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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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PROCEEDINGS OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The House met at 14:01.

House Chairperson Mr C T Frolick took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon members, before we proceed with today's business. I wish to announce that I have been informed that Ms Tanya Lyons, has been appointed as Undersecretary House Plenaries with effect from 1 September 2024. This position, which reports to the Secretary of the National Assembly, is responsible for House proceedings and programming matters, amongst other. We want to extend our congratulations to Miss Lyons.

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Hon members, the only item on the Order Paper today, is the statement by the Minister of Police, on actions taken by the South African Police Service, to deal with the threat posed by those committing acts of extortion in South Africa. I've been informed that the Minister's statement has been distributed. Thank you, hon Minister, I now invite you to the podium.

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER ON ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE SOUTH
AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE TO DEAL WITH THE THREAT POSED BY THOSE
COMMITTING ACTS OF EXTORTION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The MINISTER OF POLICE: House Chair, we welcome this opportunity to make a statement to this House, on threats posed by the current wave of extortions and other related crimes in parts of the country. The four provinces, start with Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and Eastern Cape, currently carry 73% of crime levels in South Africa. The rest of the provinces carry the balance.

The gravity of these crimes alone including extortions, is of serious concern to us over and above their concentration. Extortions have been emerging overtime and has now reached

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levels where all communities in our country beyond the four provinces indicated above, have become very angry, bitter and agitated, the pain has gone very deep.

The mood expressed in communities all around the country, is also reflective of statements that have been made in the House unanimously against these crimes in the short past. Somewhere, in the background the current socioeconomic conditions are militating against low crime levels in the country and need to be addressed urgently by this House and also by the executive.

The modus operandi of the perpetrators involved in these heinous acts is well known. Most of them are individuals who do not want to work, but rather choose to parade as armies of murderous parasites. That must be fought and rejected by society as a whole. They are often armed, operating in groups and instil fear and chaos. The relative "silence" of communities and low reporting is all due to these fears. So, we offer communities tollfree numbers, we communicate, we talk to them, but there is a lot of fear out there.

Police of course led by Ministry are hard at work fighting these crimes on daily basis. Among recent operations, is where suspects identified through intelligence, as extortionists

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were confronted in Milnerton in Cape Town. Four suspects were fatally wounded in a shootout with police, while four were admitted in hospital with wounds and two ran away and escape. In the Eastern Cape, operations are underway, and we are focusing in Mthatha and Nelson Mandela Bay. On similar crimes including illegal occupation of buildings and stock theft among others. Twelve cases have recently been reported on the hotline and investigations are underway. We are observing signs of resistance among criminals, but we want to say that police will prevail. They will have to prevail, and we will make sure that they prevail.

We must also mention that we see shocking incidents of lowest morality where church services, funerals and other family related functions get disrupted by these extortionists. In Gauteng three criminals were arrested in Bronkospruit, three weeks ago, on activities related to extortions. Soweto is also a place where that has received our attention in the incidents of extortion. In Mpumalanga, three arrests were recently made in cases of extortion and fighting over turf on the same purpose. In Free State the target of extortionists includes pensioners and people who receive Road Accident Fund, RAF.

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Generally, there is more extortions going on than meet the eye. This requires more crime intelligence operations on our side. And we know we have to strengthen intelligence; we have to improve intelligence; we have to find information on our own in terms of profiling these criminals. Because communities as I said, they do report but not enough.

In the context of the above, the whole government approach we have initiated signing of cooperative agreements with provincial and local government, with operational plans all seeking to intergrade our resources against crime.

Currently the operational plan is being rolled out here, in Western Cape, in Cape Town with its new six sub-districts, that are going to make it much easier for us to police these areas, jointly with city police, with private companies, with law enforcements and CPFs. The model will be replicated in all metros in the country. The operational plan will include Community Police Forums, CPFs, and private security companies, as I've indicated.

The Eastern Cape and Nelson Mandela Bay have agreed on the operational plan, and it is currently being rolled out and we

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will be launching it soon. We are meeting Gauteng on Thursday, this week on the same programme, next will be KZN on the 19th and 20th of this month. All these metros coincide with the concentration of crimes in the country. And this alignment will help us fight more effectively in an aligned way in term of resources.

We are also holding a series of meetings with sister departments on collaboration against crime as per the National Integrated Crime Prevention Strategy. This Friday we are meeting as the Justice Crime Prevention and Security, JCPs, cluster to tighten up our act and to come up with better synergies.

The deadline for us to complete the National Policing Policy is the end of October this year. This will among other things deal with police stations, just the definition of a police station, just the norms and standards of a police station, urban or rural. We need that, so that we define what a police station is. And it will relate to infrastructure and application of such norms, including where police live in their barracks and all of that. We believe traditional leaders and communities have a role to play and they will be engaged.

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And finally, legislation reviews are underway. One, is SA Police Service, SAPS Amendment Bill; two, Securities Industry Regulatory Authority, SIRA Act; three, South African Police Service, CSPA, Act; four, Critical Infrastructure Amendment Bill; and five, Overhaul of Criminal Procedure Act by Department of Justice and as police were participating. And this is important.

We have our eye among other things, on things like parole. We think that quite a large number of criminals get paroles unduly and prematurely in a number of cases, while they still should be sitting in jail. We'll be going through this with the portfolio committee. And we hope that we will go through, this financial year, so that we improve the way we deal with criminality in our country. Thank you very much, House Chair.

Mr D M SKOSANA: Hon House Chairperson, lawlessness and poverty have become a defining feature of the ANC of Mr Ramaphosa. The MK party has observed a sharp increase in extortion cases. This is a troubling indicator of the country economic struggle. Compared to the glorious years of His Excellency President Zuma, the current sedge in extortion incidents

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coincide with a significant rise in unemployment, economic downturn and the scarcity of opportunities.

It is ironic how the years of His Excellency President Zuma were dubbed the wasted years, quite absurd and it is madness. The MK party would also want to highlight the ineffective consequence management which is exacerbated by the weakness in the SA Police Service Act, particular section 40, Minister. And the 2016 SA Police Service, SAPS, Disciplinary Rail Regulations. The inadequacy perpetuates misconduct and undermines the public interest.

