



MINISTRY OF POLICE

SPEAKER NOTES FOR HON. CASSEL MATHALE DEPUTY MINISTER OF POLICE:

THE NEED FOR A PARLIAMENTARY INVESTIGATION ON THE IMPACT OF THE CRIME OF EXTORTION IN SOUTH AFRICA, WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS ON THE WESTERN CAPE, EASTERN CAPE, AND KWAZULU-NATAL:

06 SEPTEMBER 2024

Honourable Speaker/ House Chairperson

Honourable Members

Ladies and Gentlemen

I greet you all on behalf of the Ministry of Police and the South African Police Service. Allow me to apologise on behalf of the Minister, Mr Senzo Mchunu, who could not be here today due to other departmental work demands and has delegated me to represent him instead.

Allow me to acknowledge the Economic Freedom Fighters concern regarding the spike in different incidents of extortion that has been a serious cause for concern to us as well. I, however, believe that there is no need for a parliamentary investigation on the impact of the crime of extortion as I believe we are all in agreement that the impact is undeniably dire. What we need is the solution to eradicate extortion from our society and I believe the South African Police Service is confronting it head on.

We are aware that South Africa has increasingly witnessed systematic incidents of violence and extortion targeting formal and informal businesses alike.

Extortion is criminal and often multi faceted. These extortionists seem to know no bounds but we are pushing back and we will not retreat.

We are determined to confront extortion in all its forms and manifestations. We remain resolute in our stance to urgently and vigorously tackle all crimes that threaten the lives and the livelihoods of South Africans and all those who live within our borders. Crime, including extortion, is a threat to the authority of the state, territorial integrity, the economy, and the well being of the South African population. Hence we continue to develop and implement various strategies to deal with crime in general and Extortion in particular

To this effect, Chairperson, the South African Police Service (SAPS) has developed an Extortion Action Plan to mitigate the threat. The SAPS has established a multi-disciplinary response to the criminal phenomenon of the construction mafias and groupings that are demanding protection fees, in the provinces where the extortion has manifested, including the Western Cape and KwaZulu Natal.

Further, as part of our interventions, SAPS has established investigation teams to investigate extortion at the Construction Sites in all the Provinces. These teams are under the Organised Crime Investigation Component.

To bolster the SAPS provincial capacity in this regard, we are ensuring that the investigation of extortion cases is monitored and managed at the National Component Head of Organised Crime Investigations.

Honourable Members, we have also established the National Priority Committee on Extortions, reporting to the NATJOINTS. The Committee comprises of the South African Forum of Civil Engineering Construction (SAFCEC), Department of Public Works and Industry (DPWI), National African Federation for the Building Industry, South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SACCI), Business Against Crime South Africa (BACSA), Construction Industry Development Board, Master Builders South Africa, Black Business Forum, Crime Intelligence, DPCI, Detective Services and SCM.

We have also developed and are implementing the National Policing Strategy, which amongst others, is intended to respond to such crimes. We have also ensured that additional crime prevention and combating resources are allocated hereto. These include specialised investigation capacity and specialised visible policing units, with intention to stabilise the incidents of violence that are associated with extortion.

Chairperson, we have been unequivocal in our stance to ensure that this country will not and will never be a haven for criminals or organised crime syndicates. We refuse to be held at ransom by unscrupulous criminals and criminal syndicates.

Therefore, SAPS, through their aggressive approach to crime are attacking all elements of criminality and those who support crime as evidenced from a number of recent incidents that are dismantling these criminal groupings and syndicates. For example, just 4 days ago SAPS officers were engaged in a shootout incident with six suspects who were wanted for a number of murders and extortion cases in South Beach, Point area of Durban. SAPS emerged victorious.

Operation Shanela that we operationalized in May last year, is another mechanism we have been implementing to push back the frontiers of criminality and it has delivered desirable results. We have seen crime stats indicating a notable drop in many areas of crime as a result of these operations.

SAPS continues to improve its responses, especially the investigative capacity of the service, into extortion related crimes. This investigative capacity consists of organised crime investigators from detective and forensic services units of the SAPS, who are tasked solely with investigating the scourge of extortion in all our provinces.

The Economic Infrastructure Task Teams that have been operational since June 2022, have been instrumental in dismantling some of the criminal syndicates operating within this space. The Task Teams are vigorously tracking, tracing and arresting extortionists.

We have put focus on both human and financial resources, to ensure that SAPS tackles this crime without fear or favour.

