

PRASA to blame for arson attacks and vandalism on trains

The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa) are partly to blame for the sharp increase in arson attacks and vandalism on its infrastructure due to its continued failure to increase safety on railway stations and trains, the constant delays of trains and the general lack of service delivery.

“Commuters are beyond frustrated. The Management and the Board of Prasa keeps on making promises to increase service delivery and to take drastic steps to ensure safety on railway stations and trains, but to no avail. The United National Transport Union (UNTU) welcomed the appointment of Collins Letsoalo as acting group CEO of Prasa on 1 July this year due to his excellent track record. But eight weeks after his appointment he has made no attempt amidst the increasing violent crime spree in especially the Western Cape to meet with organized labour,” says Mr. Steve Harris, General Secretary of UNTU.

Since October last year Prasa has lost more than R330 million due to the burning of its coaches across the country. This shocking figure does not include the fire on Sunday at the Retreat station in Cape Town in the Western Cape where four coaches burnt out.

Violent crimes at railway stations in this province has been rife since the brutal murder on Pieter Barend (Piet) Botha, a train driver, in broad daylight at the Netreg-station.

“UNTU condemns any acts of vandalism on any property of Prasa. At the end of the day Prasa as a parastatal is operated with taxpayer’s money. This is money that could have been used in the war to alleviate poverty in South Africa.

“On the other hand it is no use for the management of Prasa just to continue pulling up its shoulders and saying that the burning of coaches puts a lot of pressure on the railway service to provide commuters with a reliable service. The lack of reliable services from Prasa is the reason why commuters continue to take the law into their own hands,” Harris says.

Metrorail is now offering a reward of a R100,000 for anyone who comes forward with information leading to arrests.

This comes two months after Prasa had to file a R2.6 billion lawsuits against Swifambo Rail Leasing to try and recover the money it has paid so far for the 70 faulty new locomotives that is the wrong height and will damage existing rail infrastructure. Prasa also applied in the High Court in Johannesburg to review and set aside the initial R3.5-billion contract with Swifambo after Adv. Thuli

Madonsela, Public Protector, found that the tender was improper. The matter has not yet been heard.

“But this is not the end of Prasa’s problems. The Public Protector also made nine other crucial findings against the railway operator. According to Adv. Madonsela there is widespread evidence of maladministration, improper conduct, and nepotism at Prasa. In her report entitled "Derailed", she also found that Prasa extended another improper tender of R256million to Siemens to install a communications system, Mr. Lucky Montana, former CEO, acted in breach of the Constitution and Promotion of Administrative Justice Act in terminating the contracts of seven cleaning companies in 2012, Mr. Chris Moloi of Prasa awarded a tender worth R3.7m to security company Sidas Security without a tender process being followed, Prasa improperly appointed media company KG Media to produce its Hambanathi Magazine, Montana improperly appointed Joel Chimanda's company AR Chimanda Consulting as special adviser at a cost of R2 million, Montana suspended seven employees without following proper disciplinary procedures, Montana terminated the services of five executives between 2008 and 2013 without following proper procedures, Prasa incurred fruitless and wasteful expenditure by paying rent for the Intersite Building and Prasa improperly awarded a R3.8m tender to develop Johannesburg’s Park Station to ARUP, a company associated with a Prasa board member.

“It has been a year since a political party laid fraud and

corruption charges against Mr. Montana at the Hillbrow Police Station, but still nobody has been arrested and taxpayers don't see justice to be done, one of the core principals of our Constitution," says Mr. Harris. UNTU's enquiries to the Hawks as to the status of this investigation was left unanswered.

Last week Mr. Harris wrote an open letter to the Minister of Transport, Mrs. Dipuo Peters, to urge her to urgently meet with UNTU and its affiliated federation, Fedusa, to discuss what steps needs to be taken in insuring safe railway stations before more innocent people are killed. UNTU demands that the South African Railway Police must be re-established as it existed in 1986 before it was merged with the South African Police Service (SAPS). The Union is still awaiting a response from the Minister.

“This is a massive concern for UNTU's members who fear for their lives daily when they go to work. This year was also the last of the multi term salary agreement UNTU had with Prasa and negotiations for next years' wage increases must start early next year. With Prasa's track record of blatantly wasting tax payers' money the railway operator must not even think to come to the negotiation table with an offer that relates to CPIX,” Harris says.

UNTU is also involved in a court battle with Prasa in the Labour Court in Johannesburg. The Union asks the Court to declare that Prasa violated the constitution of its bargaining forum by entering into an agreement with the

Trade Union National Transport Movement (NTM) at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) giving them limited rights. These rights were given to NTM premature as NTM does not have a 25% plus one representivity as the constitution stipulates. According to Harris UNTU ask the Court to rule that Prasa must pay the cost of the application.

“The constant burning of coaches over the past few months is a clear indication that South African’s have had enough of Prasa and that urgent intervention by Government is needed,” says Harris.

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