



SPECIAL EDITION

Magazine

FREE TO PSA MEMBERS

PSA 2024 Congress / Annual General Meeting

celebrating
UNITY, collaboration,
EXCELLENCE

The PSA's Congress/Annual General Meeting in September 2024 marked yet another chapter of success in the Union's ongoing journey and tireless work in service of public-sector employees across South Africa.

The event, held in the Western Cape, provided a platform for vital discussions and forward-thinking resolutions whilst also celebrating the people who make the PSA the robust organisation it is today – the Union of Choice. The PSA was also honoured to welcome esteemed guests to the gathering whose messages contributed to the value of the event (see *inside for these inspiring messages*).

Sincere appreciation is extended to the PSA Board for the strategic guidance and commitment to the Union's mission. This leadership, rooted in the values that have long defined the PSA, continues to chart a clear route for progress.

At the heart of the event were the elected delegates who displayed unwavering dedication to the cause.

Their active participation in debates and insights into the future of the PSA provided the bedrock for a successful Congress. The PSA has appreciation for all delegates who took the time to attend and contribute towards proceedings. This active participation reinforced the importance of collaboration in the protection and promotion of members' rights and interests and improving service delivery.

A highlight of the Congress was the gala dinner (see page 8) where the PSA also honoured the Union's dedicated shop stewards, full-time shop stewards and full-time office bearers. These stalwarts are the PSA's pulse, working tirelessly on the ground to advocate for members, resolve disputes, uphold the rights of public servants, thus promoting the PSA brand. Their commitment, often going beyond the call of duty, is a testament to the spirit of service and leadership that defines the PSA. The PSA proudly recognises their contributions and applauds their dedication to making a tangible difference in the lives of public servants.

The PSA's 2024 Congress/Annual General Meeting created fertile grounds and optimism for the future. The discussions, resolutions, and camaraderie laid the groundwork for the Union's continued success. Together, we will continue to build a stronger, more equitable future for public servants, standing firm in our mission to protect and promote their rights and interests.

The PSA's strength lies in its people, and with your continued dedication, there is no limit to what we can achieve!

Reuben Maleka
GENERAL MANAGER

PSA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

PSA President, Justice Shiburi, in his address to the PSA Annual General Meeting issued a reminder about the value of being a PSA member.

"The PSA is a major role player in society and adds value to our communities through various initiatives driven by its corporate social investment program. We have seen the value of the Union's involvement in communities through programs such as the school safety campaign in partnership with the South African Police Service and business partners, and the donation of wheelchairs, soccer kits and school uniforms to recipients in need, to mention just a few initiatives. All this was possible because the PSA is doing so through obedience and respect to the values of the organisation. The PSA has values that support the 'One PSA' as proposed and promoted in the Presidential Address at the 2024 National Chairpersons' Forum. These values include transparency, integrity, respect, and service excellence.

"This organisation, with sound values, has more than 245 000 members and on 7 July 2024 celebrated 104 years of excellent service delivery - 104 years of excellent service delivery is not child's play. For the PSA, achieving a milestone of 104 years of excellent service delivery was, however, not always smooth sailing. There were challenges both internally and externally. Yet, the organisation remains resolute as a force to be reckoned with in the current labour market and environment. This was made possible by the fact that the leadership of the organisation has always been key to observe and respect, embrace, and live the values of the PSA."

The President, however, appealed that in taking the PSA forward, caution is needed. "We need to guard our conduct and apply strict discipline in all we do. This is equally true for our member structures and the PSA's employees. Everything we do should be above reproach and stand up to the highest tests of quality and integrity. In this regard, I believe that the PSA's recently concluded structure elections serve as a prime example of such conduct.

"I also want to assure you that if we live by the PSA's values and act as a united front, the Union of Choice will thrive and will withstand feeble attacks, including attempts by the misguided Registrar of Labour Relations, new formations, former board members, members, and even staff members who are seeking the Union's downfall."

The President also referred to so-called "economists" and economical commentators attacking public servants when they want recognition and desire to gain popularity.



