

# PRESS RELEASE



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**TO: ALL MEDIA**

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**RE: CIVIL SOCIETY OWED A DEBT OF GRATITUDE**

In an effort to enhance the National Prosecuting Authority's accountability to civil society, the National Director of Public Prosecutions, Adv Shamila Batohi, hosted the first focused roundtable webinar with civil society organisations earlier today.

This webinar is part of planned structured engagements and was attended by more than 30 civil society organisations (CSOs). While the NPA wished to have had all relevant CSOs in a gathering under one roof, the practical logistical challenges posed by the advent of COVID-19, could only confine it to this first group representing a broad array of civil society groups in this vast sector. Further, the size of the group was also to ensure maximum engagement and sharing of views.

The guest list included CSOs in advocacy, litigation and research organisations. Many of these CBOs have been critical of the NPA on matters relating to governance, rule of law, state capture and efficiency.

There were also social movement-type organisations who are have constituencies of local community-based organisations or specific interest groups and focus on the rights and needs of those groups. Further, some of the CBOs do work on specialised fields such as service delivery organisations who often work in alignment and support of the NPA like in trauma services to sexual offence victims.

Among the CBOs in attendance were Among the CSOs in attendance were Accountability Now SA, African Criminal Justice Reform, Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (CASAC), Legal Resources Centre, Freedom Under Law, Illitha Labantu, MOSAIC, Lawyers for Human Rights, Sisonke National Movement, Open Secrets, Organisation for Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA), and the Restorative Justice Centre.

The CBOs raised various matters of concern including the need for regular updates with regards to high-profile prosecution without dealing with the merits. Other matters raised included matters relating to mediation, restorative justice, lack of progress with regards to investigations arising out of the TRC process, SGCV in particular the Thuthuzela Care Centres, plea bargaining, the role of NGOs, matters that may be outstanding from the Glenister judgment.

“This meeting with a key stakeholder was very well received. The country and the NPA owes civil society a debt of gratitude for its advocacy, litigation and services, in recent challenging times. Civil society tirelessly led efforts to expose the nature of corruption and played a key role in holding the government, including the NPA, accountable. For civil society groups, the roundtables are an opportunity to engage constructively with the NPA’s leadership about wide-ranging issues including the NPA’s strategic direction and ability in fulfilling its constitutional and legislative mandates. We shared information on the NPA’s work and engaged on how we can improve areas of practical cooperation between the NPA and civil society.” Adv Batohi said.

She added “Civil society, through research, analysis and advocacy – enriches the debate around the rule of law, good governance and public security,” she said.

The NDPP told the meeting that for close to a decade, the NPA, related criminal justice institutions, and South Africa’s institutions for integrity were systematically undermined and experienced a loss of critical capacity and skills. The results for the rule of law, and public trust in the country’s governance have been shattering, she said.

The NPA outlined the key pillars to its 2020-25 strategic plan to the CSOs which is underpinned by four key values of independence, professionalism, accountability and credibility. Rebuilding and strengthening the NPA, and restoring public confidence and trust in the NPA is central to the strategy. The NDPP plans to engage more in future roundtables which will be expanded to more CBO participants over time.

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