

MEDIA RELEASE: **Stats SA Council: PSA condemns government's double standards**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) has condemned government's failure to properly fund the Statistics SA Council, which is by law required to promote and safeguard official statistics, and has warned that the situation poses a severe threat to the country's stability.

The Council is threatening to resign if the agency is not provided with the necessary funding to allow it to execute its functions. Stats SA is the sole source of official statistics in South Africa. It consistently produces key statistics that allow the private sector, government, international agencies and other stakeholders to understand the society and economy, plan their work, and monitor progress. Stats SA data are critical in ensuring that national fiscal flows are appropriately directed, in line with the National Development Plan.

However, in 2015 Stats SA had R160 million stripped from its budget and a freeze on all posts was imposed by government. Both measures have remained in place do date. By early 2020, the situation reached crisis point. The vacancy rate climbed to almost 20%, placing an unreasonable burden on staff and infringing on their rights and interests as they are each expected to carry the workload of five other employees, resulting in excessive overtime.

Stats SA is not a 'state capture' bail-out candidate. The entity receives regular clean audits and enjoys widespread public trust. It is difficult to understand why a respected, reliable and important institution, that plays by the rules and is praised by the Auditor-General is not supported. The fact that government is willing to fund failing entities such as Eskom and SAA but refuses to properly fund the Council is a travesty. The PSA demands that government as a matter of urgency consults with all stakeholders, including labour, to resolve this crisis.

The insufficient funding has damaged Stats SA to the extent that products and surveys have had to be prioritised, and some value-adding items have been discontinued. This may have a negative impact on certain areas of the economy owing to a lack of information. In addition, the brain drain is a critical aspect that need to be addressed. Mechanisms should be put in place to curb this trend as it destined to have dire consequences for the country.

The PSA as a representative union of more than 240 000 public service employees, views this neglect of Stats SA's as irresponsible. The PSA has called on the Minister in the Presidency, Mr Jackson Mthembu, to intervene as the resignation of the Council could be disastrous and pose a threat to the country's stability.

The PSA will also consider legal remedies to protect the interests of the Union's members at Statistics SA should this matter not be resolved amicably.

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