Furthermore, the lack of rigorous application of these laws enables some of the rogue SAPS members to engage in extortions and other forms of misconducts with impunity. Citizens are terrified of reporting crimes like extortion because of some police are alleged to be involved.

In the route to complete the fibre installation project in Dr Kenneth Kaunda District Municipality, a contractor encountered two individuals claiming to represent the Klerksdorp community. According to the SA Police Service, these matters were reported. The man demanded employment opportunities and a

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protection fee of R50 000. Threatening the contractor to vacate the site and return with the payment. This incident highlights the dire consequence of economic hardships and the souring unemployment rates.

The City of Cape Town under the DA leadership has 64% cases of extortions. Quite interesting they say where they govern, they govern more than any other ... [Inaudible.]

This phenomenon is not unexpected given the city's history of economic exclusion where Africans and coloured communities have been systematically marginalised from participating in the economy of this country. The stark reality is that business and predominantly owned and operated by white individuals, while employment opportunities are often afforded to foreign nationals leaving local residents to face limited job prospects particular in the sector like hospitality and domestic work.

These days the term construction mafia has been prevalent in the media as you said here Minister. However, discussing extortions and the so-called construction mafia is investigators scope including the large establishment like

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WBHO, Group Five, Murray & Roberts or if solely focussed on black-owned businesses fighting a share of the market. Are these industry giants which have historically dominated the construction sector also being scrutinised for potentially engaging in extenuating practice or is it enquiry limited to small players?

The MK manifesto is very clear dubbed the peoples mandate presents an eight-pillar plan centred on transformation on initiatives such as the expropriation of land without compensation. The nationalisation of SA Banks, SAB, and the mines must happen. Through this mandate, the MK party emphasizes that neglecting these fundamental issues will to government to merely treat the symptoms rather than address the underlining cause of societal problems.

The MK party unequivocally condemns and does not encourage extortion. We call on the coalition government to eradicate conditions that provided fertile ground for this criminality. We are calling for the coalition government to do that.

The studies have shown positive correlation between crime and poverty.

Finally, the MK party are calling the Independent Police Investigative Directorate, Ipid, to urgently investigate the complicity of some SAPS members who are involved in extortions.

IsiNdebele:

Lami lamaphelelo ngizokuthi la e-Cape Town, bengikhamba namapholisa abhadala imali yokuthelisa, [i-protection fee.] Ngqongqotjhe. Amapholisa ahlala kibo Gugulethu. KwaBhaca utitjhere omkhulu weskolo, udutjhuliwe eskolweni ePumalanga Kapa, emini kukhanya! Imiraro le, qala nje bona into le ingakghona ukulungiseka na amatjhuguluko lapha kini ningawenza ngendlela efaneleko.

Into engizoyitjho kuwe kukobana umphakathi uyalila Ngqongqotjhe. Ningakhuluma abanye bayasirhuwelela nasikhulumako, kodwana iqiniso libhlungu angithi? Iqiniso liyahlababa. Kodwana ngifuna ukutjho bona amatjhuguluko la ekhaya eMzansi ukobana kwenzeke kufuneka bona abarholi nanyana abadosiphambili basidosele ngendlela ererhe. Ngombana njenganje ngifuna ukuyibeka izwakale; nisifaka ngemgodini. Ngiyathokoza.

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Mr I CAMERON: Hon House Chairperson, hon members and all protocol observed. Extortion is a rapidly escalating threat that affects every single layer of society in South Africa. From large corporations to smaller township businesses and even our schools. It is deeply rooted, and it is an issue that is jeopardising the economic stability and tears at the social fabric of every single part of our country. It has become a national crisis.

Today I dedicate this speech to the brave civilians that were violently assaulted by the members of the Presidential Protection Unit. Specifically, those eight SA Police Service, SAPS, members that were meant to protect the Deputy President on the N1 in Johannesburg in 2023. I mention this because like an extortion racket, civilians are unfortunately sometimes held captive by the employment of rouge elements in our law-enforcement agencies. These isolated rouge elements unfortunately then cheapen the ranks of the majority and thus the thousands of professional officers and dedicated cops that work so extremely hard. Even though they are in the minority, these bad actors impact not only on their fellow officers but

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erode public trust that our law-enforcement agencies so desperately need.

This very incident underscores the need that we urgently must address the misconduct within our own ranks before we can effectively and sustainably combat the existential extortion epidemic facing this country.

The courage of these specific victims and whistle blowers like Babita Deokaran, Cloete and Thomas Murray, justice who confront corruption and injustice head on, are powerful reminders of the vital role that integrity plays in our collective effort to oppose those who exploit and oppress our communities.

Extortion is not a new phenomenon in South Africa, but it has now reached a point of crisis. Recent events such as the closure of Dr Anele Jackos Ophthalmology Practice in Mthatha who was forced to shut down his practice and going to hiding highlights the destructive impact these crimes have on individuals, their communities and the essential services that they are meant to provide.

Extortion actually acts as an additional illegal tax on an already strained economy draining businesses of much needed funds. Its spread is fuelled by three key factors. The first one is the continued growth of violent organised armed groups. The perception of legitimacy or an element of fear that they cultivate within different communities in South Africa. The inability or unwillingness of state institutions to respond effectively is the third and final factor. A further example is the continued attacks on the Intercape bus service between the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, including numerous cases of intimidation and violence even murder committed by known taxi extortion mafia figures.

Attacks, extortion, intimidation of commuter transport systems threaten the livelihoods of millions and must be addressed urgently. Extortion syndicates challenge the very legitimacy of the state. Their demands for local taxes similar to those seen in regions where gangs or malicious have completely taken over the state functions and they appear especially where state institutions are either weakened or compromised.

To extort requires little more than the ability and willingness to intimidate victims and meet out violence. No sector is immune from public transport, construction small

businesses to critical public services like health care and education.

It has also become pervasive in our night life economy often linked to the drug trade and others. If unchecked it will spread to other sectors. It will be exacerbated by cases of corruption and bribery in law-enforcement.

The impact of extortion on our communities is absolutely profound. It creates a climate of fear, stifling entrepreneurial spirit and deterring investment. In townships where small businesses are lifelines extortions can ruin businesses, cost jobs and devastate livelihoods if not only take them which in turn worsens poverty and further social instability.

