DNA is crime's acid test

The fight against crime is one of this country's top national priorities, or at least that is what many citizens believe should be the case.

Yet, considering the manner in which the South African Forensic Laboratory is under-resourced, there is very little chance that some of the major cases will be effectively and conclusively closed. The forensic laboratory is responsible for Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) testing that police use when investigating serious crimes such as rape to link perpetrators to the crime through their genetic material carried in body fluids, hair or other body tissue and then comparing these to deposits found on the victim.

The laboratory forms part of the South African Police Service (SAPS) central crime fighting machinery. That it should have a staff complement of only 10 officers to deal with no less than 41 000 cases smacks of irresponsibility on the part of authorities.

The state of the laboratory must have a demoralising effect on the few officers as they might be forced to compromise standards or to neglect other high-profile cases for lack of time. This leaves the courts with the unenviable task of deciding on cases without credible and verifiable evidence from DNA testing. This situation must receive urgent attention.