

Press release

30 May 2013

Civil Society Prison Reform Initiative (CSPRI) in response to the Minister of Justice's claim that prison overcrowding is an indication of the NPA "doing a good job".

On Wednesday, 29 May 2013, the Minister of Justice claimed that overcrowded prisons and busy courts show that the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) is doing a good job. "If we look at the number of people that our courts convict on a daily basis, if you look at the number of prisoners that are in our courts, there is a complaint that there is over-crowding of our prisons"... "It is because we've got energetic prosecutors on all levels in our country who prosecute without fear or favour or prejudice." (SAPA, 29 May 2013)

CSPRI would like to point out that the data in fact show the following regarding prison overcrowding and the performance of the NPA:

- The number of prosecutions concluding in a verdict has decreased by 19% from 406 915 to 331 045 comparing 2002/3 to 2010/11, according to the Annual Reports of the NPA. **The NPA is thus prosecuting fewer cases in court.**
- Sentenced admissions to prison have dropped by 60% from around 200 000 per year over the period 1995-2001 to around 80 000 per year in 2010/11, according to Correctional Services data. **Convictions achieved by the NPA are resulting in fewer convicted people being admitted to prison. It is, however, the case that sentence lengths have increased dramatically since the late 1990s.**
- The number of posts filled in the NPA has increased 30% from 3884 in 2005/6 to 5012 in 2011/12. **This has not resulted in an increase in prosecutions nor in an increase in persons sentenced to imprisonment.**
- Admissions to prison of persons on remand yearly in 2010/11 was approximately 230 000, the same level as in 1995/96. A similar number of people were admitted to prisons awaiting trial as were admitted in 1995/6.
- In March 2009, there were 6312 people who had spent more than a year awaiting trial. By March 2012 this had increased to 29% to 8120. **More people are thus spending excessively long periods awaiting trial.**

CSPRI is concerned that the public may be misinformed regarding the causes of prison overcrowding as well as on the performance of the NPA.

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