

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	<b>Public Protector: PSA condemns intended COVID-19 investigation</b>
<b>DATE</b>	28 August 2020
<b>EMBARGO</b>	None
<b>ENQUIRIES</b>	communication@psa.co.za

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) has major concerns regarding the intended investigation by the Office of the Public Protector into alleged COVID-19 corruption in government departments.

It has been reported in the media that the Public Protector intends to investigate alleged corruption of COVID-19 contracts in government departments. The PSA is concerned about subjectivity of this investigation by the Public Protector who does not have capacity to investigate the allegations. The PSA is further concerned that this exercise will result in further fruitless expenditure by the Public Protector, owing to extended litigation when her reports are challenged.

The PSA, as the majority union representing employees at the Public Protector, has since 2019 been expressing growing concerns about Adv Mkhwebane's conduct. Since her inception as Public Protector, Adv Mkhwebane has only succeeded in tarnishing the reputation of a trusted organisation that was a pillar against fraud and corruption. She has made herself guilty of victimising employees and making irregular appointments. She abolished the Investigators committee that was dealing with quality reports before remedial action could be recommended. Investigators are no longer working independently, as required by the Constitution. Adv Mkhwebane interferes with investigations and amends reports to favour people and push a political agenda. Several experienced Investigators have left the organisation owing to harassment and intimidation by Adv Mkhwebane and have not been replaced. This situation has a negative impact on investigating capacity.

The Public Protector, in what appears to be a witch hunt, utilises external law firms to investigate and discipline her employees. These actions come at great expense whilst the Office's labour relations unit that was established for this purpose is undermined. The organisation also has issues to provide employees with tools of trade and resources and vacancies are not filled. Yet, Adv Mkhwebane deems it proper to continue spending taxpayers' money on frivolous pursuits such as the intended investigation into COVID-19 corruption. Such cases are eventually taken on appeal at great expense for taxpayers. During Adv Mkhwebane's tenure, the organisation has undergone steady erosion and has run up a deficit of millions of Rands owing to her wasteful expenditure on frivolous litigations.

The PSA has continuously advised Adv Mkhwebane to do justice to the country and herself by resigning as Public Protector as she misunderstands her duties and is not fit to hold office. The Special Investigating Unit should be allowed to continue with the investigation of alleged COVID-19 corruption.

END

