

Morticians warn bodies may go uncollected

NOMPILO KUNENE

STAFF members at the Fort Napier forensic mortuary have been on a go-slow for almost two weeks, resulting in a backlog of 16 bodies that still require post-mortems.

A staff member, who asked not to be named in fear of victimisation, told *The Witness* that at the heart of their strike was the agreement they had with the KZN Health Department that employees would be paid a once-off 40% back-pay and that their salary scales would be upgraded.

The department later reneged on this.

He said the salary talks began in 2010 and only last year the department finally agreed to their demands, but later claimed the national department said they could not do this due to lack of finances.

"We sympathise with the affected families but if the department is not willing to meet our demands the go-slow strike will be intensified and some bodies will not be picked up at scenes."

The DA's KZN Health spokesperson Dr Imran Keeka said during a health portfolio committee meeting that DA members forewarned MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo about possible strike action over the Easter period.

He said despite the heads-up, there was no response by either the MEC or his department.

"The DA is extremely concerned by the consequences of such inaction. In some cases it will mean that families cannot bury their loved ones in accordance with their religious practices.

"In other cases it could mean the frightening sight of bodies lying uncollected at accident and crime scenes — which may become a reality sooner rather than later," he said.

Keeka said the department was obliged to keep its word. "In the event that they cannot keep their end of the bargain, as a result of financial ruin during Dhlomo's 10-year reign, they must come clean."

Spokesperson for the KZN Department of Health Ncumisa Mafunda said they have noted recent action by certain employees at the Pietermaritzburg Medico-Legal Mortuary, which has had a negative impact on service delivery.

"The department is aware of the issues raised by staff, and is attending to them where feasible.

"The department wishes to convey its most sincere apologies to all families that have been affected by this situation, and is confident that ongoing engagement with the relevant labour representatives will soon result in an amicable solution, so that operations at the facility can return to normal," said Mafunda.

• nompilo.kunene@witness.co.za