a deep-seated challenge with severe adverse effects to both the police officers and the community at large.

Majority of the police stations, more especially in townships and rural areas, do not have basic equipment such as well-functional CCTV cameras, bullet proof windows and burglar doors while members do not have adequate protective gear. This effectively renders these police stations and police officers on the ground susceptible to incursion by heavily armed gangsters.

This unfortunately leaves many of our members unnecessary perishing at the hands of these heartless criminals. These gangsters have declared war on our police officers, our first line of defense and provider of security to our communities. It is against this background that we demand that police killings should be declared treason.

Another hindrance to the effective and efficient fighting of gangsterism and other forms of crime is understaffed police stations. It is practically impossible for understaffed police station to service and respond to the crime scene because the stations cannot be left unattended. Most police stations find themselves with only one police vehicle and two police officers to service their widely scattered jurisdictions. This kind of situation affects and prolong the turnaround time for police officers to report on crime scenes or reported complains.

We will like to emphasise, as we have previously averred to this very same committee, that the current bloated SAPS Top management structure consume a bigger chunk of the departmental budget. We therefore submit that the structure be downsized and redirect all resources needed at the police stations where the actual battle against crime is waged.

**Configuration of the Criminal Justice Cluster**

We have noted that the strategy has mooted disintegrated and incoherent implementation and coordination approach of this strategy with some responsibilities and roles allocated to different departments amongst others Department of Basic Education and other tiers of governments. This disintegrated and incoherent approach reflects a dismal failure to come up with implementable strategy that can be used to combat gang related crimes and other form of crimes. We are of the firm view as POPCRU that any crime preventing and fighting strategy should locate SAPS at the centre of implementation and operationalisation.

We want to take this opportunity to further advance our submission to the portfolio committee on how departments can efficiently work together to combat gangsterism. We submit that there must be a value chain within the Criminal Justice Cluster departments wherein a synergy will be built in terms of crime prevention and combating. It is a known fact, which is also acknowledged by this strategic plan that imprisonment serves as the rites of passage to higher levels in the gang ladder.

We therefore want to submit that the Criminal Justice Cluster departments stop working in silos but begin to synergise their efforts and resources to develop one comprehensive crime prevention and fighting strategy to deal with all form of crimes including gangsterism. With this submission we envisage that our correctional centres, in a situation where arrest and conviction were secured, are able to rehabilitate prisoners and eliminate recidivism.

It is an undisputable fact that our correctional centres are overcrowded and this poses serious unsavoury and life threatening working conditions to our members. This overcrowding without doubt presents conducive environment to breed gangsterism in the correctional centres. Gangs are being formed in our correctional centres to terrorise our members. The situation is exacerbated by understaffed correctional centres. There is an urgent need to augment human capital of the correctional centres to be able to at least achieve reasonable and acceptable ratio of correctional officers to prison population.

Early this year, there were unfortunate incidents of attacks and stabbings of three correctional officers by inmates at Goedmoed and Kroonstad Correctional Centres. At the time of the attack at the Goedmoed Correctional Centre, only three correctional officers were on duty guarding 300 inmates.

**Conclusion**

We have noted with dismay that the strategy does not provide any tangible and concrete solutions to deal with the scourge of gangsterism and other form of crimes. Its disintegrated and incoherent approach on implementation and coordination is a recipe for failure. We therefore call upon SAPS to develop a new strategy to fight gangsterism. We however are pleased by the acknowledgement by the strategy that there is a need to involve community in the fight against crime.

We want to seize this opportunity to call upon all community structures mandated to fight gangsterism to closely work and synergise their work with that of police such that they make impact in fighting this scourge in our communities. POPCRU further seeks to applaud men and women in blue who always ensure that despite difficult working conditions, are determinately pursuing Chapter 12 of the National Development Plan (NDP) which is to build safer communities.

**I thank you**

**Nkosinathi Theledi**

**General Secretary**

**POPCRU**