**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE WELCOMES PROGRESS ON TRC CASES, BUT URGES NPA TO COMMUNICATE MORE WITH VICTIMS’ FAMILIES**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 1 June 2022 –** The Portfolio Committee on Justice and Correctional Services today welcomed the National Prosecuting Authority’s (NPA’s) recent progress in bringing finality to prosecuting unsolved Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) cases. Committee Chairperson Mr Bulelani Magwanishe made it clear, however, that the committee still has serious concerns about the NPA’s poor communication with the families of the victims involved.

“Just this week, [the committee] was contacted by four families with the same concerns about not being timeously updated by the NPA or not receiving communication from the NPA before decisions are made public. Surely, we cannot operate in an inconsiderate and insensitive manner? Some of these families have been waiting for 40 years for justice and closure,” said Mr Magwanishe.

The committee today received a progress report from the NPA on these cases, after it was previously agreed that the NPA would update the committee regularly on these matters.

The NPA now has a dedicated team of experienced prosecutors and investigators dealing with these cases and it assured the committee that it will do all it can to ensure families are kept abreast of developments before the information is made public.

The committee heard that under the co-ordinated guidance of the national office, the capacity of the Director of Public Prosecutions’ office to prosecute such cases at provincial level, in the jurisdiction where the offences were committed, has improved. This has led to a “substantial” improvement over the last seven months, resulting in the re-opening of 38 new investigations into the deaths of detainees. There are currently 97 matters under investigation, with more matters identified for re-opening.

The committee further heard that the NPA’s Missing Persons Task Team has recovered the remains of 179 missing people so far, 167 of which have been identified and returned to their families. The teams working on the TRC cases have appointed 16 prosecutors and 22 investigators. Since September 2021, 38 investigations have been reopened and plans are afoot to reopen 18 more. Several matters have been fast-tracked, after consideration of the seriousness of the evidence, the age of the case, the age of the accused/people of interest/witnesses, the availability of experts, and of witnesses and exhibits/records.

The National Director of Public Prosecutions, Adv Shamila Batohi, assured the committee that there has been no political interference in these cases during her tenure. She told the committee that she is working with the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services on the allegations of interference and that a decision from the Minister on this is imminent.

Mr Magwanishe said the committee will continue with its regular engagements with the NPA for updates on TRC prosecutions as part of its oversight responsibility. The committee will also consider inviting other law enforcement agencies for updates on the TRC cases.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES, MR** **BULELANI MAGWANISHE.**

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