

## **Say sorry and stay free' plan**

CAPE TOWN - Thieves will soon be able to evade jail by striking a deal with their victims under the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA)'s proposed restorative justice programme.

Speaking during a media briefing yesterday, head of NPA's Restorative Justice Programme Shamila Batohi said the model, due to be implemented early next year, is aimed at curbing recidivism among petty offenders.

"This approach tries to avoid sending petty offenders to jail, where they might become hardened criminals, by employing alternative therapeutic and rehabilitative measures," she said.

The new approach allows for an offender to choose to compensate his victim, thereby avoiding imprisonment.

"The main aim here is to ensure there is sufficient punishment for the crime, rehabilitation of the offender and that the victim is somehow compensated for the effects of the crime," said Batohi.

While the proposed model will ensure crime is dealt with in a holistic manner, Batohi said it will not be applied in serious offences.

"The idea is not to go soft on crime - we are targeting petty offences.

It is not meant to replace the traditional prosecution model, but rather to support it," she said.

While she could not predict the extent to which the programme will go in tackling crime in the country, she referred to countries such as New Zealand, where a similar model has yielded positive results.

"They have managed to reduce the number of petty offenders and decrease recidivism," Batohi explained.