The construction industry is plagued with construction mafias and demands a share of contracts. They demand experience and thus causes project delays. It increases costs and even abandonment of those projects. Further deterring investment and harming our fragile economy.

In the public sector, extortion groups target essential services like waste collection, water and sanitation and road maintenance impacting the poorest communities the worst. These criminal acts not only disrupt the daily life but also undermine the trust in public institutions that are meant to serve and protect by the SA Police Service and even the National Prosecuting Authority. They use terror to ensure that their victims are silenced, and they are obviously then as the Minister correctly said stifle crime reporting.

The fight against extortion is not a unique one in South Africa. It is a global challenge. It requires innovative responses. Japan's successful efforts to curtail the Yakuza's influence of a valuable lances in curbing protection levy payments in countries like Italy that have seen success by simple community-based projects where they have also engaged businesses to then publicly reject any form of mafia involvement.

Community-driven initiatives at grassroots level supported by effective state action can empower communities and create a collective against extortion. It is simple. Our joint response just simply cannot be business as usual. Combating extortion

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requires a multifaceted approach. We need specialised law-enforcement units on combating extortion and organised crime. Capable of gathering intelligence, infiltrating syndicates and ensuring robust prosecutions.

In conclusion, there is no way that we can solve this crisis if we do not have integrated incentives to both the prosecuting authority and the Police that do not work hand-in-hand. We cannot expect ... Thank you. [Time expired.]

Dr M Q NDLOZI: House Chairperson, Deputy President, again the Minister has not paid attention to the gravity of what we are dealing with. The Minister came here, and he spoke. Quite frankly, I don't know that the people of South Africa have confidence that the police are going to attack extortionists.

There is no comprehensive crime prevention strategy, and until that happens, you will always run after the fact. After extortion has happened, you'll be running after people. What is your plan? What did you say today? You're going to work with provinces, you're signing agreements, that have been done before.

You will work with community police forums, CPFs, and security companies have been done before. That is your strategy. You came here to tell us that. Extortionists find themselves and express themselves in four aspects. One, which is a long-standing practice in the clubs, and the clubs, there is a strong phenomenon of security companies.

You are going to work with which security companies? They are involved themselves in telling clubs that they must be employed or else they're going to have to be attacked in all forms of violence and be run into the ground. It is clear here in Cape Town, that big and strong and violent security companies are the ones that are running the clubs and based on a proper extortionist network.

The construction mafia, the 30 percenters, what are you going to do with them? There's nothing that has come out today as to what you're planning to do with the people who are extracting 30% and rendering the state dysfunctional at a local level.

In cyberbullying, a lot of women are taking videos during sex and the men threaten, for example, to expose those videos to keep them in relationships or to extort money from them, a lot

as well of extortionist tendencies within the cybercrime space.

Finally, public institutions, hospitals, schools. In Gqeberha we are told that in the Life Mercantile Hospital, one of the doctors was told that he must bring an R50 000 protection fee or face violence. A male nurse at Efata School for the Blind and Deaf and his family were held at gunpoint on Tuesday. Two armed men demanded a 50% protection fee. Numerous businesses in Umtata, in the recent week, Sasol garage on the main road was closed. People are demanding a protection fee. In everything that you have said today, I don't know that we're getting confidence.

IsiZulu:

Kumele ukhulume ngezenzo.

English:

What do the people of South Africa want to hear? One, they don't want to hear that you don't know these criminals and you're saying the reports are not coming to the police stations. That is dishonest. You're the only people who don't know these criminals that are extorting communities. Only the

police in South Africa are claiming ignorance. Our people know, and the reason the police are claiming ignorance is because the police are embedded. It is because correctional services are embedded.

There are people who come from prison who are convicted of murder, who were transported outside, commit heinous violent crimes, murder and assassinations, and come back into prison. When you're looking for them, and reporting them, police say those people have been arrested already. What is your strategy regarding these activities? You do not have. So, what did you come here to Parliament to do? A Public Relations, PR, empty exercise. This Government of National ...

IsiXhosa:

... ntoni-ntoni ...

English:

... is not going to succeed if it is obsessed with media. You have got to have a comprehensive concrete strategy that is based on the lived experience of our people to combat crime. Do not come here for a PR stunt. You don't have a strategy yet, and ...

IsiZulu:

... isikhathi sakho siyaphela.

English:

What must be done? One, go and implant counterintelligence capabilities. We know these gangs. Our people will tell you. Two, build internal state capacity. Let us do away with tenders. Tenders have crippled the local state. Many of those workers, let us insource them. Let the government build schools directly, build clinics directly. It will halve the crime of extortion in our country.

The HODs in Ekurhuleni, in Johannesburg, withhold payments of contractors. Some of them are crippling black businesses. They must get bribed, or they don't get paid. Arrest these administrators. Let us see you raid that administration to disarticulate it from extortion.

Finally, please use digital and AI technologies. Implant cops with GPS so that you know where the cops are, who they are talking with, who they are seeing at all material times. ...

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[Inaudible] ... you speak about a crime strategy, not a PR exercise you came here to perform. [Time expired.]

Inkosi R N CEBEKHULU: Hon Chairperson, hon members, extortion has recently gripped the social consciousness of South Africans, becoming increasingly pervasive and organised. In a challenging economic climate, extortion contributes to rising unemployment as seen in the recent closure of private hospital facilities in Mthatha and Kwazakhele. Accordingly, it imposes an extra financial burden on citizens forced to bear increased transport costs.

Business owners across various industries are constantly balancing their aspirations with a pervasive sense of fear. The fees extorted by these criminals never appear in the accounting records. From the closure of Beerhouse in Long Street to the death of a 64-year-old vendor in Wallacedene, Kraaifontein, the message is unmistakably, comply or suffer the consequences.

It is crucial to recognise that a climate of fear among community members and victims is fundamental to the success of extortion. It is impossible to quantify how extortion hinders

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economic growth and development. However, the psychological impact on victims remains immeasurable. The infrastructure for operating business in South Africa belongs to the democratic state. This is supported by the SA Revenue Service, Sars, an organ of the state, is mandated to collect revenue. The act of extortion undermines the rule of law, or as the Global Initiative observed, extortion aims to control some aspects of economic, social, and political life and squeezes out or supplements illegitimate forms of government.

