

MEDIA RELEASE Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement: PSA comments

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) has noted the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement as presented to Parliament today by the Minister of Finance, Enoch Godongwana, with a high level of concern.

The PSA, representing more than 230 000 public-sector employees, welcomes the Minister's admission of the fact that the country is facing a crisis because of increasing debt, unemployment, poverty, and rampant crime. The PSA thus applauds the initiative to set aside funds to create job opportunities. The Union is, however, concerned about the focus on prioritising infrastructure development as a key driver to kick-start the economy in the face of government's given inability to maintain and protect existing infrastructure. Railroads are vandalised and in a poor state. Public roads are riddled by potholes, which are no longer reparable. Telecommunications collapse during loadshedding as cell-phone towers' back-up batteries have been stolen. Many government departments, police stations, courts, border posts, hospitals, clinics, and schools are hardly in compliance with occupational health and safety regulations, with employees being expected to render services under near-inhumane conditions.

It must further not be forgotten that public servants, despite too often being blamed for the country's economic woes and being denied fair salary increases, will be expected to play a key role in the Minister's envisaged plans for the growth and development of the country. It is thus encouraging that government realised that there are critical staff shortages in key sectors. The appointment of skilled tax and customs auditors as well as data scientists by SARS is thus welcomed. The additional funding allocated to the SA Defence Force and the SA Police Service to intensify crime combatting is also welcomed but related services, such as judicial and border control should not be neglected. This will be critical in ensuring the success of the Minister's plans to combat corruption and bringing to book those responsible for the damage caused by state capture and corruption.

The Minister's reference to pension withdrawals is not new but progress with this matter to alleviate hardships exacerbated by COVID-19 has been lacking. At this stage, employees should already have been able to access a portion of their pension rather than hearing about protracted processes. The services of skilled employees are lost as they opt to terminate their services to access their pension monies.

The PSA does not appreciate the statements made on the risk of the increase in the public wage bill and how it should be managed on an urgent basis. This statement is disheartening. Public servants have never been found to be over paid whilst monies have been lost to corruption and mismanagement. The PSA calls on government to be instrumental in the country's recovery by taking accountability for its actions and non-actions, which brought the country to a crisis, as acknowledged by the Minister. Government furthermore needs to recognise that public servants are key in ensuring the country's recovery and thus capacitate it employees to deliver on its promise of a budget aimed at service delivery over the next three years.

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