

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	<b>COVID-19: PSA welcomes stimulus and relief announced by President</b>
<b>DATE</b>	22 April 2020
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The Public Servants Association (PSA), one of the largest public sector Unions, welcomes the announcement by President Ramaphosa to inject R500 billion towards the poor and provide some stability to the economy to assist in saving jobs during the lockdown and combatting COVID-19.

The PSA applauds the President's leadership as the most vulnerable citizens are finding it hard to survive during the lockdown. The country is in a deepening crisis with the economy constantly shrinking, resources becoming limited and increasing economic and social challenges. The R40 billion allocation to assist vulnerable workers, retrenched workers and those that will not receive a salary during this period is hailed. It is, however, concerning to note that only 2% of the money in the Unemployment Insurance Fund has reached workers. Greater efforts must be made to ensure that the Fund is more accessible to workers and that payments are done swiftly to combat poverty. The PSA advises Government to call upon the corporate environment and financial institutions to assist workers in accessing these benefits to avoid backlogs.

The decision to increase social grants for the elderly, sick and child support as well as the basic income grant to the unemployed will assist communities where many people are facing hunger. Increased income grants to informal workers and SMMEs are also welcomed and must be used as a vehicle to formalise this sector.

The R20 billion allocated to combat COVID-19 is crucial and must enhance health systems and facilities as foundations of the National Health Insurance Scheme. It must be ensured that workers at the pandemic frontline are adequately protected. Measures must also be put in place for transport, and to ensure that workplaces and educational institutions are sanitised and decontaminated for the safety of workers and learners well after the lockdown. The provision of masks, gloves and sanitisers must be a priority, particularly for commuters using taxis, busses and trains.

The PSA welcomes the phased-in approach to gradually open the economy, whilst ensuring the safety of workers and citizens. It is, however, important for Government to consult with labour to ensure a joint effort in bringing about safe workplaces and subsequent productively.

Government is currently facing a crisis with implementing the 2020/21-salary increases for some 1.2 million public servants. It is of paramount importance for government to resolve the dispute as these workers are spearheading efforts to combat the pandemic. They deserve better and must be treated like other vulnerable employees. The PSA hopes that the dispute will be resolved swiftly without exacerbating the problem and adding to Government's woes.

Funds and resources allocated for the needy have already been exploited by fraudsters. The newly announced interventions thus require seamless implementation that its accessible to applicants. Often these applicants are discouraged by contradictory directives, complex lengthy forms, and accessibility to programmes during the

lockdown period when movement of people is restricted. The PSA calls upon Government to strengthen its oversight to deter looters from taking advantage of loopholes to gain access to funds intended for the poor and vulnerable.

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