

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**SONA: Time for President to restore hope and belief without rhetoric and philosophies**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), along with South Africans, is awaiting the State of the Nation Address (SONA) by the President in anticipation, despite not being hopeful. It is time for the President to reassure the nation of his leadership capacity.

It is exactly 11 years ago that Cabinet adopted the National Development Plan (NDP), which sought to achieve a prosperous South African society in 20 years' time. The core priorities were to reduce poverty, unemployment, and inequality. The facts, however, indicate that these priorities are not being met. The time for rhetoric and philosophies is clearly over.

The NDP was structured around 14 priority outcomes, namely, education, health, safety, security, economic growth and employment, skills development, infrastructure, rural development, human settlements, local government, environment, international relations, an effective public sector, social protection, nation-building, and social cohesion. The President has been making countless promises whilst the country continues to suffer under massive unemployment, a declining economy, corruption, and an inefficient public sector, all exacerbated by water shortages, loadshedding, and decaying infrastructure. The cost of living remains too high and continue to rise for most South Africans, especially public servants who cannot access basic services such as housing and the NSFAS for their children's studies as they are deemed "too rich" but being rejected by financial institutions as they are "too poor".

With these realities in mind, the PSA expects the President to seriously take a stock and intentionally address issues by setting a tone for a national and developmental agenda. The PSA expects the President to address the following 12 critical matters:

1. The permanent appointment of the Minister of Public Service and Administration as this Ministry and Department are at the centre of addressing challenges of an efficient public sector and the capacity of public institutions.
2. Filling of public service vacancies as the public service is operating with less than 60% of the required human resources, making it near impossible to render professional and quality services. Without addressing the capacitation of the public service, NDP priorities will remain a pipe dream.
3. Crime, corruption, and lawlessness have reached unacceptable levels. The President must decisively address the low salaries and shortage of police officers. Economic growth cannot be realised whilst investors are deterred by the country's inability to address lawlessness. The nation expects accountability, consequence management and prosecutions of those implicated by State Capture reports.
4. Protection of whistle blowers as crime and corruption will continue to thrive if good citizens are paying with their lives for exposing crime. If the President is committed to addressing corruption, he should be intentional and decisive about protecting good citizens.

5. Efficient border management control is key to the country's safety and security. Uncontrolled and unmonitored movements of people and goods across the country's borders present a massive risk.
6. A living wage for Community Healthcare Workers and Educator Assistants to ensure improved healthcare and equality in the education sector as citizens who depend upon these public services continue to suffer.
7. Rampant loadshedding has reduced citizens' quality of life and perpetuated unemployment. Many small businesses had to close shop. The fact that the President promised as far back as 2015 that this matter would be addressed within two years, is a major concern. The President must provide detailed plan on government loadshedding interventions for short- and long-term solutions.
8. Workers' health and safety is of increasing concern, with security being inadequate or absent at most public institutions, including hospitals and schools. The problem is compounded by poor infrastructure maintenance, with dilapidated buildings that do not comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.
9. The President must stop the tender system and outsourcing of basic services such as cleaning, catering, security, and building maintenance, which have proven to be sources of massive corruption in the public service. Government has the capacity to provide these services should sufficient and capable employees be employed.
10. Report to the country on the work of the team appointed to reduce red tape in government to ensure efficiency. This was not supported by the PSA as only the capacitation of the public service through resources can reduce government's inefficiency.
11. Job opportunities for young people remain a major challenge. The President must do more to create an environment that is conducive for the uptake of young people in view of the country's ageing worker profile.
12. Closing the tap at state-owned entities where corruption is thriving, thousands of ghost employees are remunerated, and service providers are paid without providing services thanks to incompetent and corrupt cadres at management and board levels to facilitate corruption.

The President must acknowledge the South African crises and not miss another opportunity to truly restore despondent citizens' hope and belief. The PSA further repeats it calls for the President and his government to recognise the rights of workers and protect collective bargaining as the cornerstone of orderly workplaces and economic stability. Workers' rights cannot disappear under the same government that fought hand-in-hand with labour to defeat a system that did not respect workers' rights.

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