"We have also of late been observing some politicians who do not have content and lack political ideologies to contribute to the building of our society, talking nonsense about the public service being bloated, with lazy employees earning millions. These are fallacies coming from persons who seek relevance. Public servants work under harsh conditions ranging from unsafe buildings to being over-stretched and underrated.

"We cannot disappoint"

"It is painful to hear the insults and disrespect directed to public servants, knowing that it was only public servants who kept the country going during the COVID-19 pandemic whilst the 'economists' and politicians were hiding behind high walls. Public servants were manning border posts to ensure that regulations that restricted movements were adhered to. Public servants assisted and vaccinated those who were affected by the pandemic, whilst the 'economists' and politicians were enjoying the warmth of their air conditioners in their glass houses. Public servants ensured that grant recipients received their grants on time, whilst the 'economists' and politicians were in cinemas inside their high-walled houses.

"It is through entrenched values that we remained calm, focused, and dedicated to serve communities without asking insurance for our own health and safety during that trying time.

"It is through the respect for these values that our men and women in blue worked tirelessly to combat illicit cigarettes and restrict movement of alcohol as it was regulated."

The President assured delegates that there is hope amongst organised labour for improvements going forward. "Such hope is brought by the fact that the Ministry of the Department of Public Service and Administration is led by honourable Minister Inkosi Mzamo Buthelezi who understands that once 'Koba ni segodi sezo uvul' within his community 'kumele kuba ne Ndhuna izophatha'. We are making this special appeal to honorable Minister Buthelezi to ignore the noise and insults directed at public servants and tap into his background expertise of serving his people and communities. Honorable Minister, do away with austerity measures, lift that moratorium. There are thousands and thousands of unfilled funded, vacant posts in the public sector whilst public servants are under strain."

"One will find that one public servant is doing the work of three people in some instances, which causes a lot of pressure and anxiety. Yet, that public servant is compensated for one person's work only. One newly appointed Minister said that it is worrying to realise that he is running a department with only 30% of the staff establishment according to the numbers versus the required number in terms of the structure."

The President further referred to the changing world. "The talk of the day is about the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). We are equally awaking to the new dynamics brought by Artificial Intelligence (AI). We have seen the introduction of drones. As a traditional unionist, one is worried that very soon drones will be used as messengers. Is AI here to replace the human factor in the new world of work?"

The President, however, advised that "understanding, anticipating, and embracing these changes will assist us to stay relevant to attract the new upcoming workforce that is digital driven and consumed in the digital world."

On the topic of elections, the President reminded delegates that elections were aimed at putting leaders in the position whereby they will be contributing positively towards the advancement of the PSA to remain relevant and work towards achieving another 104 years of excellent service delivery and even beyond. "Elections are meant to facilitate the building of a progressive labour movement. Let us all respect, welcome, and embrace the outcome of the election for this is happening within 'One PSA' to promote 'One PSA', for which our society years. We cannot disappoint."

The PSCBC General Secretary, **Frikkie de Bruin**, addressed the PSA Annual General Meeting, stating: "I proudly stand in solidarity with each of you as we strive together to build a brighter future for the working class and our country at large. It is a true privilege to address this esteemed gathering of trade unionists - representatives of the largest non-politically affiliated trade union for public servants in South Africa.

"In this year, when as a country we celebrate 30 years of democracy we come together, united by a common purpose: to champion the rights of workers and strengthen the foundation upon which our principles rest. We unite to protect the rights the founding members of PSA fought for that being the right to centralised collective bargaining, the right not to be unfairly dismissed, the right to fair labour practices, and the right to strike.

"Comrades, the sad part of the reality is that our struggle to protect these principles is far from over. The next 30 years will usher in new challenges and opportunities. It's important that we face these challenges head on, the future of work is an evolving paradigm, remote work, embracing 4IR and artificial intelligence, gender-based violence and mental health issues that we are caught up in will force us to continuously be innovative and reinvent ourselves to remain relevant.

"We must remain steadfast in our commitment to a fair and just labour environment, where every member can realise their full potential and contribute to the growth and prosperity of our nation. Countless opportunities lie ahead to improve the quality of the working lives of your members in expanding choice, close the gender gap, reverse the damages caused by global inequality, and much more.

"Yet, none of this will happen by itself. Without decisive action we will be heading into a world that widens existing inequalities and uncertainties.

