

MEDIA RELEASE: Public Service “salary freeze”: PSA issues renewed warnings

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) that represents more than 240 000 public-sector employees has issued a stern warning to government following the recent proposal by the Deputy Minister of Finance, David Masedo, for a wage-freeze at all level of the state.

The statement by the Deputy Minister, made at a Private Investors for Africa event, is irresponsible and disturbing to the PSA. Problems at state-owned enterprises (SOEs) have persisted for decades and intensified dramatically over the last few years. Yet, government has not published any coherent perspective on the core challenges at SOEs, nor has it tabled plans to tackle these issues. In addition, while being quick to blame the country’s high wage bill, little to no action has been taken against the perpetrators whose corrupt activities have brought the country’s economy to its knees.

The PSA expressed severe irritation with ongoing pronouncements, hinting that public servants will ultimately have to pay the price as saviours of an economy lamed by wide-spread maladministration and corruption. Apart from the latest shocking proposal to freeze public servants’ salaries, there are ongoing attempts to loot their pension fund to bail out dismally failing SOEs. This after their pension fund already suffered severe losses owing to questionable investments.

The PSA pointed out that there cannot be talk about economic growth and improving service delivery to communities amid such blatant attacks on public servants who are already overburdened by Treasury’s unilateral measures to stop the filling of vacancies. This resulted in public servants being stretched to perform additional functions without compensation, thereby risking their health and safety. Government fails to understand that the more than 1.2 million public servants are also breadwinners with families who depend on them. They cannot be expected to serve with pride and dignity, when they are unable to afford basics in the face of escalating prices for food, petrol, electricity, school fees, etc. In addition, public servants’ incentives are under constant attack and their working conditions often leave much to be desired.

Government’s continued reckless statements are instilling fear, panic and insecurity amongst public servants that could have a negative impact on stability and economic growth. The PSA has continuously called on the state as employer for proper engagement to assist the process and avoid labour unrest. Such calls remain unanswered. The PSA warned that the time is unfortunately drawing nearer where there will no longer be encouragement for constructive engagement should government continue making public statements to gain sympathy and support for ill-conceived, desperate plans rather than engaging labour in the Public Service Sectoral Bargaining Council (PSCBC) to deal with these matters jointly and strategically in the interest of the country’s economy and workers. The PSA will not accept any desperate proposals that will further erode public servants’ morale and income.

In addition, the statement by the Minister for Public Service and Administration, Senzo Mchunu, to Parliament regarding expected cost-cutting measures, needs urgent clarification to allay rising uncertainty about the impact on public servants.

The PSA, as one of the largest Unions in the Public Sector, will not allow any discussions to ensue at the PSCBC at the expense of its members. The PSA will stand in solidarity with other unions against such measures. Treasury should understand that there are laws that govern the relationship between the employer and employees in this country.

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