

**MEDIA RELEASE**                      **SONA: PSA disappointed with absence of concrete plans**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is disappointed that President Cyril Ramaphosa during the State of the Nation Address on 10 February 2022 failed to provide specific and measurable projects to take South Africa out of its economic crisis.

The President, whilst acknowledging that the country is facing a difficult situation, he did address various critical challenges facing South Africans. The establishment of task teams and rhetoric of reforms created more concerns, and the Address did not provide a national agenda to deal with the glaring challenges of corruption, inequality, and employment.

Public servants were also again left in the cold as the President continued with lip service of acknowledging the efforts of frontline workers who risked their lives amidst pressing circumstances. The chronic shortage of personnel in key government departments was not recognised by the President. The filling of critical positions should not be prioritised for the security cluster only as the entire Public Service is experiencing staff shortages. The realisation of a capable state will remain a mere dream until the capacity of state institutions is ensured through employment of adequate personnel in health, security, education, and social development services. In addition, the safety of government employees remains a critical issue amidst reports of educators and correctional officers being attacked and killed – a dire reality that the President seems to not even notice. Most government buildings are dilapidated and not properly maintained, thus posing risks to employees' health and safety by not complying with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

Although the President attempted to address the issue of lawlessness in the country, there is no concrete plan to deal with uncontrollable immigrants and violent crimes. The clearly poor intelligence and security services have been exposed by attacks on national key points, including courts, parliament, police stations, and municipal buildings. These facts also did not receive much attention from the President. The President is, however, correct to acknowledge that there is a need to enhance the safety of whistle blowers to eradicate corruption. How this will be achieved remains to be seen.

The announcement on the creation of employment opportunities for young people is encouraging as the country's rising unemployment of young people creates a risk for a safe and stable society. The PSA is, however, sceptical about the establishment of a 'red-tape team' as the creation of various positions and teams have not yielded positive results, particularly in the Presidency.

The desire to have reliable and affordable electricity remains a pipe dream as new energy projects are yet to be implemented and are mostly in conceptual stages. The unbundling of Eskom cannot guarantee efficiency, as is evident with many state-owned entities that were established with good intention but fail to deliver.

The new loans schemes to develop SMMEs is, however, a step in a right direction but will require tight measures to prevent corrupt personal enrichment. There is further no clarity on the process to develop 'new consensus' and sound like the President running short of ideas to provide leadership in pursuit of better society. The scourge of corruption is eroding the benefits of democracy, as finally confirmed by the Zondo Commission report. In addition, reports have shown that SASSA is losing millions and many businesses colluded with corrupt employees to defraud government through the procurement of COVID-19 personal protective equipment. The PSA, however, welcome the setting of special rolls for state capture and corruption matters.

Infrastructure development plans are welcomed as these will uplift the economy and create massive job opportunities. The use of labour-intensive methods will ensure skills development for young people and the planned construction of 95 bridges will contribute to the safety of especially learners. The extension of the R350 social grant for another year will further assist to mitigate the plight of unemployment.

The PSA is, however, also concerned that the President made no mention on how government intends to professionalise the Public Service as public servants are to play critical role in the majority of the announced initiatives.

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