MEDIA RELEASE PSA raises alarm over the subtle downsizing of the Public Service

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), is raising serious concern over what appears to be the subtle and systematic downsizing of the Public Service through voluntary exits, the abolition and non-filling of posts, and the redistribution of functions to already overburdened employees. This is particularly concerning given Government's previous position that the Public Service is not bloated and that the country continues to face significant capacity and service-delivery challenges. The PSA further rejects the suggestion that the cost pressures facing Government can simply be attributed to the number or remuneration of legitimate public servants.

Ghost workers, illicit and irregular tenders, procurement abuse, maladministration, and corruption are significant sources of public expenditure and waste. The revelations emerging from the Madlanga Commission of Inquiry have again highlighted the serious consequences of corruption and the abuse of state resources. Government must therefore address these leakages rather than reducing the human capacity required to deliver essential public services.

During 2025, Government, as employer, tabled proposals in the PSCBC for voluntary severance/exit packages, with the stated objective of creating opportunities for young people to enter the Public Service. However, where are the promised youth employment opportunities? The PSA demands accountability for the outcome of this process. If the stated objective was youth employment, Government must demonstrate that experienced employees were not simply removed from the system while the corresponding employment opportunities for young South Africans disappeared with them.

The PSA is particularly concerned about vacancies being classified as non-critical and subsequently abolished, even where the underlying functions remain necessary. Abolishing a post does not abolish the work. In many instances, the functions are simply added to the workplans of remaining employees, increasing workloads and placing further pressure on an already stretched Public Service. The government is downsizing through post abolition. The cumulative effect of voluntary exits, vacancy management, post abolition and "fit-for-purpose" organisational reviews risks creating a hollowed-out Public Service, without Government openly acknowledging that it is reducing the State's human-resource capacity. The PSA is also concerned that this approach could effectively circumvent collective

bargaining by achieving through administrative processes what should properly be addressed with organised labour. The Union will scrutinise whether the cumulative effect of these measures constitutes a substantive restructuring or downsizing of the Public Service that requires proper engagement with organised labour.

The PSA calls on the Minister for Public Service and Administration and Government to provide organised labour with a comprehensive account of changes to the Public Service establishment over the past two years and how Government intends to fill the vacancies. If Government wants to reduce expenditure, it must first close the channels where public money is lost which is through corruption, illicit procurement, maladministration and waste, rather than reducing the human capacity required to deliver services. A smaller Public Service is not necessarily a more efficient Public Service. South Africa needs a capable Public Service with sufficient skilled employees to deliver the services on which millions of citizens depend.

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