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Minister Inkosi Mzamo Buthelezi: Public Servants Association of South Africa annual general meeting

Lagoon Beach Hotel, Milnerton, Cape Town

Esteemed members of the Public Servants Association,

Delegates,

Honoured guests

Public servants and colleagues

Good morning.

I feel very welcomed as I stand before you this morning to address the Congress and General Meeting of the Public Servants Association - an organisation that has earned its place as the "Union of Choice" for many in our public service.

Before I share with you what is in my heart, I would like to take a moment and extend my deep gratitude to the General Manager of Public Servants Association, Mr Reuben Maleka, for his kind letter of congratulations upon my appointment as Minister of Public Service and Administration.

Your words of support and encouragement are a reminder of the role we all play in building a professional, effective and inclusive public service - the responsibility I consider an honour and a privilege.

It is an honour to address you during a time where we celebrate the Integrated Public Service Month and reflect on the important role that public servants play in driving the success of our nation.

As I address this Congress for the first time in the 7th Administration, under the theme that is not just a catchy phrase but a solemn commitment of government - with a deep and renewed sense of duty and the appreciation of the honour to serve.

I am very aware of the legacy of service, dedication and unity that the Public Servants Association has fostered among Public Servants in our country.

I therefore wish to reaffirm my fundamental belief that public sector unions, particularly the Public Service Association, are not just stakeholders but you are the core and an essential partner in our shared mission.

You do not represent the voices of our public servants as if you are an external middleman only needed for facilitating, but you represent a backbone of our government. By saying government, I am not referring to systems but to you the public servants who dedicate their lives to ensuring the effectiveness of the service given to our fellow citizens.

Again, this gathering of today - not only represents the collective voice of public servants, but it is also about sharing a responsibility we hold in shaping the future of our country's public service.

You give voice to their needs; you champion their rights, and you also defend their aspirations. So, as we approach the upcoming wage negotiations within the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC), I wish to assure you that this government remains committed to open, respectful and transparent engagement.

We trust that these discussions will be carried out in a spirit of collaboration, mutual understanding and in good faith - with outcomes that serve the best interests of everybody that seeks to benefit. I must however emphasize our appreciation that your role as Unions, including the PSA extends far beyond wage negotiations.

You are an integral part to the continuous improvement of service delivery and may I then encourage all of you to keep identifying areas where inefficiencies exist, where red tape hampers progress and collaborate with us to find solutions.

By doing so, we can streamline processes that enhance our working environment while we continue to serve our public with efficiency. In line with the Public Service Charter, the PSA plays another crucial role in holding us accountable for delivering on our promises to the people.

Together colleagues, we can address most of the pressing challenges that continue to affect service delivery. And I must commend the Public Servants Association for its commitment to values such as loyalty, transparency, respect and ethical conduct - which are values that mirrors those that we strive to instil in all levels of government.

Colleagues, in all that you have done and all that you continue doing - which is a commitment to promote rights, interests and the welfare of the public servants - resonates deeply with the vision of the Department of Public Services and Administration.

I fully understand that living up to these principles is not always easy, but it is necessary for building a capable, ethical and developmental state that responds to the needs of citizens - especially the most vulnerable.

Whenever I am given an opportunity to address public servants or any subject that concerns them, I never forget to mention that public service is what the heart is to the body. Likewise, today, I would like to emphasise the same analogy that public servants are the heart of service delivery and that of our government.

You are the Alfa and Omega, and your wellbeing directly impacts the quality of services provided to our fellow citizens. As the heartbeat gives a state of health of the body - likewise, public servants' attitude describes the current state and the future of our country.

This was witnessed during the tumultuous times of the Covid 19 pandemic, it was the unwavering dedication and resilience of you public servants that allowed us to sail through stormy waters and to steer towards clear horizons. Your commitment to serving the nation and your selflessness even in the face of unexpected challenges became the lifeblood of our collective efforts to save our communities.

This therefore means that each one of us here - through our daily efforts, must ensure that this heart (state machinery) - beats steadily, which in turn, will guarantee service delivery and contribute to the betterment of our people.

This steadily heartbeat needs to be sustained by living or embodying the principles of Batho Pele - which is putting our people first.

Every day in our roles, we must ask ourselves how we can best serve our communities. It is through these value-driven approaches that we will reshape and rebuild our public sector. It is through strong partnerships with organisations like Public Servants

Association that we can ensure that the public service becomes a force for positive change, a champion of efficiency, accountability and service delivery.

In this regard, the mission for this organisation, which is to protect the interest of its members, to advocate for fair labour practices and to ensure that public servants are empowered to carry out their duties - is very crucial.

That is why I call upon each of us here as public servants and as union representatives that we reignite the spirit of Ubuntu - which is the sense of shared humanity that lies at the heart of our service. Colleagues, your Union has been a cornerstone of worker representation for over a century. Therefore, never silence your voice which has been a constant guide in our efforts to transforming the public sector.

One of the objectives of the 7th Administration - the Government of National Unity - is to commit government to strengthen ties with all stakeholders, to promote continuous engagements and to fostering an environment where collaboration is central to achieving our common goal.

It is our strong view that working together, we can ensure that public servants not only feel valued but are also given the resources and support they need to excel in their roles. As we look to the future General Manager, we must also be very mindful of the evolving needs of the public service.

The world is changing right before our eyes and so are the demands placed on us as public servants. Therefore, we must embrace innovation. We need to encourage lifelong learning while enhancing skills development to ensure that our workforce is prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

I am confident Programme Director that this Congress today will provide a platform for productive discussions and that the resolutions taken here will contribute to a stronger and a more inclusive public service.

Before I conclude, I wish to extend my best wishes to the newly elected leadership of the PSA. Your role in holding the government accountable and ensuring that we remain responsive to the needs of our citizens is more important now than ever.

As you take the baton today, it is important to remember that your leadership arrived at a very important moment in the history of our country - as our fellow citizens have given a clear mandate to the 7th administration - which is to rebuild and put our country back on the right trajectory of growth and development.

Therefore, this is your moment to take charge and to steer us forward with strength and positivity. A moment for you will be the barometer by which history will judge our efforts, our successes and our dedication to the cause of public service.

Let your leadership be the Alpha and Omega of a renewed commitment to the people of South Africa - for ever remembering that in your hands lies the future of our nation.

As you deliberate on the agenda for the year ahead, I am pleading for only one thing from you: "Allow your agenda to be driven by our shared values". Let it reflect the needs of the people we serve.

In closing, I wish to also reaffirm the Departments commitment to working closely with the Public Servants Association in ensuring that public servants are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. That their rights are protected and that - together, we continue to build a public service that works for the people of South Africa.

Thank you

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