

Lockdown or not, union members want their increases

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Lockdown or not, union members want their increases By Loyiso Sidimba - Apr 1, 2020 11 The salary increases are to be implemented from today. Picture: Soraya Crowie/African News Agency (ANA) Johannesburg – Public sector unions have warned the government that the Covid-19 pandemic should not serve as an excuse to not honour the salary increase that was due to be implemented from April 1. The 230 000-member Public Servants Association (PSA) has warned that failure to implement the wage agreement signed in 2018 will result in the union resorting to declaring a dispute with the government. The union has promised its members that it would ensure that the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) does not abuse the 21-day national lockdown announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa last week by failing to oblige to the wage agreement signed in 2018. “The PSA will remain alert to ensure that these increases are implemented in line with the agreement,” the union assured its members. It warned that failure by the government to comply would force the PSA to take measures to ensure that the state’s 1.3million employees receive their increases. During talks at the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) the government told labour it cannot implement the last leg of the agreement citing lack of resources and asked for the deal to be reviewed but this was unanimously rejected by unions. Last Wednesday at a special PSCBC council meeting, the government again requested the matter be discussed despite unions rejecting it. Public Service and Administration Minister Senzo Mchunu’s spokesperson Vukani Mbhele said on Tuesday that engagements were still going on with unions. The government’s proposed offer to its employees states that it wants to implement only 4.4% for salary levels one to eight. To achieve this, funds allocated for the 1.5% pay progression would be allocated for salary increases but this will not cover the entire 4.4%, with the shortfall to be supplemented by granting of capped leave, which will be redeemable upon retirement. The PSA said this effectively means that employees would be offered a 3% once-off non-pensionable gratuity for the first eight salary levels and that the shortfall of 1.4% will be redeemed in the form of 3.7 capped leave days upon retirement. There will be no cost-of-living adjustment for salary level nine to 12 and their 1.5% pay progression will be suspended for a year and workers will only receive a once-off 3% payment on their respective notches. According to the National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (Nupsaw), the employer indicated that it had budgeted R10 billion for pay progression. Unions demanded to know from the government’s negotiators at the PSCBC whether the agreement would be implemented today but refused to provide a firm commitment but reiterated that labour must reconsider its proposal. Public servants expect the government to increase their salaries by between 4.4% and 5.4% depending on salary level. Nupsaw’s Kagiso Makoe said the amount required to pay salary increases for the first eight levels is R15bn but the government only has R10bn, which is for notch progression. He said labour collectively rejected the employer’s offer and indicated that unions will utilise the dispute resolution mechanism outlined. Meanwhile, Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize said the country is bracing for the worst as the number of deaths as a result of Covid-19 has climbed to five and the government is preparing to conduct a massive testing and treatment campaign. According to Mkhize, KwaZulu-Natal has so far recorded two deaths while three were recorded in Gauteng, Western Cape and the Free State. At the same time, the country’s confirmed Covid-19 infections keep on rising with Mkhize saying there were 1353 cases and Gauteng was still the epicentre for the virus with over 600 cases. “The number (of deaths) is five, I did say So those are the numbers that we have, those are confirmed (deaths),” he said.

*Additional reporting by Sihle Mavuso Political Bureau