

MEDIA RELEASE	Lack of uniforms and protective clothing endangers Limpopo Rangers
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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about the continued by the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism to provide much-needed uniforms and protective clothing to more than 350 Field Rangers and Nature Conservators at 43 Nature Reserves in the Province.

The failure by the Department since 2019 to address this issue continues despite numerous attempts by the PSA to address this matter. The Department attributes the failure to procure uniforms and protective clothing to budget constraints. The PSA, however, regards inefficiency and disregard for the plight of workers are the causes of this situation.

The lack of proper uniforms and protective clothing not only makes it impossible for these workers to execute their duties but also endangers their lives. Field Rangers are legally not able to perform their duties without the necessary uniforms or protective clothing but continue to do so in line with their commitment to ensuring the protection and sustaining of the country's natural resources. Uniforms and protective clothing are not only used for employees' protection but are required for identification purposes. The implications of employees not being able to identify themselves by wearing branded uniforms have far-reaching consequences such as the inability of Field Rangers to make arrests in terms of the *National Environmental Act* and thus not able to enforce environmental laws, rendering them "toothless". At the same time, they can easily be mistaken for poachers whilst patrolling reserves.

The Department as employer has a legal obligation to provide uniforms and protective clothing in terms of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. Workers cannot be expected to wear old, worn-out uniforms and be without protective clothing, including boots. This situation has forced some of these workers to use their own funds to purchase such items. In addition, these workers have been fighting veld fires relentlessly in recent weeks, without having protective clothing. The working and living conditions of Field Rangers on most reserves are deplorable and also do not comply with the requirements of the *Firearms Act* as there are no gun safes or strongrooms for the storage of their rifles. This non-compliance with the *Act* can create major problems for individual workers.

The PSA reiterates its call on the MEC responsible for the Department to urgently intervene. The Department has dismally failed its employees in ensuring their safety. It has also failed the community by not exercise its mandate to protect the environment. The PSA is no longer interested in the Department's excuses and urges the MEC to take immediate steps to ensure the speedy provision of uniforms, protective clothing, and working tools for affected workers.

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