



JICS

Judicial Inspectorate for
Correctional Services

MEDIA RELEASE

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Incidents of violence, damage to state property and use of force at East London Correctional Centre

The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS) has received a report of a case of use of force at the East London Max Correctional Centre, dated 4 December 2018 after several inmates allegedly became violent towards officials, burnt prison cells and blocked cell doors.

A preliminary JICS investigation was launched at the end of November after another incident of use of force was reported prior to the above mentioned at the same correctional centre. JICS investigators were sent to the correctional centre to look into the latest incident.

The JICS preliminary investigation report was released today after the East London correctional centre was visited. According to the report, the incident of 4 December 2018, emanated from grievances/demands that were submitted by the PMC (Participative Management Committee) to the DCS Area Management Team on the 7 November 2018. Some of the demands included removal of the Centre Management, complaints about the quality of the food and overcrowding to mention but a few.

Two days ago (4 December 2018), the DCS Area Management together with the Centre Management met with the PMC at the East London Max to give feedback in response to the demands listed above. The PMC demanded that feedback must be given to all inmates in one group.

The Management made a decision to give feedback per communal cell rather than all inmates in one group, as this would have posed a security risk with the ratio of inmates-to-officials being 600/10. At approximately 14h00, as they were giving feedback from one cell to another, a riot ensued in unit 3, offenders set mattresses and blankets alight, throwing them into the passage through the windows and the courtyard and wetting the floor inside the cell and the passage. The inmates also barricaded the doors with beds denying access to the officials. Due to the volatility of the incident, the Emergency Support Team (EST) was activated as well as SAPS to diffuse the situation.

The Head of Centre (HOC) authorised use of force to be applied after realising the intensity of the incident. Inmates that sustained injuries were taken to the centre

hospital for treatment. SAPS also pledged their support to DCS should a riot erupt. According to the HOC it looked like the situation had been brought under control.

However, on the same day at approximately 21h00, it was reported that the inmates at unit 1, set mattresses and blankets alight with the situation escalating. Fire fighters were sent inside the section to douse the fire before EST and SAPS were activated. Electricity units were damaged due to the fire from the mattresses and the blankets.

To force inmates to open up the doors, five teargas canisters had to be used and no use of force was authorised at this stage. It took about 45 minutes for the inmates to open up the cell door.

Some inmates were assisted by members of the EST as they had suffocated from teargas and five of them were sent to an outside hospital (Frere) and were brought back to the centre. Seventeen inmates were segregated and an application to transfer them was approved by the Area Commissioner. Five of them were transferred to Kokstad, six to LMN (Thohoyandou) and the other six to Grootvlei. A case of damage to state property was opened against the inmates.

Various factors may contribute to violence in a correctional centre at any given time. In preceding years riots and other incidents have tended to be higher in December and January, due to a shortage of officials, inmates getting less exercise time and the unavailability of active programmes. Even environmental factors such as the weather and temperature can cause a shift in frustration or agitation and may increase the probability of violence.

Another reason for an increase in incidents, especially during this period, pertain to inmates wanting to be with their families during the festive season which generally creates more tension this time of the year.

JICS remains vigilant especially during this time, to ensure that it is able to perform its mandate during this tension filled period.

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