Furthermore, it is important to note that extortion helps sustain criminal governance. This pervasive fear is linked to the fact that extortion is difficult, if not impossible, to prosecute collectively. Therefore, addressing this crisis necessitates a collective approach. Put differently, working together, and sharing information that helps build effective strategies that benefit the collective community that is exposed to extortion.

New approaches to intelligent policing are needed to address this phenomenon. However, the first step is to allocate the necessary resources, provide data, and training, and better

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equip police officers to handle violent confrontations. I must say, ...

IsiZulu:

Lezi izinkomba zokuthi leli lizwe noma lingelona izwe elingazinzile kwezombusazwe nakwezomnotho kodwa manje silibona libheke eweni okukhomba ukuthi impela liyaya ekubeni izwe elingazinzile kwezombusazwe nakwezomnotho. Nezenzo ezenzeka phambi kwababusayo kodwa kube kuncane abakwenzayo ukubhekana nezinsalelo.

Kuyadabukisa khona ukusho ukuthi ukungabibikho kolwazi emaphoyiseni ezwe lethu yikhona ikakhulukazi okuyimbangela ukuthi kwenzeke lezi zinto. Njalo sisukuma sekonakele bese siyobopha. Asikwazi ukubuka izinto zingakenzeki ukuze sizingande sivikele isizwe, sivikele amabhizinisi ethu, sivikele nezwe lakithi ekutheni lithathwe izigilamkhuba ezimatasa njengamanje.

Lapho kufakwa nengxenywe yamaphoyisa athile, kufaka nengxenywe yamabutho amasosha athile ayingxenywe yokulekelela ukungcola Phakathi kwezwe lethu. Mhlonishwa kuyoba kuhle uHulumeni wethu asukume. [Kwaphela isikhathi.]

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Mr A SAULS: House Chair, greetings to the Deputy President, to the Ministers, to the House, greetings in Jesus' name, ...

[Inaudible] ... it will be disingenuous of me to remind everyone in the House or the Minister of the ugly face of crime within our country when the Minister came before us and transparently admitted to the severity of the levels of crime.

Einstein says, "If he had an hour to fix the world, he would use 55 minutes to understand the problem and five minutes to fix it." Hon Minister, your statement reveals that you sought first to understand the problem, and you came here to indicate that you are now in your five minutes to attempt to fix it.

You came here and you transparently stated to us, you didn't come to sugarcoat our crime levels to fool the country. You came here and you were specific. You said that the crime that level here is at 73%. We applaud you Minister and the government for approaching the provinces and local governments to integrate resources against crime. We also ask for the co-operation of traditional leaders and all our communities in rural and urban areas to work with police and assist them in arresting these extortionists to make our communities safer.

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We ask the Minister's department to closely monitor the SAPS hotline and follow up on all reported cases.

There needs to be protection of our whistleblowers instead of our people being forced to pay protection fees for criminality. We ask the Minister to move to paying crime with punishment that is immediate and long-lasting. Minister, we trust that your department will root out corruption in your department. Minister, we will support you in putting plans in place to move from being a reactive department to being a proactive department that restores the hopes of our people.

But also focus on strengthening ties with the justice system so that there are actual prosecutions that take place because oftentimes communities are in fear because they can report on who is responsible but then those very people come back into our communities. Crime, Mr Minister, is like a slippery snake. But I believe as the House knows my faith in scripture that you should be like Moses when he faced the snake and did not take it by the head but take it by the tail so we can say you have crime under control. [Time expired.]

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Mrs H DENNER: Hon House Chair, the crime of extortion, whereby criminal networks demand payoffs from businesses in exchange for, in some cases, protection from these mafias themselves or on some or other perceived grounds that infringe upon these businesses' right to exist and trade freely, has cost the South African economy about R68 billion thus far. As if private-sector businesses don't have enough to cope with, with extremely poor service delivery in South Africa in general and a government that far too often used to scapegoat the private sector for everything that went wrong, extortion has become one of the worst millstones around the neck of businesses in our modern history.

The quarterly crime statistics released last week revealed that extortion has more than doubled from the same quarter in the previous year, with Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal leading in the numbers of cases reported in the country. Experts say that extortion syndicates are not restricted to only construction as so many of us know but vary also and include, amongst others housing, the taxi industry and the hospitality industries, while we've heard of many other examples here today.

Crimes of extortion are often coupled with the threat of violence or real violence against business owners, their workers and more often than not their families, and I think the Minister described it aptly by calling them armies of murderous parasites. Minister, that's exactly what they are. It is no wonder then that the crime of extortion is underreported because much like in the cases of gender-based violence, GBV, many victims are afraid that the repercussions for reporting these crimes will lead to further violence. This means that the cost of this growing crime trend is probably much more than the estimated R68 billion that it has cost the South African economy thus far.

These criminal syndicates are also not region specific but have started spreading from urban areas to smaller rural towns and communities across the country, disrupting development and undermining economic stability. As was mentioned numerous times, the reporting of these crimes is very low. It is therefore of the utmost importance, Minister, that the victims of these crimes are truly supported and protected so that they are enabled to report these crimes before they become entrenched.

Afrikaans:

Agb Voorsitter, die VF Plus waarsku al etlike jare dat hierdie misdade in die kiem gesmoor moet word. As daar op ons waarskuwings ag geslaan is sou ons nie nou hier gewees het met hierdie probleem wat elke dag alewig groter word nie.

Nietemin, ons is nou hier en dit is die plig van die regering van nasionale eenheid om die gemors van die verlede skoon te maak sodat ekonomiese vooruitgang, werkskepping en die welstand van die Suid-Afrikaanse gemeenskap verseker kan word.

Daarom verwelkom die VF Plus die planne van die Minister van Polisie wat vandag hier aan ons voorgelê is.

English:

We would've liked to see more details, Minister ... [Time expired.]

Ms D E JAMES: Chairperson, the issue of extortion syndicates in our country has spiralled dangerously out of control, becoming a crisis that strikes at the core of our economy and society. This isn't just about crime. This is about government's inability to serve and protect our communities

and our businesses. Extortion rackets have spread like cancer, threatening our economy, destroying business confidence and terrorising our communities. No sector is immune from these notorious construction mafias to now even local businesses that are under siege. Look no further than in the Eastern Cape where businesses are being driven out of business. It is not an isolated issue. It is systemic, cutting across all sectors and no community or business is safe under this government's watch.

