



30 March 2023

## **BLA STATEMENT ON THE "ESCAPE" OF THABO BESTER**

For immediate media release

The Black Lawyers Association is watching with keen interest the development around the mysterious disappearance or escape of Mr Thabo Bester from prison.

The disappearance or escape is a serious indictment on our criminal justice system, in particular the correctional component of it. This escape demoralises the police, the prosecution team and the intelligence services who worked very hard to find the suspect and put together a solid evidence to sustain a conviction. All their hard work has come to nought as a result of the ineptitude or greed of some correctional services officials.

The Department of Justice and Correctional Services, entrusted with the responsibility to house awaiting trialists and convicts has therefore failed the nation by allowing this miscreant to leave its centre prematurely.

The BLA would like to remind the prison officials that their duty is to ensure that those that our courts have removed from society are kept in prison until released through legally acceptable procedures. This is so because our courts are the only institutions empowered to take away the rights of those who have wronged society. The decision to imprison an accused person follows a rigorous process including taking into account the rights of the victims and the interests of the society.

It is therefore shocking that a person whom the courts have considered a danger to society is let loose by those entrusted with the responsibility to protect us against him. This, in our view, is a clear attack on the court order that directed his incarceration and serves to undermine the rule of law.

As BLA we call upon the Minister of Justice and the head of the prison concerned to take all the appropriate steps in making sure that those responsible for Mr Thabo Bester' s escape are found and dealt with in accordance with the law.

We also urge the Minister of Police to spare no resources in ensuring that this criminal is arrested and returned to his cell to complete his sentence in accordance with the law.

Lastly, we thank the media for alerting the nation about this assault on our legal system and by extension the rule of law. Had it not been for the vigilance of the media, the nation would have still been in the dark about this.

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