

Officials in court for illegally releasing parolees

The law enforcement agencies have nabbed nine officials from the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Correctional Services for illegally releasing at least 36 parolees.



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The nine out of 11 government officials were arrested on Friday, 16 March 2018, on charges related to corruption following a high-level multi-disciplinary investigation by anti-corruption investigation teams from the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Correctional Services led by the South African Police Service Crime Intelligence.

Police Minister Bheki Cele said the officials were allegedly involved in illegally releasing at least 36 parolees, all of which were women, over a period of more than a year without following proper procedures for financial gain.

The parolees include females from Guyana in South America, Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho who were arrested for various charges like drug smugglers or drug mules.

“The foreign parolees, most of which were drug smugglers or drug mules, had to be released and deported to their country of origin through Lindela deportation centre, instead they were sent directly to the Johannesburg Department of Home Affairs regional office for an unprocedural and illegal early release,” Minister Cele announced on Monday.

Minister Cele was accompanied by Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba, Correctional Services Minister Michael Masutha, as well as the National Commissioner of Police General Khehla Sitole.

The illegally released parolees and ex-convicts left South Africa through their own expenses and travel arrangements.

Some remained in South Africa of which six of them have been rearrested. It emerged that these six had no intention of leaving the country, Minister Cele said.

The six parolees that were rearrested included three Guyana nationals from South America who were arrested for narcotics-related offences and one Zambian who was incarcerated for narcotics, plus two Zimbabweans who were arrested for theft.

General Sitole said the investigation revealed that South African officials were paid in cash or into their bank accounts from the parolees' families or friends, amounts ranging from R3,000 and R6,000.

Investigations further discovered the arrested officials from Correctional Services compiled fraudulent parole documents; which enabled the suspects from Home Affairs to create false release documents to assist the inmates to flee South Africa or remain in the country.

In light of this, Minister Gigaba said he has directed the department to review the internal control measures as well as the delegation of powers.

Minister Masutha for his part said there's still ongoing work within SADC to negotiate an agreement around parole issues.

Initially, 26 corrupt officials were identified to be part of this syndicate. However, General Sitole said after extensive consultations with the Directorate for Public Prosecutions, it was decided that 11 officials should be indicted given the level of evidence against them.

Eleven warrants of arrest were issued and executed on Friday last week around Soweto and Johannesburg.

To date, nine suspects were arrested and detained in Johannesburg central.

According to General Sitole, the "tenth suspect is still being sought and the 11th suspect died in a motor vehicle collision last month".

All the suspects were to appear in Johannesburg magistrate court on Monday, 19 March, facing Contravention of the provisions of section 4 (1) (a) of the combating and prevention of corrupt activities Act, Act 12 of 2004 and Contravening of section 115 (b) of act 111 of 1998 (aiding and abetting).

Moving forward, the departments will adopt an integrated approach involving all relevant departments to ensure proper processes and procedures are adhered to.

Minister Cele applauded the anti-corruption team for having apprehended the suspects and for cracking the syndicate, saying the arrests directly responds to SAPS's cardinal pillars of stamping the authority of the state

"More and more of such coordinated operations of this magnitude will be conducted. We would like to send a strong message to everyone that we are indeed serious about rooting out corruption inside and outside of our ranks. The business of squeezing crime to zero continues," Minister Cele added.

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