

MEDIA RELEASE **Workers' Day 2021: New struggle**

DATE 30 April 2021

EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

On the eve of Workers' Day 2021, the Public Servants Association (PSA) is increasingly concerned about public-sector employees' struggles for improved working conditions, occupational health and safety, and the right to fair compensation.

The PSA, representing more than 235 000 public-sector employees, is aware that Government's continuous failure to deal with fraud, corruption, mismanagement, and wasteful expenditure has brought the South African economy to its knees. Unfortunately, workers are now expected to pay the high price in this dire situation as unemployment continues to soar and public-sector employees are facing a second year in a row without salary increases. In addition, the State as employer is failing to adhere to processes as prescribed in the Constitution, with the potential to destroy collective bargaining and plunge the country into labour-unrest turmoil. Collective bargaining governs the relationship between the employer and employees and allowing Government to renege on negotiated agreements places labour peace at risk.

The PSA, understanding the importance of collective agreements, has approached the Constitutional Court regarding the non-implementation of Public Service wage increases for 2020 and the matter will be heard on 24 August 2021. The ills facing the successful management of the Public Service are known, and it is troubling that Government continues to show a lack of urgency in tackling issues which are having a direct impact on workers as well as service delivery to citizens.

Gains made for public servants through constructive collective bargaining over years are now facing the danger of erosion with workers being used as scapegoats to conceal real cost of the damage done by irregular activities. This includes the continued use of the Public Service wage bill as an excuse for government's failures in achieving basic service delivery goals. Finance Minister, Tito Mboweni, continues to affirm the decision to implement a three-year wage freeze in the public sector to cut government spending by R300-billion. Government's "offer" of a 0% wage increase for its employees for the 2021/22-financial year underlines the fact that workers are facing a new struggle. This struggle filters through to workers in parastatals such as SARS, SALGA, etc. SARS employees, for example, did not receive an increase due this month as part of a multi-term collective agreement.

The PSA reiterates the fact that if Government fails to implement fair wages for public servants and ensure their health and safety in the workplace, industrial action will become an unavoidable reality to ensure that these workers, who kept the country afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic, receive the respect and recognition they deserve from their employer.

END