

**MEDIA RELEASE** Government Printing Works: PSA condemns suspension of employees for demanding personal protective equipment

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**EMBARGO** None

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is disturbed by the Government Printing Works (GPW) failure to comply with the *Occupational Health Safety Act (OHSA)* at the expense of employees' safety, coupled with blatant intimidation of employees.

The GPW as a component of government, provides printing services to all spheres of government. It operates as a factory with printing machines and equipment. As a production and manufacturing company, it is thus compelled in terms of the *OHSA* to provide and maintain a safe working environment without risk to employees. This includes providing employees with personal protective equipment (PPE) to minimise risks. Such PPE items that must be provided to employees include safety shoes, overalls, gloves, ear plugs, and gloves to protect them against harmful chemicals, noise, papercuts, sharp blades, and heavy-metal equipment.

GPW employees have, however, been working without the necessary PPE for months and despite several requests to management to provide such items. Some employees are now no longer willing to compromise their safety to meet the GPW's service-delivery demands. On 2 June 2023, they informed the GPW that they were only prepared to work if there was compliance with the *OHSA*. Rather than responding to their plea, the GPW reacted by placing them on immediate suspension.

The action is unlawful and amounts to intimidation and abuse of power. The suspended employees raised the issue of lacking PPE in June 2022 and again in September 2022. All they received from the GPW were empty promises that PPE would be provided. The *OHSA* forbids victimisation of employees who demand compliance by an employer. It further provides that employees should not place their lives at risk where employers are directed to provide PPE. However, contrary to the *OHSA* and other labour laws, the GPW management decided to abuse its power and subject these employees to disciplinary action. This whilst there have been several incidents at the GPW where employees were injured and harmed by machines and chemicals. Some employees have lost fingers that were severed by machines. One of these employees has been waiting for injury-on-duty payment for six years and is expected to continue working without PPE.

The PSA represents more than 80% of the GPW's employees. The Union met with the GPW management to discuss the situation and demanded that the decision to suspend employees be reconsidered. The GPW management, however, refused to reconsider. Employees are working in fear as they are threatened by that if they did not "want to work, they should go home".

It is deplorable that a vital component of government's unlawful conduct is jeopardising its employees' safety at risk, coupled with intimidation. The PSA condemns this conduct and will pursue all legal avenues to ensure that the GPW accounts for its actions and complies with the *OHSA*.      **END**