

Hope for SA prisoners serving time abroad

News | 21 May 2017, 3:10pm

Nkululeko Nene

DURBAN - There seems to be a glimmer of hope for South African prisoners serving jail time abroad who want to return home to complete their sentences.

A high-level delegation from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) will gather in Gaborone, Botswana, on Tuesday to discuss the final draft on the transfer of foreign prisoners complaining of appalling conditions abroad.

Department of Correctional Services spokesperson Logan Maistry confirmed the meeting and said the draft protocol was expected to be endorsed by the ministerial committee of the organ on July 21.

At present the department does not have an interstate prisoner-transfer agreement with any country.

A number of South Africans are serving time in jail out of the country, mostly on drug trafficking charges.

Patricia Gerber, who heads Locked Up, an NGO that assists South Africans who have been

convicted in a foreign country, has been lobbying the government for many years to enter into a prisoner transfer agreement. She is aware of more than 30 South African prisoners serving time in Mozambique alone.

“This is extremely encouraging news. For the first time we have been given dates. Hopefully, this will herald in the transfer of hundreds of South African citizens incarcerated abroad,” Gerber said.

Also speaking out about the need for prison transfer agreements, a pensioner from Komga in the Eastern Cape, Wawi Mathanga, 62, said she and her 12-year-old granddaughter had to travel for two days to get to Mozambique where her daughter is serving a 16-year sentence after she was found with a 1kg of cocaine at Maputo airport three years ago.

Her daughter was returning from India when she got caught. She is held in Cadiea Civil de Maputo prison.

Travelling to Mozambique to visit her daughter is a daunting task for Mathanga and her grandchild, who have to sleep on the bus during the long trip. Mathanga said she was suffering from depression because of her daughter’s incarceration and could only afford to make the trip once a year. She has written to Parliament asking for her daughter to be transferred to East London prison.

“The travelling is killing us. My face gets swollen every time I travel there. It is a traumatic experience which starts from planning and preparation of the mind. I travel with my grandchild who cries when she sees her mother in that situation. It is important that she visits her mother, although it is only for two hours,” Mathanga said.

They board the afternoon bus from East London to Joburg’s Park Station, which arrives the next morning. Then they spend the day buying groceries, toothpaste, toothbrush and facecloths for her daughter, while waiting for the bus to Mozambique. When they get there they rely on an interpreter to communicate with officials, since most of them speak Portuguese.

“Among the documents we need to produce are two affidavits, one signed by her daughter to explain why she is travelling with a minor. An unabridged birth certificate, passports and court order is a must-have. Getting documents ready for both of us is stressful,” she said.

Mathanga claimed that when she visited her daughter last month she appeared dehydrated.

She likened the prison to a dungeon.

“It is heartbreaking to see her in that condition but I have to be strong for her sake and that of her daughter’s. I do not allow myself to crumble, but it is difficult. She has lost weight because she is only allowed one meal a day,” she said.

A prisoner, who asked not to be named, said life was tough on the inside.

They recently had the number of meals cut to one a day and are no longer given bread and sugar.

While the 34-year-old has made friends with fellow inmates, she would prefer to complete her sentence in a South African prison.

The Sunday Tribune was unable to reach the spokesperson for the Cadiea Civil de Maputo prison at the time of going to print.

[nkululeko.nene@inl.co.za](mailto:nkululeko.nene@inl.co.za)

SUNDAY TRIBUNE

[Link To Article](#)