"We must be attentive to technological advances – such as artificial intelligence, automation and robotics – this will create new jobs, that we need to prepare our members for.

"The demographics of trade union membership are changing and the cadre of today, is not focused on job security, or benefits anymore, the worker of today is focused on a work environment that allows for quality of life.

"We need to continuously innovate and learn within our environment, if we don't change now, in a changing world, we will certainly render ourselves redundant and will sure enough face doom.

"As I close, allow me to draw your attention to PSC-BC Resolution 1/ 2022, which is commonly referred to as the Public Service Summit Declaration. This resolution is aimed at improving collective bargaining processes, professionalising the public service, leveraging digital advancements, and promoting equality and fair treatment in the workplace.

"Allow me to summarise the following four pillars the agreement is build on:

Strengthening Centralised Collective Bargaining

The Summit emphasized the need for reviewing and reinforcing collective bargaining structures in the public service, with guidance from international best practices, but more importantly, expanding the public service definition, to include amongst other employees in agencies, parastatals and entities.

Professionalisation of the Public Service

Public servants are encouraged to embrace values like loyalty and transparency, with a focus on ethical behaviour and professionalism. There's also a push for ethics training and the inclusion of public values in education.

***"Let us carry
the spirit of unity
with us"***

Fourth Industrial Revolution and Digitalisation

The summit highlighted the importance of strengthening internal systems, ensuring reliable data, and investing in research and innovation for better service delivery. Public servants must be upskilled and reskilled to stay relevant in the face of technological advancements.

Recognition of Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities: Violence and Harassment

Compliance with ILO Convention No 190, addressing violence and harassment in the workplace, was affirmed. Programs to develop leadership skills among women, youth, and persons with disabilities will be implemented, with a focus on mental health and psycho-social issues. We find ourselves in a time where mental health is an issue of great concern.



"The COVID-19 pandemic has left us with lasting impacts, not only on our physical health but more significantly on our mental well-being. While we have been battling the effects of this global crisis, mental health is one area that has often been neglected for too long. It is now, more than ever, that we need to acknowledge the profound impact this neglect has had on individuals, families, and the workplace. The stress, anxiety, and uncertainty of the past few years have exacerbated an already challenging situation for many. Work-life balance has become increasingly difficult to achieve, and the line between personal and professional life has blurred for countless individuals.

"Comrades, this sums up the key areas that I wanted to highlight please take time to read and familiarise yourself with the devil in the detail of this agreement.

"I would like to use this opportunity to wish you a successful and productive session, and we look forward to the outcomes that will undoubtedly strengthen the foundation of the PSA. Together, we are more than the sum of our parts. Together, we can achieve what may seem impossible alone. As we move forward, let us carry this spirit of unity with us, knowing that in solidarity, we can and will make a difference. Let us continue to work together - allow me to call on the PSA not to be distracted by empty vessels around you, don't allow destructors to infiltrate and divide you as a union. Your leadership is sound, your union is sound your members is of a force and favour. Thank you for your continued dedication and service. *Amanda!* Long live the spirit of PSA!"



The Minister of Public Service and Administration, Mzambo Buthelezi, addressed the PSA Annual General Meeting as follows:

"It is an honour to address you today during our Integrated Public Service Month - a time when we reflect on the critical role that public servants play in driving the success of our nation.

"This year's theme, 'The Government That Works For You', is not just a catchy phrase but a statement of intent, guiding our daily actions in service of the people.

"As the Minister for the Public Service and Administration, I often compare our Ministry to the heart of the government. Just as a healthy heart is vital for the well-being of the body, so too is a robust and effective public service essential for the health of our nation. Each of you, in your roles, ensures that this heart beats steadily, keeping the wheels of service delivery turning for the benefit of all South Africans.

"Today, I would like to begin by reaffirming a fundamental belief of mine: public sector unions, including the PSA, are not external stakeholders, but integral partners in our mission. You represent the voices of our public servants the backbone of our government - advocating for their rights, addressing their needs, and upholding their aspirations. This partnership between unions and government is essential for the success of the public service and the health of our democracy.

