

MEDIA RELEASE Workers' Day 2019: PSA reflects on new-age challenges for workers

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EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

On the commemoration of Workers' Day on 1 May 2019, the Public Servants Association (PSA), with consideration of the historic significance of this day, is concerned about new-age challenges faced by workers.

"The responsibility placed upon trade unions today has taken a new turn. Unions should be able to recognise issues outside the workplace that could also harm workers. Should all unions take this approach, the benefit for workers and the country will be vast," said PSA General Manager, Ivan Fredericks.

"The challenges that workers face goes beyond the work environment. Socio-economic issues have had a major influence. What happens outside the workplace has severely affected the livelihood of workers. The PSA's has stepped up to the challenge by challenging, for example, corporate giant, Steinhoff International Holdings, that lost billions of public servants' pension investments in what was termed 'accounting irregularities'. The protection of these hard-earned pension funds has also seen the PSA taking on the Public Investment Corporation to request clarity on investments choices, and the Finance Minister to demand workers' representation on the Board," said Mr Fredericks.

The PSA prides itself in being a non-politically affiliated union and has witness the impact of political influence on workers. "History has provided workers with an array of protective legislation, but unfortunately public servants are paying a new price. They have become the scapegoats of corrupt and incompetent senior officials' actions. They are blamed and even prosecuted for following instructions. The Nkandla debacle is one example where the PSA successfully assisted its members who were implicated. Workers' job security and hard-earned service benefits are under attack in the name of cost saving. Their income is eroded by salary adjustments that do not consider rising costs in critical living expenses. Public servants are exposed to unsafe and unhealthy working conditions in dilapidated buildings. They must render services amidst increasing staff shortages and a lack of equipment. They are exposed to violence and workplace trauma as seen in the recent fatal attacks on officials of the Department of Correctional Services," said Mr Fredericks.

An even-more concerning threat being faced by organised groupings of South African workers is their chosen unions' failure to act in their interests and not properly managing unions' assets. "The PSA's Board of Directors realises the critical importance of its fiduciary responsibility and the upholding of high levels of discipline to safeguard the PSA against drifting into a state of chaos as seen in the case of the South African Municipal Workers' Union that is insolvent after years of financial trouble. In another example, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union is facing deregistration by the Registrar of Labour as it has since inception failed to hold congresses to elect new leaders and has not made financial disclosures.

"Amidst present challenges, workers should be able to rely even more on their unions to uphold their rights and interests rather than being left exposed owing to the poor conduct of the very custodians of their labour-related protection. The PSA, having been part of the labour fraternity for almost 100 years, has a proud legacy. The Union is committed to head-on face emerging challenges to the dignity of public servants and all proud workers of this country," said Mr Fredericks

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