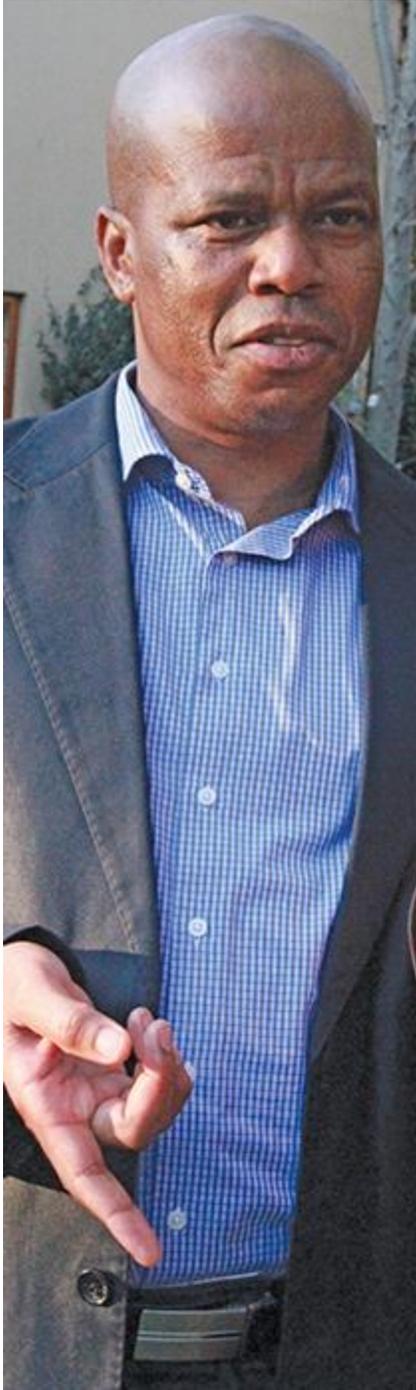


ONE ON ONE WITH Israel Kgamanyane

The weekly Newspaper

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The Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) held its first national indaba and awards ceremony in Bloemfontein last weekend. The Weekly's Thapelo Molebatsi caught up with the acting head of the IPID, Israel Kgamanyane, to discuss the department and its work, and what it hoped to achieve with the indaba. Molebatsi also asked Kgamanyane about how he was coping in the hot seat and whether he has at any point come under undue pressure to act in a way not in keeping with the ethical requirements of his job. Excerpts:

Your job is quite a sensitive one with high possibility there would be many parties that might want to interfere with your work. Have you had such an experience of someone, whether politician or other actors, trying to dictate to you how you should do your work? I've been very fortunate because both of my principals (Minister of Police Nkosinathi Nhleko and his deputy, Maggie Sotyu) have shown absolute confidence in me since taking over the reins (in an acting capacity). Our working relationship is based on respect and trust. So to answer your question, I've never experienced such (undue influence, political or otherwise) since taking up the position.

In your address to the indaba, you took a strong stance towards the media and said you are not going to run the IPID through the media. What exactly do you mean by that? There's absolutely nothing controversial or strong about that statement and I don't know why the media always gets it wrong every time we make this statement. As a public servant I am accountable to parliament and then the people of this country. My responsibility is to the people of South Africa and this I maintain, not only now that am the acting nation head of IPID but since my tenure as provincial head in the Free State.

Another point you raised was that the work of the IPID is important to ensure justice is served and that the institution is working hard to discharge its mandate but it is often subjected to criticism; can you elaborate what you mean by that? There's absolutely no doubt that the role played by investigators along with the SAPS in ensuring that justice prevails is of utmost importance ...and I think at times people or rather South Africans have a tendency to focus on the negatives rather than the positives, and that is often the case with IPID. But on the other hand, criticism is good because it has enabled us to improve our performance over the past year and I can safely say we are on the right track.

It's been a year since you became acting IPID executive director, a position that can only be described as a hot seat and one that comes with a lot of scrutiny from the media. How have you found the going? The journey has been more challenging than anything else (I have done before). it could never be easy due to the nature of my work. During this journey, I've come across a lot of challenges but most importantly I've learned a lot from my principals – minister Nhleko and deputy minister Sotyu.

One thing I have learnt that stands out in particular is that no one is bigger than the institution, and the fact that as a leader you must always humble yourself and at all times be able to learn from and listen to others, so all those things have made me enjoy my work.

Also, I have focused more on creating a team-orientated environment, where people do not only see me as their boss or leader but rather as a colleague, and because of that I've been able to enjoy my work regardless of the challenges.

But of the challenges that you met along the way, which would you say were the toughest to overcome?

