

# NEWSFLASH

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A Commission for Gender Equality Newsletter

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## Correctional Services Raises Concerns Over Prison Overcrowding and Rise of Female Offenders

The National Commissioner of the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), Mr Makgothi Thobakgale, says the department is concerned about the increasing number of female offenders who are incarcerated in their facilities. Thobakgale was briefing Commissioners during DCS' appearance before the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) in Johannesburg on Thursday. "The female inmate population has been steadily growing over the years and this is not a positive thing for a developing country like ours" he said.

"We have 4,089 female inmates. Sadly, due to fewer female correctional services across the country, female inmates are forced to be far from their families," Thobakgale added that the facilities used to house female offenders have been designed to accommodate mothers and babies. The department appeared before the Commission to provide an account on the state of gender transformation at its facilities, and its protection measures for offenders. CGE Chairperson Nthabiseng Sepanya-Mogale raised concerns about the management of the parole

system and various challenges it poses, "Parole should be a right to be considered, not a right to be given". In 2017, the CGE conducted a study and subsequently issued a report in 2018 that looked at issues on mental healthcare of female inmates in South Africa.

Furthermore, the Commission instituted an investigation into the state of correctional centres in the country, the investigation is primarily focused on ascertaining whether the Department of Correctional Services has upheld its obligation derived from the Correctional Services Act, 1998 (Act 111 of 1998), the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977), the 2005 White Paper on Corrections in South Africa, and the 2014 White Paper on Remand Detention Management in South Africa to place offenders in a secure, safe and humane environment, and to ensure that rehabilitation and successful reintegration programmes are implemented. It was against this backdrop that the department appeared before the Commission.



Correctional Services' National Commissioner, Makgothi Thobakgale



## Commission Calls for Intervention at Eastern Cape's Grey Hospital Thuthuzela Centre



### Thuthuzela Care Centres provide safe havens for victims

When a victim walks into a Thuthuzela Care Centre, they receive immediate medical attention, which includes a medical examination, counselling and medication to prevent pregnancy.



The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE)'s Commissioner Leonashia Leigh-Ann Van Der Merwe has urged the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to intervene and ensure that the Grey Hospital's Thuthuzela Care Centre (TCC) in the Eastern Cape complies with the standards and guidelines of its programme.

This follows an oversight visit by the CGE at the Grey TCC in King William Town, where the Commissioner learned that the hospital turned away victims of sexual violence if they did not fall within its jurisdiction. The aim of the visit was to assess how the TCC supports rape victims and whether their services are accessible to everyone, including persons with disabilities and the LGBTQIA+ community. The CGE also sought to identify any obstacles in providing holistic support to rape victims, as the TCCs are intended to be one-stop facilities that offer medical, legal, and psychosocial services. Grey TCC is supported by Masimanyane Women's Rights International, a civil society organisation.

According to the TCC, this support plays a vital role in ensuring that it operates 24 hours a day, as they counsel victims after hours and help medical doctors by providing trauma counselling and collecting information for further follow-ups. Commissioner Van Der Merwe expressed concerns about the NGO staff members giving medical treatment to victims, "Lay counsellors are not qualified as medical staff and should not be allowed to administer medication to clients, as it could endanger their lives and expose the TCC and hospital to legal action", she said. This is after the CGE was alerted to an incident where an eight-year-old child was allegedly given incorrect medication. The CGE also noted that the TCC is under-resourced, resulting in long waiting hours and inadequate care for patients. CGE's Eastern Cape provincial office intends to engage the CEO of the hospital and the DPP offices to urge them to provide more support to the TCCs, as they are vital in addressing the scourge of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.