

Justice Minister could be in court over pay dispute

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Minister of Justice Brigitte Mabandla has so infuriated prosecutors and Legal Aid attorneys by failing to honour their occupational-specific dispensation (OSD) agreement that their union aims to take her to the high court.

The Public Servants Association (PSA) yesterday announced that it had declared a dispute regarding the non-implementation of an agreement that was supposed to have been effected in July 2007.

Manie de Clercq, deputy general manager of the PSA, said the OSD was supposed to include all the legal professionals in the department.

However, the prosecutors (who fall under a different sub section) and Legal Aid employees were excluded.

As a result, Legal Aid attorneys last month marched to the Justice Department, demanding that the OSD agreement be applied and that they receive the salary increase they were supposedly promised since 2005.

Yesterday, the PSA said they will go to both the bargaining council and the high court to resolve this issue.

"We want the court to get the Board of Directors of the Legal Aid Board, and the justice minister to apply the Public Administrations Act, so that the process of payment of OSD can be expedited," De Clercq said.

He said the PSA had written to Mabandla in March and April.

"The Justice Department has not bothered to respond or even acknowledge receipt of the letters.

"This amounts to nothing but blatant disregard for these employees' right to fair labour practices," De Clercq stated. He said the morale of employees was at rock bottom and they were threatening industrial action – something that could cause the entire criminal justice system to collapse, with vast implications for the country as a whole.

