

MEDIA RELEASE	State of the Nation Address 2026: PSA calls for decisive action by President
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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 245 000 public-sector employees, calls on President Cyril Ramaphosa to deliver a decisive, honest, and action-oriented State of the Nation Address (SONA) on 12 February 2026.

South Africa is at a critical juncture. Sluggish economic growth, devastating unemployment, collapsing infrastructure, escalating crime, entrenched corruption and a deepening cost-of-living crisis have pushed workers and communities to the brink. The era of vague commitments must end as South Africa needs concrete action and measurable outcomes.

Despite limited signs of stabilisation under the Government of National Unity, South Africa remains in a profound socio-economic crisis. Official unemployment remains at an alarming 31.9% and youth unemployment exceeds 58%. Public debt is approaching 80% of GDP. Real GDP per capita has stagnated for over a decade. Deteriorating public infrastructure, failing water systems, unsafe roads, and persistent electricity constraints, continue to undermine economic recovery and erode quality of life. Public servants are expected to deliver essential services under increasingly impossible conditions, whilst austerity measures continue to erode wages and morale.

The PSA rejects ongoing austerity policies and calls for inflation-plus wage increases, long-term wage stability, and an end to fiscal consolidation at the expense of workers. The PSA urges the President to confront the realities of workers and their families, including a severe cost-of-living crisis driven by a triple squeeze of rising taxation, persistent inflation on basic necessities, and the escalating cost of raising and educating children. Despite modest salary increases in recent years, workers are becoming poorer in real terms. An average worker earning approximately R15 000 per month loses close to 25% of income through direct and indirect taxes, including PAYE, UIF, VAT, fuel levies, and municipal charges.

Inflation continues to drive up the cost of food, transport, electricity, housing, healthcare, and communication. Below-inflation salary increases therefore amount to real wage cuts, further compounded by tax-bracket creep and rising VAT collections. For workers supporting children, the situation is even more dire. The PSA's analysis shows that the average monthly cost of raising and educating one child, including school fees, transport, uniforms, stationery, food and basic care, is approximately R3 700. Many workers are left with no disposable income, forcing households into debt to survive.

Recent increases in medical-aid contributions, including Government Employees Medical Scheme adjustments at the start of the school year, further intensified workers' financial strain. The PSA remains extremely concerned about persistent corruption, cadre deployment, skills deficits, and inefficiencies in the public service. Municipal collapse, procurement failures, and weak accountability systems continue to undermine the constitutional promise of quality service delivery.

The PSA calls for full implementation of reforms contained in the *Public Service Amendment Bill* to professionalise the public service, introduce merit-based appointments, and eliminate political interference. The President must commit to robust anti-corruption measures, including strengthened oversight institutions, fully resourced lifestyle audits, and enhanced protection for whistle-blowers, who continue to face intimidation, retaliation and, in some cases, assassination for exposing wrongdoing.

The PSA reiterates the Union's call for urgent and full capacitation of the Border Management Authority (BMA). Despite notable operational successes during peak periods, including intercepting undocumented entrants, disrupting trafficking networks and combating cross-border crime, BMA officials continue to operate under severely under-resourced and unsafe conditions. SONA 2026 must commit to urgent investment in border infrastructure, sufficient staffing, modern surveillance technologies, as well as improved remuneration and working conditions for BMA officials. Border security is national security and continued neglect of the BMA undermines economic stability, public safety, and state sovereignty.

South Africa urgently requires a bold, labour-centred economic strategy that prioritises job creation, fair wages and inclusive growth. The PSA calls for accelerated infrastructure development under *Operation Vulindlela* Phase II, the expansion of labour-intensive sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and green energy, a national jobs plan targeting millions of new employment opportunities by 2028, strengthened localisation and industrial policy. Additionally, the Union calls for tax relief for low- and middle-income earners, as well as firm measures to cap electricity, fuel and administered price increases. Government must replace austerity with an equitable growth strategy that restores workers' dignity and rebuilds state capacity.

With municipalities in deep distress, the PSA expects SONA 2026 to announce the date for 2026 Local Government Elections to be held no later than 15 December 2026. This must be accompanied by concrete interventions to stabilise dysfunctional municipalities, improve water and electricity supply, strengthen governance and ensure free and fair elections. The PSA expects the President to deliver a SONA that confronts the true state of the nation, prioritises workers and public servants, addresses the cost-of-living crisis decisively, advances meaningful public service and economic reforms, strengthens anti-corruption efforts and commits to restoring state capability and public trust.

South Africa cannot afford another year of empty promises. Workers are not asking for excess, they are asking for fairness, dignity and the ability to provide for their families. The PSA will continue to hold government accountable for building a capable, ethical, and developmental state rooted in integrity, fairness, and opportunity for all.

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