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For immediate release

LEGAL AID SOUTH AFRICA MEETS ITS 3-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN TARGETS

Cape Town - Legal Aid South Africa has maintained its high performance record, yet again posting excellent results for the last financial year.

The 2011/12 financial year has been a significant year for the organisation, in that it not only achieved targets on performance in all areas of the business for the year under review, but also marked the successful completion of its three-year Strategic Plan period 2009-2012.

Presenting the organisation's performance results for the 2011/12 financial year in parliament today, Legal Aid SA CEO, Vidhu Vedalankar said assisting over 680,000 persons in legal and legal advice matters continues to make access to justice a reality for many poor South Africans. An eleventh unqualified audit and seventh year of no matters of emphasis is a cherry on top for the organisation, underscoring its sound financial management and corporate governance.

"Our performance on all fronts including service delivery, financial management, governance and people management is at the highest level and the organisation has delivered on its mandate of increasing access to justice for the indigent," said Vedalankar.

She adds: We were able to make the strategic shifts that we mapped out in the 2009-12 Strategic Plan, which amongst others sought to explore and implement new strategies to increase access to justice within the resource constraints"

These included the successful implementation of the national footprint expansion programme, which saw establishment of 6 new justice centres and 27 satellite offices in the 3 years.

Establishment of the Legal Aid Advice Line in November 2010 was also a notable milestone for the organisation, as part of its efforts to meet the growing demand for civil legal aid.

During this period, the organisation was also able to expand civil legal aid capacity and establish civil units to improve coverage of civil matters which resulted in a 60% increase in the number of people assisted in civil legal matters in the Strategic Plan period. This meant that by 2011/12 we were assisting over 46,000 persons with civil legal matters. "Our programmes aimed at increasing civil legal aid are yielding positive results, as evidenced by the significant increase in the number of civil legal aid matter taken on in the last 3 years," said Vedalankar.

Year under review 2011/12

In executing the programmes spelt out in its 2009-12 Strategic Plan, the organisation delivered good performance results, providing access to quality legal services to well over 682,962 persons in the year under review.

In giving effect to Section 28 of the Constitution, Legal Aid SA assisted 22,376 children in conflict with the law and 5,584 children in civil matters, including Estates matters. In total the organisation was able to assist clients in 428,653 legal matters, of which 89% were criminal and 11% were civil legal aid matters. We also took on 23 Impact Litigation matters. In addition we assisted 254,286 clients with legal advice. We continued to deliver quality legal services meeting our quality targets as assessed by our independent Legal Quality Assurance Unit. In this year we were proud to achieve a 66% success rate in criminal matters in the SCA, while the average success rate in the SCA was at 54%.

"Despite our budget and capacity being lower than that of our counterparts in the justice cluster, our sound financial and expenditure management and control processes have enabled us to accomplish great things. We implemented effective programmes to ensure that we get the most out of our limited budget, she said"

Future projections

Vedalankar said the organisation's new 5-year Strategic Plan (2012 -2017) mapped out long term growth opportunities that will allow the organisation to increase its scope and scale to success – noting however that the impending across-the-board budget reductions, to be implemented in the 2013/14 financial year could negatively affect the pace of growth.

“As it is, the current coverage of courts is not adequate and the budget cuts will exacerbate this with further reductions in coverage.” She said the current budget allocation did not provide for any coverage for any new courts and limited the organisation's scope in terms of delivery of legal services, which translates to increased access to justice.

Reiterating this statement, Legal Aid SA vice chairperson, Judge Edwin Molahleli urged the legal fraternity to support national efforts to make justice a reality for those who need it the most, by acting on its pledge to strengthen the pro-bono support network.

“Now more than ever, in the face of the budget reductions, we need the support of private attorneys in extending legal services and support to the poor,” said Molahleli.

Judge Molahleli also explained Legal Aid South Africa's commitment to the development of its employees. “In this past three-year Strategic Plan period we have been successfully accredited as a Best Employer for each year. Our recruitment levels were maintained at 95-96% year on year to ensure optimum resourcing directed to delivery. Our Leadership Programme was also successfully implemented with a focus on a training and development for individual managers and leaders,” he concluded.

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