

**MEDIA RELEASE**                      **PSA: Freedom Day not free for all**

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Freedom Day is marred by the knowledge that conditions faced by too many South Africans still deny them of their constitutional rights as the country bends under spreading poverty, inequality, violent crimes, and rising unemployment.

The Public Servants Association (PSA) is further dismayed that public-sector employees continue to be made scapegoats for maladministration and corruption that brought the country to this position, 27 years into a democratic society. It is a grim fact that World Bank recently confirmed that South Africa remains the most unequal country in the world. The country's unemployment levels have surpassed 35% mark, whilst the youth is the hardest hit, with more than 60% of young people eligible to work, being unemployed. Additionally, public servants who are responsible for ensuring that government's service delivery goals are met, were denied their negotiated wage increase when, after a protracted legal battle, the Constitutional Court ruled that government will not have to pay these increases for the 2020/21-financial year. Workers' salaries remain stagnant, while the cost of electricity increases, the petrol price is at a record high, and prices of all commodities display these ripple effects. South Africans can also not rely on public transport, with train services being impeded by vandalism and poor maintenance, and the country's road being in a poor state.

The PSA has been opposing the casualisation of workers, where work is irregular, which the Union views as the perpetuation of inequality. The PSA continuously calls on government to lead by example by ensuring that casualisation is eradicated in this country. The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 8 is 'decent work and economic growth'. Decent jobs should provide fair income, workplace security, and social protection, and also allow flexibility of working arrangements and hours. This is, however, for example, not the case for government's community health workers (CHWs), security staff, and cleaners who are still mostly outsourced employees. The absorption of CHWs, insourcing of security staff and cleaners should be at the top of government's agenda as part of the endeavour to provide decent jobs, which are critical for economic development. Lower-level government employees can still not afford houses, often staying in sub-standard accommodation as they also do not qualify for 'RDP' houses for earning 'too much'. Furthermore, government seems to no longer be filling vacancies in the public service, with huge shortages in most sectors including teaching, police, immigration officers, cleaners, and groundsmen. The implementation of anti-developmental and regressive austerity measures further robs South Africans of the opportunity to enjoy their freedom and right to access professional services in most government institutions owing to poor infrastructure, staff shortages, and inadequate resources.

On Freedom Day, the PSA issues a reminder to all South Africans that the battle against corruption must continue. South Africans must protect their hard-won freedom by exposing those who unduly enrich themselves as such 'stolen freedom' imprisons others to poverty and unemployment.

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