"Now, as we approach the wage negotiations within the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council, I want to assure you that we remain committed to engaging in these discussions with transparency and respect.

"We trust the negotiators will approach these conversations with a spirit of collaboration and good faith, and we believe the outcomes will benefit all parties involved.

"However, let me take this moment to remind us all that the role of public sector unions extends far beyond wage negotiations. Unions like the PSA play a pivotal role in addressing the broader challenges that affect service delivery, particularly in line with the Public Service Charter that was signed by both government and public-sector unions.

"You are able to identify areas where inefficiencies exist, where red tape slows down progress, and to work with government to streamline processes. This collaboration is crucial in tackling issues such as fragmented service delivery.

"These are the same values we strive to instil across the public service. As public servants, we all know the importance of these guiding principles, and we know that living up to them is not always easy. But they are essential to building a capable, ethical, and developmental state.

"When President Cyril Ramaphosa shared the priorities of the 7th Administration earlier this year, he emphasised the need for a capable and ethical public service as a key focus. These are no small feats, but they are achievable when each of us - whether in government or as union representative draws on our shared values to deliver on our collective mission.

"Let us not forget the principles of *Batho Pele* - putting people first. Every day, in each of our respective roles, we must ask ourselves how we can best serve the people of South Africa. In doing so, we contribute to the ongoing effort to rebuild and reshape our public service. The values-driven approach we take should be something we live, breathe, and embody in every decision we make, in every policy we draft, and in every act of service we perform.

"I commend the PSA for its unwavering commitment to values such as loyalty, transparency, respect, and ethical conduct"

"This values-driven public service that we are building together has the potential to inspire a new era of public trust and accountability. I envision a future where public servants are not merely seen as government employees but are valued as dedicated contributors to the betterment of our society. This is a win-win situation: when we are led by our values, we perform better, and when we perform better, the public service as a whole achieves its goals.

"This is why I call on each of you, as public servants and union representatives, to reignite the spirit of *Ubuntu* - the sense of shared humanity that underpins our commitment to service. Let *Batho Pele* and the values of the PSA guide us as we continue to build a public service that truly serves the people.

"Before I close, I want to take a moment to wish the PSA's elected leadership well in the important work ahead. Your leadership is instrumental in holding government accountable, ensuring that we remain responsive to the needs of our citizens, and advocating for the rights of our public servants. This partnership between government and the PSA is not just important—it is essential if we are to achieve a public service that is both capable and ethical.

"In conclusion, colleagues, I ask only one thing of you as you deliberate on your agenda for the year ahead: let that agenda be values driven. Let it be in the interest of the people we serve. Together, by upholding our shared values and fostering a spirit of collaboration, we can build a better, efficient and values driven public service for all."

The General Secretary of Fedusa, Rief-dah Ajam, addressed the PSA Congress as follows:

"The PSA plays a vital role in shaping the fabric of our nation, and this gathering reaffirms our commitment to the values that guide us as a Federation.

"Public servants are not just employees fulfilling job descriptions; they are the pillars of the developmental state envisioned by our Constitution. The Constitution mandates the public service to be professional, efficient, and developmental, rooted in the values of accountability, responsiveness, and integrity. The *Public Service Act* complements this by outlining the structures that support these values, providing a legal framework to ensure that every public servant upholds the principles of impartiality, fairness, and dedication. In the public sector, it is clear that the work of government relies on the dedication of public servants who implement policies, provide essential services, and uphold the rule of law. Whether in health, education, social services, or public safety, it is public servants who translate policies into tangible outcomes that affect the daily lives of millions of South Africans.

"In times of crisis, like the recent COVID-19 global pandemic, our public servants were at the forefront; nurses, teachers, police officers, and countless others, ensuring that the wheels of our nation kept turning. Their resilience and commitment remind us that, without a robust and efficient public service, the dreams of a prosperous and equitable South Africa will remain unfulfilled.

