

MEDIA RELEASE: **COVID-19: PSA appalled by statement on “public servants’ lockdown holiday” and ongoing attacks**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing some 240 000 public-sector employees, is appalled by a recent media statement insinuating that public servants were on holiday during the COVID-19 lockdown whilst the rest of South Africa was contemplating on how to save the country from economic disaster.

Responses provided by the Minister of Public Service and Administration to parliamentary questions were misconstrued and resulted in an unfortunate impression that public servants were “on holiday” during the lockdown. This notion is untrue as most of public servants rendering essential services, including Police Services, the Department of Correctional Services, Emergency Services and Health Workers were on duty to combat the pandemic. The absurd notion by the media statement of a “mass exodus” by public servants when South Africans needed government workers is unfounded. Most public servants were on duty to perform vital functions to save lives and ensure that wheels of the economy kept moving. Public servants were at the coalface in combatting the spread of the virus and ensuring that citizens complied with lockdown regulations. Statistics will show that during the lockdown social grant payments were processed, TERS unemployment payments were completed and all services that were identified to be rendered in terms of COVID regulations were fully functional.

Many public servants have sacrificed their lives and those of their family members during this trying time. The constant attack on these workers and their benefits is regrettable and speak of a lack of understanding of Labour Law and the force and effect of collective agreements that regulate public servants’ terms and conditions of employment. Government should rather focus its attention on the soaring crime rate, including rampant corruption.

Any plans to reduce the SA Police Service workforce will place a tremendous strain on these employees. In addition, the Department of Correctional Services is severely understaffed and needs some 20 000 additional posts to ensure the successful implementation of a seven-day work establishment. During the pandemic, it also became evident that the Health Sector was strained owing to a huge shortage of health professionals and a lacking infrastructure.

The PSA, although aware to government’s plight and the current economic situation, calls on President Ramaphosa to move the narrow focus on government employees’ remuneration and address the real cost drivers, including litigation, corruption and fraud, consultants, irregular and fruitless expenditure, as well as unnecessary foreign missions. Apart from no clear indication of the amounts lost in the current financial year, there is also no indication of plans to recover money splashed in irregular and wasteful expenditure, fraud, corruption and frivolous litigation.

Inputs made to government on curbing its wasteful expenditure clearly fell on deaf ears. Rather than tabling a decisive plan and clear proposals on addressing state inefficiencies to manage its budget, public servants are

again used as a scape goat. Public servants' negotiated benefits, remuneration and pension fund are not up for sale for state bailouts or to compensate for losses incurred owing to government's inefficiency and lack of urgency to deal with corruption decisively and recover the lost funds.

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