



LAW SOCIETY
OF SOUTH AFRICA

PRESS RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

**LAW SOCIETY EXPRESSES SHOCK AT INHUMANE TREATMENT OF
REARRESTED ESCAPEES**

The Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) expresses shock and concern at the 'parading' of rearrested escapees at a press conference by the Department of Correctional Services earlier this week. 'Although we acknowledge the seriousness of the crime situation in our country, we as lawyers, cannot condone the patent abuse of basic human rights exhibited at the Correctional Services press conference, where the rearrested offenders were displayed in the presence of the media with little thought for their basic right to dignity,' say LSSA Co-Chairpersons Nano Matlala and Praveen Sham.

The LSSA believes that Minister of Correctional Services, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, would have been better advised to focus on the systemic shortcomings and problems within the correctional services environment that facilitates such breaches, rather than exploiting a press conference to parade rearrested escapees. 'Our government departments and officials should not be seen to endorse the violation of basic human rights,' say Mr Sham and Mr Matlala.

The concern of the LSSA is not focused on the innocence or guilt of the offenders, but rather on the violation of their rights, such as the right to dignity and their right to proper medical treatment. Chapter 3 of the Correctional Services Act, 1998 stipulates that prisoners must be kept in custody under conditions of human dignity and that the minimum rights of prisoners entrenched in the Act may not be violated or restricted for disciplinary or any other purposes.

Broadcasting and publishing images of prisoners being denied their basic rights can encourage a culture of vigilantism, in which the public could be led to believe that offenders -- whether awaiting trial or convicted -- are not entitled to basic rights, including the right to dignity. This could be indicative of a shift to a culture that tolerates people taking the law into their own hands.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA, PRAVEEN SHAM AND NANO MATLALA

by Barbara Whittle

Communication Manager, Law Society of South Africa

Tel: (012) 366 8800 or 083 380 1307

E-mail: barbara@lssa.org.za Website: www.lssa.org.za

Editor's note:

The Law Society of South Africa brings together its six constituent members – the Cape Law Society, the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society, the Law Society of the Free State, the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, the Black Lawyers Association and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers – in representing South Africa's 20 500 attorneys and 5 000 candidate attorneys.