"South Africa's journey to becoming a developmental state is deeply reliant on the effectiveness of its public servants. A developmental state prioritises economic growth, social equity, and institutional capacity. It is not just a vision of governance but a concrete strategy for transformation. The public service must be equipped with the tools and capacity to address inequality, create jobs, and drive sustainable development. This requires strategic planning, innovation, and a commitment to excellence in every department. At the heart of a developmental state is the idea of governance with purpose, where the state actively intervenes in the economy to correct market failures and drive socioeconomic development. Public servants are the key actors in this system, translating policy into action, and ensuring that every citizen has access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and security. It is through public service that we can bridge the gap between the rich and poor, rural and urban, and empower marginalized communities to rise.

"As an affiliate of Fedusa, the PSA's role in building a strong, united federation cannot be understated. Our unity is our strength, and together, we represent a broad spectrum of workers across various sectors. As public servants, we must embody the values of solidarity, transparency, and mutual respect that are foundational to both the PSA and Fedusa.

"We are stronger when we stand together, speaking with one voice to advocate for the rights of our workers. It is through this unity that we can influence policy, negotiate for better conditions, and ensure that our members receive the recognition they deserve. The PSA, as part of the Fedusa family, plays a critical role in shaping our nation's future through its representation of public servants. It is through organisations like the PSA that we can ensure public servants have a say in the policies that govern them, and in the development of our nation.

"Our unity is our strength"

"Leadership is one of the cornerstones of an effective and developmental state. However, leadership in the public service must be servant leadership, one that places the needs of the people and workers at the forefront. The *Public Service Act* emphasises efficiency and professionalism, but more than that, it calls for a public service that is ethical and accountable. Servant leadership is about leading with humility, listening to the needs of those you serve, and making decisions that benefit the collective. In every department, every office, and every public service institution, leadership must prioritise the welfare of the people and ensure that the systems and services are functioning efficiently. The kind of leadership we need is one that sees beyond personal gain, one that focuses on the well-being of the workers and the communities they serve. Public servants deserve leaders who are committed to their development, who invest in their skills and provide the support they need to perform their duties effectively.

"I also want to stress that harmony within any trade union is vital for progress. Disunity, on the other hand whether within the leadership or between members, hinders our ability to achieve our goals. We must cultivate a culture of mutual respect and collaboration, where every voice is heard, and every member feels valued. Harmony does not mean the absence of disagreement; rather, it is about how we handle those disagreements.



"It is about ensuring that we remain focused on our shared objectives even when we have differing perspectives. In our congress today, let us remember that our strength lies in our unity. The PSA, like any union, thrives when its members and leaders work together towards common goals.

"It is disappointing that Minister Meth is not with us today after confirming her attendance to this critical gathering, as her 100 days in office should be characterised by interventions and measures of improving the levels of trade union density, through more effective and practical measures of regulation within her own jurisdiction. Approving registration of break-away splinter factions is not the solution to drawing workers to a protection zone where unions are most effective, for these measures in the long run, will only serve as a catalyst for contributing to disunity in the trade union movement, and the breeding ground for unwarranted politics of power, that do nothing, but breakdown what unions have long fought for. And that is a fight we must not bow down to.

"Let us recommit ourselves to building a strong and vibrant public service that upholds the values of the Constitution and the *Public Service Act*. Let us work towards a developmental state where every South African, no matter their background, has access to the services they need to thrive. Let us strengthen Fedusa, with the PSA at its core, to be a powerful voice for public servants, advocating for their rights and ensuring that they are respected and valued. Let us lead with integrity, build harmony in our organisations, and most importantly, put our workers first. Together, we will continue to build a South Africa that is just, equitable, and prosperous."

GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICE SECTORAL BARGAINING COUNCIL (GPSSBC)



The GPSSBC General Secretary, **Sharlaine Oodit**, addressed the Congress as follows:

"The PSA has been playing a pivotal role in the sector council and in the chambers of the GPSSBC since the inception of the Council 25 years ago. We recognise the PSA as a progressive trade union both in the public and private sectors and as the GPSSBC we acknowledge you as key stakeholder in strengthening workplace relations and advancing worker protection.

"As the union with the largest membership in the sector, the PSA's role in the GPSSBC cannot be understated and we cannot overemphasise your role in the crucial importance of strengthening workplace relations and in defending collective bargaining. We are alive to the fact that Bargaining Councils exist at the behest of trade unions, without you we have no relevance.