There were a number of things that we needed to get right, ranging from our financial audits released shortly after I was appointed acting head of IPID. There was also the issue of

improvement when it comes to finalisation of cases. You'd remember we were sitting at 13 percent in 2014/15 as compared to 95 percent achieved in 2015/2016. These were some of the matters that needed to be corrected to enable the department to operate not smoothly but rather effectively with the little (resources) at our disposal.

In your address you said you had to take some unpopular decisions to turn around the institution, what decisions were these and how did taking them affect your relationship with your team?

Well, you would remember that hardly two or three months after my appointment the IPID financial report was released and I had to appear before parliament to explain what transpired that financial year and needless to say my superiors were not impressed.

Now to make sure that I would not come under the same heat again, we needed to change how we were doing things, not necessarily polices but administratively.

The way performance evaluation and monitoring was being done is one of the things that we changed to ensure that things changed for the better and indeed these changes paid off. Now I would not go as far as to say these changes made 'enemies' for me but like at any other institution, whenever changes are implemented you have those that are for the changes and those against but this doesn't necessarily mean there's bad blood among us.

It simply means we have different ideas on how things should be done and as a leader one must always be able to listen to ensure that we work towards a common goal, which is exactly what we did.

In his speech, Minister Nhleko said the issue of understaffing at the IPID was one issue that needs to be addressed to make the department work more effectively and efficiently. Your views on that?

The minister's statement was actually more of praise to the department than anything else taking into the account its performance regardless of the staff shortage. But yes, that is an important issue which we will be looking into this financial year. Among priority issues to be addressed by the department in 2016/2017 is the capacitation of investigators to ensure sustained improvement in their performance of their duties. It is also important that we strike a balance, because increasing staff without capacity (required skills) will not do the department any good.

Indeed, the minister as well as his deputy did praise the IPID, but the question is, are you yourself content with your work or do you feel there is room for improvement?

I don't think there is anything wrong with the ministers acknowledging the impressive work done by the department. It is well deserved because a lot went into achieving what we did especially after parliament wanted to reduce our performance target to 35 percent because of our dismal performance the previous financial year (in 2014/15). So it is important that you take into account that the 95 percent performance target achieved in (2015/2016) did not come on a silver platter. A lot of hard work and dedication went into it and indeed we have reason to celebrate.

But surely you are not yet there; you still have a long way to go, especially when some of your members are still being caught on the wrong side of the law?

The important thing for us to do now is not to regress but rather to improve on our performance and maintain consistency. The issue of wrongdoing by our own members will forever be a constant headache because these are people who are entrusted with upholding the law and safeguarding the nation but we are not going to stop doing our job because a few of our members might have been found to be on the wrong-side of the law. Any member found guilty of wrongdoing will face the law. No one is above the law.

The relationship between the IPID and South Africans is a bit problematic to say the least. Some have expressed confidence in the department, while others have a different view. How would you describe the relationship?

The relationship has certainly grown for the better. The number of cases reported to the IPID is increasing and that on its own shows the level of confidence South Africans have in the IPID because if they did not have it, we would not be receiving such a high number of cases. But more important is the way these cases are handled by the IPID once reported to it because there would be no reason for people to keep on reporting cases if they never see progress or get feedback on what is being done about them. So indeed we are on the right path and we intend to maintain that.

Let's talk about the indaba and the IPID awards, first, what is the idea behind having this kind of meeting? How is the indaba going to help the department carry out its work better?

Well, we wanted to get everyone under one roof so that we can clearly understand the challenges our investigators encounter on a daily basis and come up with ideas how those challenges could be overcome. It was critical that we have this indaba because the challenges that investigators face differ from province to province therefore it would be wrong to apply a one-size-fits-all approach when issues are not the same, hence this indaba.

Now as to whether we achieved our objective, the answer will not be a complete yes because what we've managed to obtain here is only an understanding of the challenges and the possible solutions. We still have to come up with a complete strategy that will ensure that we are able to address those challenges raised by our investigators during the Indaba. So yes, I'd say we partly managed to obtain the objective of the two-day session.

And the awards, how did that come about? Why is the IPID celebrating its best performers only now when the institution has been in existence for so many years during which there would obviously have been people that performed exceptionally well and deserved recognition?

IPID investigators are no different from any other employees, therefore, like any other institution which rewards its employees, we decided that we are going to reward our investigators who at times come under heavy criticism from the community — in some cases unjustifiably so — but still manage to serve our people regardless of the criticism and the sometimes tough operating environment.

It is indeed correct that we are having the awards for the first time since the inception of the institution. But it is important to note that time is everything, and in this case I think the time was just not right yet. However, despite all that we have managed to put together these awards

ceremony which we intend to become an annual event so that we continue showing appreciation of the work done by this wonderful group