

MEDIA RELEASE	Public Service wage dispute: PSA outraged by Government's attempts to frustrate process
DATE	3 June 2021
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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 235 000 public-sector employees, was left irritated by further attempts by Government as employer on 3 June 2021 to delay the dispute process on current Public Service wage negotiations.

The PSA filed the Union's dispute on 11 May 2021 and the conciliation hearing was held on 3 June 2021. Despite having sufficient time to prepare for the conciliation process, the employer at the commencement of the hearing raised a jurisdictional issue. It argued that the dispute referred by the PSA was premature as the majority of other unions is still engaged in negotiations. The employer refused to deliberate on its argument orally and requested to submit arguments in writing. The employer's inferior argument that it is willing to engage other unions under facilitation with exclusion of the PSA, is a clear demonstration that the employer is afraid to engage the PSA in a fair negotiation process for the benefit of workers and would rather manage negotiations with weaker unions under facilitation. Public Service negotiations and the future of collective bargaining are under serious threat with an employer and friendly unions that are willing to exclude the PSA from negotiations and thereby compromise public servants' conditions of services and improved salaries.

The conciliation process is a phase during which parties must resolve their dispute within 30 days from the date the matter was referred for dispute. If the matter is not resolved within this time frame, a certificate of non-resolution must be issued by the Conciliating Commissioner, which then entitles the PSA to embark on industrial action.

The above timeframe expires on 11 June 2021, irrespective of whether a decision is made on the jurisdictional ruling or not or if the employer will submit its argument by this date. Despite having declared a dispute, the PSA made every attempt to engage the employer during the conciliation process on 3 June 2021 on the salary proposal tabled to other unions. The PSA also stressed to the employer that the matter should not be dragged to the courts, thereby preventing PSA members from embarking on strike action and further frustrating its members who also have not yet been paid last year's salary increases.

The PSA has warned the employer that by frustrating the process, employees are losing patience. The PSA will comply with the LRA and kickstart its strike balloting in view of the lapse of 30 days by 11 June 2021 . Government should take responsibility for the country's financial crisis and refrain from making public servants the "scapegoat" in this process.

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