"We therefore call upon the PSA to utilise your position within the Council and chambers to drive the bargaining agenda of the GPSSBC. We want to see your issues on our agendas!

"Collective bargaining is a key pillar of social dialogue in labour relations. The decent-work agenda is even more relevant as the world of work is changing at a very rapid pace. The decline of jobs, even in the public sector, and the rise of non-standard and flexible work, coupled with changes in employment behaviour of the millennial worker, will have implications for trade unions and bargaining councils alike. How we respond to these changing needs will be crucial to protecting union density and bargaining councils' relevance. Together we need to assess our strategies on how to strengthen the employment relationship while ensuring adequate protection to all workers, including improved conditions of service and safety and health at work. We must respond together to challenges of the future worker.

"I commend the active role the PSA has played in shaping the vision of the GPSSBC"

"It is widely accepted that trade unions worldwide have seen a steady decline in their membership density. South Africa is no different. There has been a lot of research regarding the effectiveness of trade union towards the economy and the country. The importance in understanding the reasons for this, will allow for measures to be put in place to reverse this.

"Trade unions like the PSA have been around for decades and have given their members a huge number of benefits in the workplace, and together we must protect this existence and look at how we continue to grow the Union and protect collective bargaining. Over the years the PSA has prided itself on the quality services delivered to your members, I urge you to continue in this spirit as workers do not join trade unions for the same politically driven reasons in South Africa as before. The millennial worker joins a trade union for protection from exploitation, for services on an individual basis, and for the improvement employment conditions. Service delivery is therefore imperative.

"The PSA continues to be union with the highest number of referrals withing the GPSSBC, and this is indicative of the service offerings of the PSA and the importance of PSA as employee representatives in the workplace. The PSA plays an important role not only in the workplace, but also in society and in the economy. Socio-economic issues cannot be separated from issues directly related to the workplace; The adversarial nature of collective bargaining does not help the situation. Good faith bargaining, orderly bargaining and labour peace should be at the heart of dispute resolution and negotiations: The PSA has an important role to play inside and outside of the workplace, and have a responsibility towards workers and society at large you are important agents not only when you represent workers but also in the promotion of stability in and outside the work environment.

"I would want to commend the active role the PSA has played in shaping the vision of the GPSSBC. Your positive contributions have assisted the Council to grow strategically and deliver on its mandate. The PSA has resolute leadership in President Shuburi and General Manager Maleka who act responsibly in engaging with other role players, this ensures sustainability, accountability, and corporate citizenship and will ensure that the PSA continues to grow from strength to strength."

PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITY (PSETA)

The CEO of the PSETA, **Bontle Lerumo**, explained the role of the organisation in being at the heart of developing a skilled, capable, and innovative public-sector workforce.

The PSETA's mission is supported by researching skills demand and supply in the sector.

It focuses on effective delivery of skills development interventions based on occupationally directed qualifications. It further monitors, evaluates, and reports on the implementation of education, training, and skills development in the sector. The PSETA supports work readiness skills, fundamental human skills, leadership and management skills, technology skills, and functional/operational skills.

Ms Lerumo also explained the considerations for education and training provision to address skills mismatches (owing to unequal access to quality education), competition with the private sector (hindering attracting young talent to the public sector), professionalism (in line with major reforms to modernise the public service whilst attracting and retaining top talent), entry-level requirements, as well as fiscal sustainability.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SECTORAL BARGAINING COUNCIL (PHSDSBC)

In his address to the Congress, the General Secretary of the PHSDSBC, Mpumelelo Sibiyi, pointed out that the PSA has played an essential role in advancing the rights of public servants and building the capacity of the Sector's workforce.

"Upon reflecting on the PHSDSBC's 25 years of our existence, the role of collective bargaining and dispute resolution in shaping the future of public health and social development services must be considered. These past decades brought valuable lessons about the importance of dialogue and cooperation as well as the challenges to ensure workers' rights are respected, public services are strengthened, and citizens are served with dignity and efficiency. "Trade unions are the bedrock of worker representation and collective bargaining. Over the years, the PSA has stood firm in advancing its members' rights, conditions, and welfare in the public service. Your unwavering commitment to social justice and your tireless efforts in defending workers' rights have left an indelible mark on the labour landscape of South Africa.