Minister, you have inherited a crisis no doubt created by the incompetence of your predecessor. For too long government's lack of a coherent zero-tolerance approach has allowed these criminal networks to embed themselves deeper into our communities. We are a nation of laws yet extortionists operate with near total impunity.

The facts speak for themselves. It's either the police are in their pockets, they don't know how or they are compromised. We cannot ignore the glaring possibility that these syndicates are politically connected as some reports indicate. The most severely impacted are always our most vulnerable.

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Afrikaans:

Laat ek nie daar gaan nie.

English:

Their dignity is systemically stripped away by an indifferent government that only takes action when it's too much or when it's uncontrollable. This isn't just a fight against crime. It's a fight to restore the dignity of our communities and to protect the most vulnerable amongst us.

We must hold those in power accountable. We need a Police Force that will act decisively without fear or favour and dismantle these syndicates. It is unacceptable for fear and corruption to rule the streets while those elected to serve look the other way or jump to action when it's too late. Our communities deserve better and it is our duty to demand better, that the law serves the people not the few and certainly not those who profit from this racket and chaos. I thank you.

Mr W M THRING: Hon House Chairperson, the ACDP welcomes the news by the Minister that the SA Police Service is taking major steps to combat extortion and protection rackets in the

nation. These practices are perpetrated across the country. Organised crime syndicates operate ... strong connections within local communities, many of whom live in fear. Extortionists are often aided by corrupt police or government officials who protect these criminals, obstruct investigations or even participate in the crimes themselves, as seen by the arrest of Capt Wilford Qikwa, who appeared in the Blue Downs Magistrate's Court on extortion charges.

Syndicate methods involve violence and assassinations, holding up major infrastructure and housing projects. Their tentacles reach from top construction companies and businessmen and businesswomen to electrical engineers, local fibre installers, bus companies and even a deaf school for children in the Eastern Cape.

Evidence is key in prosecution. Yet, if victims report the crime to the authorities, many live in fear. This has been exacerbated by the ineffectiveness of the police in providing protection or pursuing justice. Swift prosecution is essential before communities resort to vigilante justice. Additionally, as one constituent in referring to the extortion commented, our whole criminal justice and legal system is unsuited to what is happening and is arguably not fit for purpose.

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The ACDP notes that the SAPS and other law enforcement agencies have lacked the resources, training and manpower necessary to effectively combat organised crime and extortion. This includes inadequate technology and forensic capabilities, and is also evidenced by the fact that over the last five years, 722 extortionists were arrested but only 52 found guilty and sentenced, which equates to a dismal and shameful 7% conviction rate. Minister, last week the ACDP called on you to improve co-operation with all crime-fighting agencies in order to increase conviction rates.

The ACDP laments the cold-blooded murder of a 64-year-old granny shot in her head by extortionists in Kraaifontein because she was unable to pay their fees. May our gogo's death never be in vain and never go unpunished. This extortion ring must be smashed and no stone left unturned in bringing these murderous extortionists to book. I thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majosi): Hon Kwankwa? Hon Kwankwa?
Hon Gana?

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Xitsonga:

Tat S M GANA: Mutshamaxitulu, ndzi khensa ku nyikiwa nkarhi.
Holobye ...

English:

... the police must prevail. They have to prevail because we are not safe. They have to prevail because businesses are not safe. The police have to prevail because pensioners are not safe. Communities are not safe. The extortion gangs and rackets are terrorising all of us. Doctors running practices are being targeted. Informal traders are a target. Spaza shops and small businesses are a target, including construction sites that have become battlegrounds. This has become a pandemic. It is spreading like wildfire or even COVID-19. It's no longer just an urban or city pandemic. It has spread to deep rural areas of our country.

These gangs target vulnerable people who are trying to make a living under already difficult conditions. That today you are making this statement is proof that extortion rings pose a significant threat to our communities.

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So, what are the conditions that give rise to this pandemic? We know that one is unemployment and second is impunity, because even when arrested these criminals will be released in a few days or weeks. People feel that the police are no longer protecting them, forcing them to pay protection fees. The trust levels between the police and communities have broken down, as many see the police as working to protect the criminals rather than protecting the victims.

We must also be honest with ourselves. The spread of the extortion pandemic points to a failure of crime intelligence, which I know you have committed to sort out, Minister. We know what happened to crime intelligence. It became politicised back in the day.

However, as Rise Mzansi we want to say that visible policing and brute force alone will not deal with this pandemic. It needs proper intelligence. It needs the working together of the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority, NPA, so that we don't just arrest but those that are arrested are prosecuted and sent to jail. We believe that acting on intelligence and building watertight cases must be what the police focuses on ...

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Xitsonga:

... Holobye. Ndzi khensile swinene, Mutshamaxitulu.

Mr M A MAIMANE: Hon Minister, Deputy President, fellow South Africans...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majosi): Hon Kwankwa, we called you earlier and you did not respond. So, now on the platform is hon Maimane.

Mr N L S KWANKWA: I had connectivity challenges, my apologies, House Chair. I understand.

Setswana:

Rre A M MAIMANE: Bagaetsho, dumelang.

English:

What you would note hon Minister is that, recently I was in Gqeberha, in a community in Walmer. When I arrived in Walmer, it struck me, when I got there - it is affected. This is a community where in the church, young people walked in and robbed people there and it struck me on a few thoughts. The

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citizens recognised this very difficult issue, which is, when they called the police, sometimes the police do not show up. When the police ultimately show up, sometimes they are demanding bribes themselves.

The worst feeling that a citizen can have in this country is not just a feeling or fear of being robbed or facing extortion. It is the fear that comes with the fact that even when the police come, there is no help. The genuine feeling of helplessness, and this is what this debate must be about today, because in truth, there are 500 murders a week. The reality is that we have grown at one percent for the last 10 years and in truth, even though we speak about an increase in crimes against women, there seems to be no appropriation that has been allocated for that fight.

So, hon Minister, I am here to say to you that we cannot afford another talk. What we have got to be doing here today is making a declaration of war on crime. Here are my suggestions in a few ways and I would want to work with you in achieving this. The first one is that we need a new capacitation of police. The truth is, we are living with 8 000

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vacancies and only 22 000 detectives in the country. That is far from enough. We will never win.

