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REPORT ON COMMISSION EVIDENCE

“We are putting people in a vice” – O’Regan

Commission probes highest-ranking SAPS witnesses on resource allocation and accountability

As the O’Regan-Pikoli Commission of Inquiry works up the SAPS ranks, the questions of resource allocation and accountability loom larger over the witness stand at Lookout Hill.

On Tuesday 25 March, the SAPS national head officer for performance measurement **Brigadier Leon Rabie** described the process by which human resources are allocated to SAPS stations across the country.

To establish the theoretical requirements of each station, SAPS employs a complex formula which takes into account a wide range of variables, including environmental and socio-economic conditions, population and crime rates.

Brigadier Rabie explained that it is misleading to compare the stark differences in capacity between stations as contextually dissimilar as Harare and Camps Bay because any station, regardless of its needs or challenges, requires a minimum of 60 members to maintain a 24-hour service.

Misallocations

Advocate Michael Bishop thus revised the comparison by selecting two stations with a similar staff complement: namely Khayelitsha’s Lingeletu-West (with 234 members) and Claremont (with 236 members).

Despite Lingeletu-West's exponentially higher contact-crime levels, its detective-to-resident ratio is 1:1496, in sharp contrast to that of Claremont which – like Stellenbosch, Sea Point and certain other affluent suburbs – has minimal contact crime and a detective-to-resident ratio in the vicinity of 1:1000.

Of even greater concern are the ratios for Harare and Site B – 1:2626 and 1:1974 respectively – where detectives experience the highest contact crime levels in the Western Cape.

This suggests that the formula used by SAPS to calculate its stations' theoretical requirements has been severely undervaluing certain factors.

Growing backlogs

In her testimony earlier in the week, the detective coordinator for the Khayelitsha cluster **Colonel Alma Wiese** referred to the SAP6, a document which on a monthly basis indicates the number of new cases received, in addition to those still outstanding.

She explained that, from one month to the next, it is not unusual for the 48 detectives at SAPS Harare to carry as many as 2300 unresolved dockets, while taking on an additional 1000 new dockets.

Acknowledging these challenges, Commissioner O'Regan described, in practical terms, their spiraling repercussions:

“The work that they [Khayelitsha detectives] are getting is so far removed from the ideal. It's not 30% removed from the ideal; it's in the region of 70% removed from the ideal. And I can't see how one can expect detectives to try and do that if, on a reasonable assessment, they ought to be having four dockets. Well, sorry, you've got 120, and all sorts of knock-on things happen – they don't contact witnesses, they don't feed back to people, they don't take the dockets to court, the matter then gets struck off, so that doubles their work. They've now got to try and get the matter re-enrolled but actually they haven't got time to get it re-enrolled because they've got another 119 dockets . . .”

Under such constraints, the Khayelitsha detective branches have little option but to adopt a system of triage, assigning degrees of urgency to the most pressing cases.

The chain of accountability

Over the next two days, the Commission's first round of public hearings will culminate with the testimonies of the Western Cape's two highest-ranking SAPS officers: the Deputy Commissioner of the Western Cape **Major General Sharon Jephta** (Monday 31 March) and the Provincial Commissioner **Lieutenant General Arno Lamoer** (Tuesday 1 April).

These members represent the final links in the long chain of accountability which the Commissioners have been unraveling over the past two months.

It is hoped that their testimonies will offer revealing and constructive evidence where others – such as those of the Khayelitsha station commanders and the provincial head of detective services **Major General Molo** – have not.

Central among the issues to be raised in the cross-examination of Lieutenant General Lamoer will be that of resource allocation. Referring to the workload of Khayelithsa detectives on Friday, Commissioner O'Regan herself acknowledged that "we are putting people in a vice".

While the SAPS head office in Pretoria is responsible for calculating the theoretical requirements of each station, it does not stand alone in determining the human resource capacity on the ground. On Tuesday Brigadier Rabie confirmed that "in terms of section 12 of the SAPS Act, the provincial commissioner has the prerogative to move resources within the province."

It is therefore within Lieutenant General Lamoer's powers to reallocate personnel and thereby add much-needed capacity to the stations which carry the heaviest burdens.

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