"At the heart of our work in the PHSDSBC is fostering strong, effective, and respectful labour relations between government and public-service employees. The PSA has always been a valued partner, bringing constructive proposals and a solutions-oriented approach. Our collaboration on critical matters of mutual interest issues, such as conditions of employment, health and safety measures, and broader policy matters affecting the public health and social development sectors, has yielded meaningful results. Over the years, through productive dialogue and negotiation, we have significantly improved the conditions under which our public health and social workers operate. At the same time, we have witnessed the evolution of dispute-resolution mechanisms that have become critical in managing labour relations.

"Still, we must remain vigilant in constantly improving these processes as the demands of the workplace change. The role of collective bargaining must evolve alongside the changing public sector needs. The health and social development landscape is rapidly shifting due to technological advances, the increasing complexity of service delivery, and the growing demands placed on our workers. These changes bring new challenges and opportunities for innovation and growth in labour relations. One of the collective bargaining challenges that warrants the attention of this AGM is matters of mutual interest that take a long time on the agenda of bargaining councils. When we diagnose this problem, we discover a challenge with the mandate, given that most of these items have financial implications.

"We must develop strategies for addressing this elephant in the room. The other challenge concerns the implementation of concluded collective agreements, which requires monitoring. The PSCBC has appointed compliance officers in terms of section 33 of the *Labour Relations Act*. Sectoral councils must follow suit because they have exclusive jurisdiction concerning matters specific to that sector.

"Your continued activism ensures that public servants are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect"

"As public servants, we are the backbone of our country's social safety net. Our responsibility is to ensure that our workforce is equipped to handle new challenges. We must negotiate increased investment in skills development, training, and upskilling programs through collective bargaining, particularly in digital literacy and technological integration. Public servants must be prepared for the increasing reliance on technology in service delivery, and collective agreements must reflect this evolving reality.

"The past few years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, have underscored the need for enhanced attention to worker wellbeing and mental health. The health and social development sectors were under immense pressure, and many workers faced emotional burnout and physical exhaustion. Moving forward, collective bargaining must prioritise workers' mental and emotional health as a central issue. Negotiations should focus on reducing workplace stress, improving work-life balance, and ensuring that mental health resources are readily available and accessible to all public servants. I am proud to say that, as a sector, we are the first to conclude a psycho-social support programme for our workers.

"Collective bargaining must continue to encourage open dialogue between employers and employees to foster a workplace culture that is collaborative, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of both workers and the public. Collective bargaining should address the broader social and economic challenges impacting our ability to deliver high-quality services. The pressures on public-service employees are mounting.

"Public servants find themselves at the forefront of transformation, from the demand for improved service delivery to implementing the National Health Insurance (NHI) and other essential government programs.

"The PSA has a critical role in ensuring that these transformations are carried out without compromising the rights and well-being of public employees. At the PHSDSBC, we are fully committed to working hand in hand with the PSA and other stakeholders to ensure that workers' voices are heard and that any changes are implemented fairly and with due regard for our members' livelihoods. One of our immediate priorities must be addressing the critical issues surrounding the conditions of service for health and social development workers. As the country navigates the implementation of the NHI, we must advocate for clear and transparent processes, fair compensation, and a work environment that prioritises the well-being of those on the frontlines.

"As collective bargaining is evolving, so must our approach to dispute resolution. We must strive for a more proactive, preventive approach to labour disputes, focusing on early interventions and fostering an environment where conflicts are addressed before they escalate. We must ensure that our dispute-resolution mechanisms are efficient and equitable. Delays in resolving disputes can harm workplace morale and service delivery. We must continue refining our processes to prevent this. Of concern is the high rate of postponement. While we accept that sometimes postponements are inevitable due to the unforeseen challenges that might emerge, it is crucial that when such happens, parties follow the rules of the Council when seeking postponement.

"We must take drastic measures to involve debt collectors to help us recoup cost orders because most parties default on payment. We have observed with great concern the conclusion of so-called settlement agreements, which are not settlement agreements but process agreements. When the terms of these process agreements are not met, applicants bring them back to the Council with the hope that we will reschedule them. Unfortunately, by then, the horse has bolted. Those matters can only be reviewed at a Labour Court at a very high cost. By investing in continuous training for mediators, arbitrators, and other dispute-resolution professionals, we can ensure that disputes are resolved fairly and expediently.

