

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA outraged by Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism's failure to provide field rangers with uniform**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is outraged by the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism's failure since 2019 to provide much-needed uniform and protective clothing to more than 350 Field Rangers and Nature Conservators.

The failure to provide protective clothing and uniform is in contravention of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and is unfair as the employer has a legal obligation to provide such items to its employees. Employees are wearing old, worn-out uniforms and some were forced to procure part of the protective clothing, such as boots, using their own money. Field Rangers furthermore do not have two-way radios and thus have no means to communicate in emergency situations when their lives are threatened by poachers or wild animals. Uniforms and protective clothing are not only used for employees' protection but are needed for identification purposes when in the field and engaging with members of the public.

The matter has been on the bargaining chamber's agenda for a prolonged period without any commitment by the employer to provide these items until it confirmed in December 2022 that sufficient money had been secured to provide a single set of uniform for each employee. The employer cited budgetary challenges as the money that was budgeted for uniforms was apparently used for the procurement of COVID-19 personal protective equipment. The PSA was not satisfied with the procurement of a single set of uniform but welcomed the positive movement.

In March 2023, the employer stated that the supplier contracted to provide the uniforms had disappeared without delivering the items. The PSA is not aware if the service provider was paid before disappearing but the fact that the supplier disappeared without delivering what was ordered, is extremely concerning. This raises questions on whether the Department vetted the service provider that should have been chosen on merit in comparison to other bidding suppliers.

The PSA calls on the MEC responsible for the Department to urgently intervene in this embarrassing and cruel situation. The Department has failed its employees in ensuring that their dignity and safety are prioritised. The procurement processes must be strengthened to avoid the recurrence of this situation. The MEC must further take urgent steps to ensure the speedy provision of uniforms, protective clothing, and working tools within the current financial year.

END

