

## **FISA MEETS WITH DEPUTY MINISTER OF JUSTICE, MR JOHN JEFFERY**

Following on various meetings with the Legal profession, the Deputy Minister of Justice; Mr John Jeffery called a stakeholder meeting on 16 November 2023, to discuss challenges regarding the Office of the Master of the High Court.

FISA was invited to this meeting and was represented by Dr Eben Nel, Chairman of FISA, together with Ricky Opperman-Knipe, Chairperson of the Northern Region of FISA.

Approximately 90 people from various legal associations attended the virtual meeting including Ms Penny Roberts (Acting Chief Master of The High Court) and various other government officials.

A general lacking in service delivery appeared to be the common frustration amongst the delegates. Dr Nel also raised the point of inconsistencies between the various offices, the unwillingness to use technology (such as email) to communicate with members of FISA and other stakeholder, and the issue of trust files having been removed offsite but to which industry stakeholders are unable to access. He highlighted again the serious implications for beneficiaries that are reliant on funds from Trusts.

Francois Bouwer, Chairperson of the Gauteng Attorneys Association and a FISA Member, added that it appeared that in certain offices only once legal action was threatened that the trust files mysteriously appeared.

Legal practitioners also raised that it appeared that staff members in the Masters offices were not performing in terms of their employment contracts and queried the Deputy Minister on whether staff were still subject to performance reviews.

Once all stakeholders had shared their grievances, the Deputy Minister then confirmed that a Ministerial Task team had been set up headed by Deputy Director General; Thabiso Titi with instruction to investigate the state of Masters offices countrywide.

The Deputy Minister also thanked the stake holders for their willingness to assist the various Masters offices and advised that this would be for the various offices to consider.

Director General, Advocate Doc Mashabane also advised that due to financial restraints on the Department of Justice, staff appointments would be frozen for the next 3 years.

Acting Chief Master, Ms Penny Roberts acknowledged the issues raised by the various stakeholders.

Unfortunately, no further information was provided regarding the Ministerial Task Team nor was any action plans discussed to rectify the issues at the Masters office. The Deputy Minister did however request that a meeting be held before the 15<sup>th</sup> of December or early in the New Year for an update on the issues raised.

We hope and trust that the Deputy Minister will have taken the stakeholders concerns onboard and is able to come up with a workable solution to the issues.