

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA: MPSA address disappointing and rather too late**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 240 000 public servants has noted with serious concern, from the address delivered by the Minister for the Public Service and Administration (MPSA) on 08 May 2020, on the lack of readiness of the public service to return to work. It is disappointing that the Minister has only a week later announced that plans will be developed for the return of public servants, whilst public servants have been performing duties since the inception of the lockdown. The Minister was surely aware that a vast number of public servants have already, since 4 May 2020, been recalled reporting for duty by various departments and agencies though lacking PPE's, screening of employees and deep cleaning of offices.

This acknowledgement is late, and preparations should have been made before employees were recalled. The PSA is aware that many public servants, were already recalled to the workplace and in some instances sent back, thereby causing unnecessary and further exposure to the virus. The PSA will not allow its members to be exposed to dangerous working conditions unnecessarily.

To add insult to injury, the Minister of Home Affairs now intends to take the Department of Labour and Employment to Court for closing down non-compliant Home Affairs offices, instead of ensuring that the Regulations are indeed complied with, in his department. The Department of Labour and Employment was merely ensuring that the Regulations issued by the President are complied with. Even against the state as the employer, who as part of the Administration in support of the direction of the President, is supposed to set an example for citizens and employers.

To add to the current crisis, a number of departments identified by the PSA have been closed, as they were failing to comply with "return to work" regulations, leaving the general public frustrated because they are unable to access vital services. The recent debacle at SASSA is a prime example that departments are not placing urgent emphasis on health and safety issues to prevent the infection rate from increasing. On 08 May 2020, nurses at Steve Biko hospital were made to wear refuse bags as PPE s from the video that members brought to the attention of the PSA. The PSA will be demanding action from Steve Biko hospital management about the gross violation of the regulations and further involve the Department of Labour and Employment inspection for violation of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (*OHSA*).

The PSA has noticed that the infection rate among public servants is increasing at an alarming rate, with the Minister indicating that 511 healthcare workers have been infected. Therefore, central co-ordination by the MPSA on the plans from departments to return to work is vital and should not be left to individual departments. At the moment each department apply and interpret regulations differently and keep on exposing members and the public at large to the virus. The DPSA has failed to co-ordinate and ensure consistency in the public service.

The PSA strongly advise the MPSA to ensure that public servants do not return to the workplaces without having the necessary equipment's are in place and that all workplaces are complying with the Regulations and *OHSA*.

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