"With the dedication and commitment of the PSA and other stakeholders, I am confident that we will continue to navigate the complexities of labour relations and achieve outcomes that benefit both workers and the people of South Africa. Together, we can build a more robust, more equitable public sector that meets the needs of its workers and the society we serve."

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE



At a glittering awards ceremony on 19 September 2024, the PSA paid tribute to the Union's shop stewards (see below) who excelled in service of members. Adv Luvuyo Bono, Chairperson of the Essential Services Committee, was the guest speaker and delivered the following message:

"A congress is a time to reflect on collective accomplishments in the public service and to celebrate the good work that you do. Most importantly, this is a time to remind yourselves of your purpose. Celebration is not a boastful ritual that is solely focused on how far you have come, but a reminder of how far we can go. I am advised that PSA currently has about 245 000 members in the public sector. It is indeed a "Union of Choice" for public servants. Trade-union membership worldwide has been going down over time.

"To be able to still have such a huge number of members and still be growing must be commended. I must commend the Union for being a fully representative union in the public service. The transformation that we see must be celebrated.

"While we are here to celebrate our accomplishments, we should never lose sight of our purpose. Unions, in my view, exist to represent members' rights and interests in the workplace. Representing members is mostly found in collective bargaining and in dispute resolution.

"I believe that there is a third reason to exist and that is to educate and guide members. This reason for existence is, in my view, a key responsibility of trade unions that is not always paid attention to. I believe that education also plays a significant role in dispute resolution. In March 2023, the PSA signed the wage agreement in the public service.

"In a media statement issued, the PSA indicated that it opted to participate in the wage negotiations to mitigate the risk of public servants not receiving a salary increase during the 2023/24- financial year. In addition, public servants could be further negatively impacted if the cash gratuity ended without another agreement being in place. It was therefore imperative that the agreement be concluded to safeguard public servants against such risk. To secure such an agreement that was probably unpopular is commendable.

"Unions in this country played a huge role in dismantling apartheid. Strikes and disruptions were an integral part of dismantling apartheid. We are now 30 years after 1994, surely the agenda has changed. We have different challenges. One of those challenges is the current economic climate of the country. In the current challenging economic climate proper leadership is required to balance the interests of members and economics of the country. These difficult times require realists and not populists. These times require innovative ways of ensuring that employers provide a living wage for employees and their families within the confines of tight budgets.

"As you continue to grow and stand your ground in the public service, stay firm on the course of ensuring fair and equitable labour practices. Honour your values of loyalty, transparency, respect, ethical conduct, consistency, and service excellence. May you set the agenda for the role of trade unions in the public service for the next century."

The event honoured, celebrated and recognised the sterling work and performance by PSA shop stewards in their efforts to position the PSA as the top Union for public servants in South Africa. Themed as "The world is your oyster" (getting meaning from pearls that are hidden in many oysters), it resonated the talent the PSA enjoys from its employees and shop stewards. The PSA expresses thanks and appreciation to the Union's valued business partners for their support in hosting this successful event.

Awards were made to the following shop stewards in respect of recruitment excellence:

- Mpho Lentswe (Mafikeng), Dalton Dladla (Durban), Moshe Monyamane (Polokwane), Freddy Luke (Pretoria), Poni Rakgalakane (Pretoria), Nkosinathi Thwala (Durban), Benedict Mdluli (Nelspruit), Edwin Kula (Gqeberha), Richard Mhlongo (Durban), and Mosimane Olyphant (Kimberley).

The following shop stewards were recognised for excellence in rights matters:

- Ernest Mkhize (Durban), Andre Strydom (Cape Town), Johnson Matidza (Pretoria), Anthony Kilian (Gqeberha), Fredre Fouche (Bloemfontein), Hendrik Pretorius (Mahikeng), Lihle Mlungwana (Mthatha), Jacobus Heyneke (Nelspruit), Regardo Abercrombie (Kimberley), and Nomathemba Ngcobo (Johannesburg).

