

# Renaissance Project to bring laws in-line with Constitution

Justice and Correctional Services Minister Michael Masutha says the department is spearheading a project that will help government bring laws in-line with the precepts of the Constitution.



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The Minister said this when he briefed the media ahead of tabling the department's Budget Vote speech at the National Assembly on Wednesday afternoon.

"We are rolling out legislation to ensure that all our laws are within the spirit and letter of the Constitution of the Republic.

"In this regard, the department is spearheading what is known internally as the Renaissance Project, which aims to develop a new body of law to bring our legal system which is based on Roman Dutch and English Law, fully in-line with the values and spirit of our own Constitution," he said.

He said an example of this was the introduction last month of the Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech Bill before Parliament, which aims to define and criminalise any conduct amounting to hate crimes and hate speech.

“These crimes have, for a long time, divided our country. In the age of social media, offensive remarks and other forms of communications travel far, fast and wide and can be severely injurious to the national well-being,” he said.

## **Construction of Mpumalanga High Court almost complete**

The Minister said, meanwhile, that the construction of the Mpumalanga High Court was, despite budgetary constraints, 97% complete.

“Plans are also underway to expand the Durban High Court at a cost of R728 million. The department will also complete construction of magistrate’s courts in Plettenberg Bay in the Western Cape, Booysens in Gauteng and Dimbaza in the Eastern Cape,” he said.

The Minister also said that the department will upgrade 45 regional courts. He said the upgrades consist mainly of court infrastructure, including security and information and communication technology.

“A new court recording technology which enables the easy retrieval and storage of court recordings has been rolled out to all courts across the country,” he said.

## **Transforming the judicial bench**

The Minister said that the department is working continuously to transform the judiciary to ensure that it reflects the demographics of the country.

“In this respect, black judges constituted 66% of the 253 judges by October last year. Of these, 34% of judges were women,” he said.

The Minister said that last month, the Judicial Services Commission concluded the latest round of interviews for judge candidates and are awaiting the President’s decision determination of the Commission’s recommendations.

## **Justice entities making progress**

The Minister said, meanwhile, the entities that report to the department have registered good progress during the last financial year.

He said the National Prosecuting Authority secured a conviction rate of 91.7% in the superior courts, 81% in the regional courts and 96.1% in the district courts.

The Special Investigating Units recovered assets to the value of R33.5 million and secured the setting aside of administrative decisions to the value of R797 million.

He said by the third quarter of the 2017/18 financial year, Legal Aid SA took on over 300 000 new matters. The organisation rendered legal advice to just over 225,000 clients. Legal Aid SA also launched a “Please call me” service through which members of the public can make contact with a legal advisor at no cost to the caller.