The second is, once we have done that, we have to fix our police station so that people can feel a place of hope and help when they go there. Thirdly, Minister, I want to suggest very strongly that we need a new consensus on values because honestly, you cannot put a policeman in every church. There is something inherently wrong. That is why all of us, as citizens, must work together to fight crime in our communities and say to ourselves, how do we partner with the police to fight.

More seriously, I want to urge that we need a different prioritization. Before 2010, Minister, what remained patently clear was that when we prioritized murder, which is the general feeling people fear, is that we can focus police resources, capacitate budget and fight crime. So, what I am suggesting is that let us increase the budget, let us get better police and let us ensure, more vital, that once we have done that, we give them the best vehicles to fight.

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Let us eradicate unethical or old policemen who lack ethics and leaders who lack ethics. Because if you create the impression that if you do the crime in this country, you will get away with it. Trust me, extortion is believed the same. So, Minister, in my closing, if we work with the Department of Justice, we have to improve conviction rates, otherwise our prison doors are revolving doors. Time for talk is over, it is time for us to act now. Thank you very much.

IsiXhosa:

Mnu. N L S KWANKWA: Mphathiswa, sidinga amapolisa angasebenzisaniyo nale genge yoonqevu. Ndibenelishwa mna ndafakwa ebhuthini yemoto ndaphantse ndabulawa yinkwenkwe ibiqhunyiwe. Ngalo mhla wesi sehlo, le nkwenkwe ibasandula ukuphuma ejele ngokutyityimbiselwa umnwe ngumantyi. Ndivela eMpuma Koloni ngoku, iigaraji zakwaSasol eMthatha zivaliwe ngenxa yokunyanzeliswa kwemali yokhuselo ngoonqevu. Oogqirha baseGqeberha bazivalile iindawo zabo zokusebenzela ngenxa yokunyanzeliswa kwemali yokuzikhusela ngoonqevu.

Akubanjwanga mntu ngela xesha bekuphandwa le nyewe yam, kodwa andinakuxoka ndithi amapolisa afedile ekwenzeni umsebenzi, bawenzile umsebenzi. Okwangoku, basaluse abatyholwa aba

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ndibakhombe ngokwam, ukuba babangakule. Into evelileyo, Mphathiswa ngela xesha bekuphandwa eli tyala lam, kukuba ingxaki ikhona kwalapha emapoliseni. Kukho amapolisa asebenzisana naba ngevu abanyanzelisa abantu ukuba bakhuphe imali yokuzikhusela. Abantu baseKoloni, iyonke, kuquka iMpuma neNtshona Koloni, kufuneka bayinikele emapoliseni le ngxaki ayilwe ngokwawo, njengoko ubutshilo. Ukuba amapolisa ayoyisakala, abantu baseMpuma naseNtshona Koloni kufuneka bangaxakwa ukuba benze ntoni. Asikwazi ukuphila ubomi bamagwala ngenxa yoongevu, ayikwazi ukuba njalo. Ukuba amapolisa ayoyiswa, thina siza kubangomba. Ukuba ukubangomba akubalungisi, siza kuba thumela kwizinyanya zakumawabo.

Into ebuhlungu kukuba baqala koosomashishini, nto leyo etshabalalisa amathuba emisebenzi. Emva kokuba iphele tuu imisebenzi, aba ngevu baza kuphumela emakhayeni ethu. Ngomso baza kuthi masikhusele iithivi zethu ezinkulu ezisibaca, kumakhaya ethu ngokunyanzelisa ukuhlawulwa kwemali yokuzikhusela. Zisiqhela kakubi ezi ntwana, andifuni kuxokisa. Ndithetha njengomntu osinde cebeshu ekufeni, nosuka ebhuthini yemoto, ukuba amapolisa ayoyisakala, siza kubabulala aba ngevu, Mphathiswa, andifuni nokuxoka kuwe. [Kwaphela ixesha.]

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Mr V ZUNGULA: Hon House Chairperson, Minister, extortionists are brazen criminals who have got no regard for law-abiding citizens. They target everyone, including the most poor and vulnerable in our society. The national government needs to follow the lead of KwaZulu-Natal police in dealing decisively with criminals. The KwaZulu-Natal police have shown the country the type of attitude we need to have towards criminals. There must be a no-nonsense approach. The people all over the country appreciate and support the work that is done by the police in KwaZulu-Natal.

The foreign funded NGO's and the experts that have made themselves mouthpiece of criminals at the expense of South Africans, must please volunteer their skills and be in the frontline of police operations. There were Amabharethi Minister, who used to patrol in high crime areas and their deployment assisted in reducing crime. Amabharethi and other special task forces must be deployed in areas where extortion crimes are rife.

Minister, you must engage the Justice Department to ensure that the National Prosecuting Authority, NPA prioritises the prosecution of criminals arrested for extortion crimes. The

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Security Cluster must work together to ensure that we deal decisively with criminality at all levels. Our people are discouraged and soon will take the law into their own hands when they see that the government is seemingly protecting criminals over them.

Minister, your department needs to strengthen its internal integrity mechanisms and root out corrupt police officers from all levels. Corrupt police officers are the reasons why citizens lose faith in law enforcement and end up taking law into their own hands. There are other crimes that warrant priority by the department. Other crimes such as drug trade, prostitution, the production of fake products and fake South African documents also need to be dealt with, with urgency as well.

The police raids, Minister, eThekweni exposed the rot of crime in South Africa. Similar raids need to be conducted in Sunnyside, Hillbrow, Bedfordview, Central at Gqeberha and all other central business districts where all these crimes are rife. All police officers must be encouraged to use maximum force whenever their lives are under threat from the extortionists and criminals. The state cannot keep on burying

police officers who lose their lives whilst protecting the citizens from criminals. The state must protect the police officers who protect the people.

Adv S SALIE: Hon Chair, hon Minister, *As-salaamu-alai-kum*. [Peace be with you.] to all. The rapid increase of this formidably criminal act of extortion has been allowed to expand to various business levels as the SA Police Service has been ineffective to deal with the problem of historical gangsterism and corruption with the corrupt within their own ranks. For far too long gangs have been at liberty to view extortion as a lucrative criminal act with high chances of not getting caught.

