



WORLD CLASS NTUZUMA COURT ENHANCES JUSTICE SERVICES.

Mokgethwa Ngoepe

The prayers of people of Inanda, Ntuzuma and Kwamashu (INK) and the surrounding areas of having an up-to-standard court were finally answered when Justice and Constitutional Development Minister Jeff Radebe officially declared the Ntuzuma Magistrate's Court opened.

As part of increasing and improving access to justice services, efforts of building new courts specifically in the townships and rural areas help the majority of people who were previously disadvantaged. "People will no longer go far to access the services which we provide," remarked the minister, while delivering a keynote address at the official opening of the state-of-the-art Ntuzuma Magistrate's Court in KwaZulu-Natal.

Designed with the image of a tree which depicts the bygone era of rural community courts, the R200 million worth Ntuzuma Magistrate's Court boasts six (6) floors comprising of courtrooms and offices. Approximately 1.5 million people will benefit from the services at the court.

Court users, unlike before, will no longer travel long distances to the Verulam Magistrate's Court to access justice services as regional court matters are also heard at the Ntuzuma Magistrate's Court.

Excited community member, Mr Bernard Moteoli from Ward 7, KwaMashu said the opening of the new court has been long overdue. "We have been waiting in anticipation for the opening

of this court as we experienced challenges at the old court and I am so delighted that our prayers have finally been answered. The services will improve a lot, cases will be finalised timely and without delays," commented Mr Moteoli.

Another resident, Ms Nomvuyo Silange, of Ward 47, KwaMashu said: "I really appreciate the good job done by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development for us as residents, this will go a long way in making sure that services are improved and we are so grateful for that." She also appealed to officials working at the court to work hard to deliver justice services to the communities they serve. During the event, Minister Radebe officially received a key which symbolises an official handover of the building from the Department of Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi. "This is a job well done, this project commenced in 2010 and we are proud that it has been completed within a set timeframe," said Minister Nxesi.

Ntuzuma Court has been a branch court of the Verulam Magistrate's Court since the 1970's and only dealt with criminal matters. Family court matters were introduced later.

The services, in respect of the civil and small claims court matters, were only made available at the old Ntuzuma Magistrate's Court from October 2011, after Minister Radebe proclaimed Ntuzuma as a self-standing court.

The court faced challenges of insufficient court rooms and communities had to travel long distances to access justice services. Due to the appalling conditions at the old court premises, the department had to intervene to improve the situation.

Ms Jane Naidoo, a Senior Administration Officer at the court shared some of the experiences the officials endured while working at the old court building. "We only had one telephone line that we all shared. One needed to walk and make a booking to use the phone and our main resource in the maintenance office is a telephone. We needed to communicate with sheriffs and the police regularly and that was impossible", said Ms Naidoo. The court also had no access to drinking water for the public and no waiting rooms, as a result, on rainy days it became disastrous, according to Ms Naidoo.

The new court comprises of four regional courts; including two sexual offences courts; six district criminal courts; two civil courts; four family courts; an equality court; a domestic violence court; a juvenile offenders court; 24 offices for prosecutors and 21 offices for magistrates.

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Lack of space and resources is a thing of the past as all courts have appropriate waiting rooms for the public and witnesses; consulting rooms for legal representatives, assessor's offices; intermediaries' offices; offices for maintenance and court clerks as well as stenographer's offices.

Other facilities include investigator's office; criminal court preparation office; typist; messenger and photocopying

offices; store rooms; sick rooms; and the public and staff toilet facilities; court orderlies' offices and kitchens which most of these resources were not available at the old Ntuzuma Magistrate's Court.

After the event, the minister attended a public participation programme where he acknowledged some of the community concerns regarding the high rate of crime in the area including the abuse of women and children. He pledged that the new court will address such issues.

"The notorious criminals and all perpetrators who use drugs and commit serious crimes will have nowhere to hide. Officials in this court will ensure that justice is served," he cautioned.

He appealed to the community members to utilise the court and work together with the police to track down criminals. [BT](#)

