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PRESS RELEASE: PRASA MUST USE ITS MONEY FOR SAFETY

The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (Prasa) must fulfil the promise the company made to the widow of the slain train driver Pieter Botha before it spends money on yet another facelift of the Cape Town Station.

Mr. Steve Harris, General Secretary of the United National Transport Union (UNTU), says he was disappointed to read in the media that the struggling Prasa will pay a development contribution for the upgrading of the local services infrastructure where a 120-room hotel, office and retail complex will be built on part of the forecourt of the public transport exchange area. The development is worth R1 billion.

Prasa submitted a rezoning application to allow for the development more than a year ago. The rezoning of 35 000² of the forecourt area on the western portion of the property, adjacent to Adderley Street, was approved so that it can be develop from a transport zone to general business.

The proposed development follows two major upgrades to the station over the past eight years - the R408 million overhaul of the station for the 2010 World Cup, including the Adderley and Strand Street concourses which were completed in 2011, followed by the R126m redevelopment of the Parade forecourt, which was completed last year.

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This comes a week after Mr. William Steenkamp, acting director of Prasa, promised that the Netreg Station in the Western Cape where Botha (46) was shot twice in the head last Monday, would be made secure for staff and commuters. He promised Tania Botha (42) and her children, Nadia (16) and Brendon (19), that he will invite them back to Netreg in three months to view the improvements in memory of their father and husband.

But Harris says it is not only the Netreg Station where the safety of staff and commuters are a great concern. Prasa urgently needs to address the safety of all its stations across the country and do a proper evaluation of the increased security needed to prevent a similar incident like the robbery and brutal murder of Botha, a loyal member of UNTU. The Union is still waiting for a response from PRASA after the Union demanded that an investigation should be done to determine why there were no security guards on the platform when Botha was attacked.

On Christmas Day 25 December 2012 JP du Plessis (58), a Metrorail train driver, was found stabbed to death in a train near Hercules in Pretoria. Du Plessis also was a loyal member of UNTU.

Then Mr. Lucky Montana, the former GCEO of PRASA, announced that R100 million would be made available to strengthen the security on trains. This would have included armed guards at hotspots, visible policing and CCTV-footage. According to Mr. Harris PRASA has not kept its promises.

In his first interview since his appointment on 1 July Mr. Collins Letsoalo, the new GCEO of Prasa, promised to visit his staff at their workstations and ask them how their families were as that is important to him. Mr. Letsoalo urged his staff to become members of a formidable team to ensure teamwork and better cooperation.

Mr. Harris says Mr. Letsoalo can only expect good teamwork from his staff when they feel safe at work. "UNTU have on numerous occasions engaged with PRASA to address the lack of safety and security. The Union is of view that PRASA is not fulfilling its constitutional obligation to provide a safe and secure working environment for its employees. The Union hopes that Mr. Letsoalo can bring about this change," says Mr. Harris.

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