SIGNIFICANT ARRESTS MADE AND ACTION TAKEN SO FAR

Through all the efforts made in this regard we have made some significant inroads and some individuals have been forced to face the might of the law. These include:

- The arrest of Ralph Stanfield who is linked to “THE FIRM” criminal gang grouping that is part of the Construction Mafia in the Cape Town area. During June 2024, this individual together with 15 other accomplices appeared in the Cape Town Court on 32 charges. Cases include:-
 - Murder of Wendy Kloppers (City of Cape Town official);
 - Murder of an off duty police officer, Faizel Adams;
 - Murder of Ismail Abrahams (gang member) and;
 - Attempted Murders of Joel Booyesen and Gareth Potch (gang members).

Next court date is 13 September 2024

During December 2023, well-known taxi boss, Bonke Makalala, 32 years (Chairperson of Ocean View CATA and Vice-Chairman of Disciplinary Committee of SANTACO) was arrested on a number of offences, including:

- Murders x 3;
- Attempted Murder;
- Intimidation;
- Possession of an unauthorised firearm x 4;
- Impersonation of a police official.

Members of the public and police officers linked to this grouping are also making appearances in various courts in the Western Cape and Gauteng regions.

On Thursday 18th of July this year, the North West Provincial Organised Crime office received a complaint from a contractor who was installing fibre on the N12 from Klerksdorp to Wolmaransstad and from Klerksdorp to Potchefstroom. The Contractor alleged that on the 15th of July 2024 they were approached by two African males who claimed to be from the community of Klerksdorp and demanded work as protectors or payment of R50 000, failing which no work was to continue. The company reported the incident to the police and on 23 July 2024 the team consisting of Organised crime, Crime intelligence and Provincial TRT conducted an operation which led to the arrest of the suspect.

Just 2 days ago, three armed suspects were fatally shot, following a shootout at the National Intervention Unit (NIU) premises in Mthatha. On completion of their disruptive operation at Mthatha West and on their way back to their premises, police members noticed that they were being followed by two vehicles. As members arrived at the premises, the two suspicious vehicles stopped behind them, and the three men armed with firearms alighted and immediately opened fire. Police officers retaliated fatally wounding the three men. One of the deceased persons is Sakhumzi Mareke (42) and was a person of interest in several incidents of extortion in the Mthatha area. Our well wishes go to the Police Officer shot and wounded during this incident and we applaud them for being on the alert at all times and for responding decisively.

This despicable attack on our police officers is an indication that our efforts are felt by these devious extortionists and they are becoming desperate. We are squeezing their space tight.

The biggest challenge with extortion is the secrecy around it – victims fear to report it for fear of further victimisation, so they quietly pay the demanded fee. They do not realise that such payment will also perpetuate the extortion against themselves but also to others around

them. Therefore, our plea to the community is that they should not pay but should immediately report any demand for such payment.

To deal with the fear of reporting the SAPS has established an extortion hotline where members of the public can report incidents of extortion.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Honourable Members, we have said it many times that we are of the strong belief that crime prevention and combating is not the responsibility of SAPS alone. We need all hands on deck. Hence, following the crime analysis of the so-called protection fee syndicates, it has become clear that, if we are to see the end to this kind of organised criminality, we need the buy-in of communities and other stakeholders. We also need the assistance of other departments and affected parties.

To date, the SAPS has joined forces with the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) as well as stakeholders in the business and private sector. These collaborations have resulted in greater coordination and synergy between parties and definitive inroads continue to be made in this regard.

We are nevertheless determined to meet these criminals head on and are encouraged that a majority of our people are law abiding citizens, we know it is a handful of gangs and individuals who commit this form of crime.

As a preventative measure, through pamphlet distribution and community engagement, police continue to conduct crime prevention programs to educate communities about the seriousness and negative impact that extortion has on communities.

The crime prevention and information campaigns are aimed at empowering communities and owners of small and micro businesses against extortionists.

While we are confident that the police are up to the task on stamping the authority of the state in this regard, we again call on all stakeholders to also play their role in the fight against organised crime, especially extortion, which has no room in our society.

CONCLUSION

Honourable Members, we are not oblivious to the impact of extortion on the economy of South Africa and economic activities of South Africans, hence we continue to establish and implement various mechanisms to confront extortion and the extortion value chain head on.

We remain determined to ensure that no crime or criminal activity will be tolerated and we will continue to track down and ensure the arrest, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators. Whether it is organised gangs, criminal syndicates or individuals preying on small scale business people, we are closing in on them.

We refuse to co-govern with criminals and we will not allow criminality to plunge our beloved country into a mafia state. Hence we continue to relentlessly pursue every avenue that will ensure that all businesses, big or small, formal or informal can operate freely without fear of any form of intimidation or violence.

Honourable Members, rather than investigating the impact of this criminal activity, I'd plead with all of us to partner with the police and the Justice system to ensure that we bring an end to extortion and other forms of organised crime.

I thank you.