

Prasa must be held accountable for senseless killings on railways

The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa) must be held accountable for the senseless and barbaric killings of train crew, railway staff, security guards and commuters as it continues to ignore pleas to drastically increase its security on railway lines across the country.

This demand by the United National Transport Union (UNTU) comes after a male armed security guard (33) of Comwezi Security was shot in the head by two armed robbers on Monday afternoon while patrolling the central railway line between Heideveld and Nyanga near Thambo Village with a female colleague to ensure that the signalling boxes are not stolen. The robbers fled with the firearms of both security guards. The suspects are still at large.

The guard was killed just a few kilometres from where train driver Pieter Barend (Piet) Botha was shot twice in the head for his bag while waiting for a train at the Netreg-station two weeks ago. The management of Prasa promised Botha's family that security at the Netreg-station will be increased immediately.

Mr. Brian Davids, full time UNTU Executive Council Member, says the central line between Cape Town and Khayelitsha on the Cape Flats are getting increasingly dangerous to use and should be closed if Prasa are unable to properly secure it.

Just last week the management of Prasa promised UNTU in a meeting that armed security guards will be appointed to patrol the railway line. "Train drivers live in constant fear. The railway line has become so dangerous that they cannot properly focus on the signals they need to look at allowing them to proceed as they are constantly on the lookout for criminals," says Davids.

This places the lives of commuters and the train driver at risk. Train drivers are also too afraid to be accompanied by armed security guards as they believe this would make them more of a target for criminals, says Davids.

“No amount of money can replace the lost of a loved one. Prasa is a state owned enterprise responsible for most passenger rail services in the country. The Bill of Rights in our Constitution guarantees everyone the right to freedom and security of the person. Therefore Government has a duty to assist the struggling Prasa to fulfil the promise made by its former group CEO Lucky Montana so spend R100 million on the upgrading of the security of railway lines in 2013,” says Steve Harris, General Secretary of the United National Transport Union (UNTU).

Montana made this promise after train driver JP du Plessis (57), was stabbed to death in a train in Hercules, Pretoria, on Christmas Day that year. Harris says nothing has been done to increase security since THEN.