Civil society organisations have over the past three decades, warned government of corrupt officials within SA Police Service, SAPS at the borders and airports. Gangs, organised crime and mafias have been exploiting the government's weak security measure to deal effectively with them and this weakness further led to the community's lack of trust in the powers that be.

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We can see that the reality of extortion, the situation is far more serious than is perhaps realised. It has infiltrated not only various levels of businesses, such as construction, coffee and spaza shops, minibus taxis industry, private transportations etc. These extortion economies are interlinked, and they use extreme violence and hitman to carry out the deadly attacks on innocent people who refuse to pay their protection fees.

While Al Jama-ah notes the recent efforts being made by SAPS, we question as to why they've been dragging their feet in apprehending these criminals. The SA Police Service know who the gangsters, drug dealers, mafias and extortionists are. It is disheartening to know that even our sailors who live in Khayelitsha and working at Simon's Town Naval Base are being expected to pay fees for protection to safeguard their homes.

Al Jama-ah calls on government to remove corrupt officials and to look towards meaningful measures to identify and eradicate extortion, by establishing a specialised unit with specialised skills, ensuring proper collection of evidence and effective prosecution of these criminals. Monitoring and tracking

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extortion economies act against organised crime syndicates. Policing on extortion activities must be proactive.

Communities are the government's eyes and ears on the ground. Systems must be put in place to gain the lost trust they have in SAPS so that they can report activities of extortion. It is useless to make arrests only and to mess up cases as all these have rippling effects on our country's socioeconomic stability. I thank you.

Mr F ADAMS: House Chair, hon members, hon Deputy President, incoming President, hon Minister. I've listened to this House talk. I've listened to my boeta [my brother] hon Sauls laud the Minister for taking 55 minutes to understand the problem. I cannot believe that my Minister does not understand that poverty breeds crime.

Minister, we can lock up every extortionist in this country. But while in the Western Cape we are planning to lay off 2 500 teachers, we are breeding more extortionists. Minister, I've come here, I've listened to you, and you've said very little. Extortion is born out of the fact of economic exclusion.

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In the Western Cape, Haw and Inglis contracted to the Western Cape government, gave a gang boss R2 million of our tax. A case was made, no one is followed but it is confirmed. Minister, if that was a black-owned company, they would be in prison today.

Minister, let me assure you, as long as our local businessmen are not included in the tender processes and in the benefits of everything, this thing will never stop. It is apparent that this government is okay with criminals taxing the poor. It becomes problematic when they start taxing the rich.

Minister, this is not your problem, it's a socioeconomic problem. The SA Police Service is at the wrong end of this. Until we include all of our people in the benefit of all of this country, this problem can only grow. Minister, I stand here today to bring you a very, very simple message, speak to your colleagues. Tell them to start including all of South Africa in the spending of all of South Africa, and this problem goes away.

Minister Wendy Kloppers was shot 16 times in Delft because criminals demanded a share of the pie. Who shoots a woman 16

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times? That is not a human being. But Minister, our society breeds people that are less than human. Minister, I ask that you do the right thing. That while you can arrest 700 extortions, our justice system will only sentence 5% of them. The rest of them will be released in the same communities where they feared of. It is a cycle that is going nowhere. Minister, I want to say one last thing before I leave. As a coloured person in the City of Cape Town, I can't work in a township. Khayelitsha does not want me. Samora Machel does not want me. But this House doesn't talk about that. As a coloured person I can't be schooled in the townships alongside my black brothers, but this House doesn't talk about this. Are coloured people in South Africa [Interjections.] Thank you.

Mr M NYHONTSO: Hon Chair, the PAC welcomes the statement by the Minister. The crime of extortion is growing. It is moving towards rural areas. This is an issue that goes beyond policing. It is war. As Minister highlighted, we have to have a hand on specialised units that will not be distracted by any other thing. We call on communities to utilise hotlines to blow the whistles against this crime and other crimes. Minister ...

IsiXhosa:

... masijonge ngqo kwizaphuli-mthetho ...

English:

... and defeat them. Thank you, hon Chair.

Mr L W MAHLATSI: House Chairperson, greetings to the progressive caucus. Hon Minister, extortion once perceived as an isolated crime has now metastasised into a nationwide thread that demands immediate and decisive action from our law enforcement agency. Extortion is no longer confined to underworld or limited particular sectors, it has spread across the industries from small businesses to large corporations, from rural areas to urban centres.

This cancerous growth of criminal activity is crippling the enterprise, discouraging investment and eroding public trust in the government's ability to protect the citizens. The most alarming trend we have witnessed the rise of organised crime syndicates that operates within the near impunity, exploding loopholes within our legal frameworks, at times, leveraging the very structure that means to protect us.

The question we must ask ourselves is this: How did we allow it to get this far? Despite various promises and policy interventions, the response from the Minister of Police has been largely reactionary and frankly inadequate. We have seen a fragment approach with police force, often ill-equipped, underresourced and overwhelmed by the sophisticated and reach of these criminal networks.

The extortion syndicates operate with a level of co-ordination and intelligence that exceeds the current law enforcement capabilities. They leverage advanced technology, encrypt the communication channels and complex financial networks to evade detection and prosecution. Yet our response remained stuck in outdated practices that fail to address the modern realities of organised crime.

Hon Minister, what we need is not just boots on the ground, but fundamental shift towards intelligent driven policy. These involve the integration of advanced analytic real time data sharing, the strategic partnership with private sector. We must leverage the technology, predict, prevent and dismantle the criminal enterprise before they can cause harm.

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Moreover, these are urgent needs to enhance our intelligence capabilities. This means, invest in training and development of a specialised unit that can infiltrate and disrupt criminal organisations. It also requires commitment of breaking down silos within our law enforcement agencies.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Hon Mahlatsi, your time has expired. I gave an extra five seconds.

Sesotho:

Mong L W MAHLATSI: Ka nako e ngwe ha o ka tlohela seretse nako e telele, se qetella se o nkgella mme ho be thata ho se tlosa.

Mr W T D PLAATJIES: Greetings, hon Chair, Deputy President, hon Ministers and Deputy Ministers. Minister, we are welcoming your outline of the interventions by the police to deal with crime in general, including the crime of extortion that is rising within our communities. These interferences are aimed at building safer communities, which is a priority of the ANC. Our people want to live in safer communities without fear of criminals. They also want to engage in business activities without any hindrance from criminals.

