

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION NUMBER 2129

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Mr M S F de Freitas (DA) to ask the Minister of Finance:

- (1) Whether he has taken any steps to inform the public of the reporting of customs officials involved in allegations of bribery; if not, why not; if so, what steps;
- (2) what processes, procedures and mechanisms exist to monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of such steps;
- (3) with reference to the seven cases referred to in his reply to question 423 on 21 June 2010, (a) how many persons were (i) suspended, (ii) criminally charged and (iii) dismissed and (b) what are the reasons for certain persons not being suspended, charged or dismissed?

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REPLY:

- (1) SARS and its management team have been transparent and outspoken in public both promoting integrity among South Africans and the SARS staff and advancing the fight against corruption. Various public fora are utilised to publicize this message.

SARS launched a whistle-blower hotline in 2005. The purpose of the hotline is to provide taxpayers with an anonymous communication channel to report suspicions of corruption, bribery, tax evasion and fraud. The hotline has been widely publicised and all frontline SARS offices including customs border posts and international airports have posters calling on taxpayers to report bribery. The messages on these posters are quoted below:

- Blow the whistle on bribery
- Speak up on Corruption
- Offering a bribe is a Criminal Offence.

These messages are accompanied by the hotline number 0800 00 2870.

The SARS website also keeps a permanent hotline advert on the landing page. The public are also regularly reminded of the hotline and a zero tolerance stance on fraud and corruption by SARS through regular media engagement and press releases. Employees who are convicted of fraud and corruption are named within and outside the institution through staff newsletters and news coverage.

- (2) A demonstrated capacity to act against corrupt officials by SARS, combined with access to an anonymous reporting channel is regarded as key to the ongoing registration of new cases for investigation. Since the start of the new financial year (1 April 2010 – new financial year) to date, 7 new cases involving allegations of customs corruption have been reported. New Case registration comprises tangible evidence that efforts to encourage reporting are indeed effective and reaping results.
- (3) Of the seven cases of alleged bribery at international airports reported, four of these remain under investigation of which one has moved into a prosecution phase. The three concluded investigations led to a dismissal, a not guilty verdict and in the third case the employee resigned.