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Our point of departure and our point of arrival is that all of us have rights under the Constitution, in Chapter 2 of the Constitution. Some of the fundamental rights, include, the right to dignity, the right to life and the right to freedom of trade. Therefore, it should be borne in the minds of criminals that they harm their fellow citizens: When they engage in activities of extortion; and when they frustrate and stop construction activities, demanding money for services they didn't render - undermining these fundamental rights of our people as outlined in the in the Constitution.

To these criminals, we must say that no matter how powerful they are, they cannot have a right to undermine the rights of other people. The law enforcement agencies must stop and reign on them. We can characterise these crimes of extortion as crimes of economic sabotage because they disrupt economic activities in construction industries through so-called construction mafias.

Crime effects also rob some of businesses, especially small businesses, of their hard-earned revenue, to criminals who thrive and threaten our people in our communities. It goes

without saying that many aspirant businesspersons will not invest in our economy because of the fear of extortionists. Extortionists are militating against the noble efforts of the government to build safer communities and the efforts of creating conducive environments of economic activities to thrive, disrupting government infrastructure development.

Therefore, extortionists target various businesses, including the transport sector. Some schools have to close, and learners have to miss time at school and lessons because extortionists want to be part of projects that are run at school. These crimes of extortion, arising in many provinces, including the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, North West and the Western Cape.

The concern is that crimes can be many, but many of our people are afraid to come forth because of fear. We note the deployment of extra police and the capacity in the Eastern Cape to deal with the crimes of extortion. This deployment follows the engagement of the police with stakeholders in Umthatha and Gqeberha. This deployment of police will also focus on clamping down gangsterism, which is also linking to extortion.

It is important to acknowledge the contribution of civil society and traditional leaders. It is in this regard that we would like to commend the King of Abathembu - uZwelibanzi - for ensuring that acts of extortion in Umthatha areas are stopped and ensuring that that nothing disturbs schools from operating, and teaching and learning should proceed.

It is in this spirit of Zwelibanzi that we urge civil society and institution of traditional leaders to work together with the police and law enforcement agencies to root out these crimes of extortion in our communities. Our ...

[Interjections.] Our firm believes. [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majazi): Hon Plaatjies, I am sorry to disturb you. Hon members, please, we can speak, but can we not drown the speaker? We cannot hear from this side. Thank you. Continue hon member.

Mr W T D PLAATJIES: Our firm belief is that police alone cannot win the fight against crime. [Interjections.] Crime is everybody's business and therefore we should lend a hand. We commend your collective and co-operative approach, Minister,

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amongst the law enforcement agencies, and also in all spheres of government. We call on society, through the CPF and other civil society organisations, to join hands with all law enforcement agencies to fight crime on our country.

We, therefore, call on you, Minister, to convene a national dialogue in the form of community imbizos, so that we don't leave our communities behind regarding what we want to do. We call on the society, through the CPF and our civil society organisation to join hands with law enforcement. We cannot surrender our country to criminals. We have fought so hard for our country's democracy and many of our compatriots have died for this freedom. Therefore, nobody has the right to undermine the freedom we have been visiting though crime upon our people. Therefore, Minister, we welcome your intervention. I thank you.

The MINISTER OF POLICE: Thank you very much, House Chair. I think the first point we need to make at this stage is that we have an honour of this debate being attended by our Deputy President. After he listened to all of us who were debating here, we can now make firm undertakings and declarations. The

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first declaration, Deputy President, is that we are one and we are speaking in one voice in this House.

I noted hon Ndlozi and others. However, his in particular, was another way of agreeing with what you are saying here, but in his own words. We are saying, all of us are rejecting crime and criminals in South Africa. He said it very clear, but in his own words. Secondly, I do want to emphasise that we have the plans. The plans are what we have and are working on. Very soon, these plans will pay fruit.

I don't think we should trivialise this matter and not emphasise that we are speaking in one voice than to stand one side with criminals, because they will think that some of us are on the other side and the only other people are on this side. Let's stand together. That is why we are going out, to make sure that across these spheres of government, we stand together.

Of course, there are socioeconomic conditions, hon Adams, but you can't wait until we fix all those problems. Yes, the problems of a socioeconomic nature have to be fixed, but do not speak as if you tolerate crime. It is as if you say, let

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us tolerate crime for now until we fix, because you are going to be the next victim yourself. So, separate lives. Just stand on one side and allow criminals to be alone. Let us face them together, then fix the economic challenges in the country next.

Yes, we agree that we have to work in synergy, especially with the Department of Justice and that is what we are doing. The first meeting of this seventh administration of the JCPS is on Friday. We have identified loopholes that need to be tightened up, so that criminals don't get arrested and then in the afternoon they are with us.

For that matter, I do want to emphasise that police know criminals, and that is why they arrest them, and they even shoot them. We are encouraging them to go on, in those two. Arrest where you can, but where you have to deal with them head on, you do. That will happen, and it is going to happen in all other provinces.

Finally, some of these stories are not necessarily true, like the garage in Umthatha. We have gone there to interviewed to those people and they said, "No, in this garage, I ran short

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of money; it is not due to extortion and so on." No, no, no! Police themselves have done. They have done so. They have taken statements, and they have them. You can also go to them.

However, the main thing for us, is that police must investigate all alleged crime. Whatever it is! However, you are free to bring more evidence, and they will consider it. All in all, House Chair, we are going out to confront crime and use whatever it means to deal with them, so that we have a crime-free South Africa. It is important that our children and all of us ensure that South Africa is free of criminality.

The issues of synergy are internally, yes. There are quite a number of challenges. There are rogue police. The only good thing is that there are a few, if you compare. It is just that any bad thing that one policeman or policewoman does, it taints the image of all. However, the majority of them are doing very well. We can trust them, work with them and rely on them for safety and protection in the country. Thank you very much.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Ms Z Majozi): Thank you, the hon the Minister. Hon members, this concludes party responses to the

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Minister's Statement. I request members to stand and wait for the Chair and the mace to leave the Chamber.

Business of the day concluded.

The House adjourned at 15:23.

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