

Unions urge workers to join nationwide strike on International Day of Decent work



Cosatu has called on workers to join the Nationwide protest on International day of decent work. Picture: Bongani Mbatha/ African News Agency /ANA

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Trade Unions will tomorrow embark on a nationwide strike to demand urgent changes on various issues in the country which include decent salaries for workers, and employers to stop retrenching their staff members to increase profits.

October 7 is International Day of Decent Work and the Congress of South African Trade Unions's (Cosatu) provincial secretary Edwin Mkhize said the day would be used to highlight challenges that are affecting workers.

He said in KwaZulu-Natal, workers will be marching from King Dinuzulu Park in Durban.

“People should do their things on time and not say that they were inconvenienced by the march,” warned Mkhize.

He said this march would be more focused on the economy of the country which continues to favour the rich people.

Mkhize noted that companies were retrenching workers to cut costs in order to make more profits.

“We have a list of those companies,” he said.

Mkhize said most workers needed to choose between buying electricity and food, and salaries were going down instead of increasing as the cost of living was high.

He said as the negotiating of salary season has started they want the government and municipalities to give the public servants decent salaries.

“We want the companies that have not been contributing to the pension funds of the workers to be held accountable. Some employees have told us that they had experienced delays when they wanted to withdraw their money from their pensions,” he said.

Mkhize urged workers to come out in numbers tomorrow to join the march.

The Public Servants Association KZN manager Mlungisi Ndlovu said they would also be joining the march under the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), in solidarity with other unions and organizations advocating for workers' rights.

“Our participation in the march underscores our commitment to: protecting jobs and preventing unfair retrenchments, promoting decent work, fair wages, and better working conditions, and advocating for policy changes that benefit workers and the broader society,” said Ndlovu.

He said the PSA was also concerned about the increasing trend of retrenchments in the private sector.

Ndlovu said while some companies were genuinely faced with financial difficulties others used retrenchments to boost profits at the expense of workers, undermining job security and worker's rights.

The provincial secretary of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu), Ayanda Zulu said they would also be joining the Cosatu's march on the basis that they also have workers who were not earning decent salaries.

“We have workers called Community Healthcare Workers who are providing primary healthcare in communities. During the Covid-19 pandemic they were key in contact tracing. They are still earning R4200. We are calling for the government to absorb them and put them on a salary level three scale of all workers in the public service,” said Zulu.

The KZN spokesperson for the South African National Taxi Council (Santaco) Sifiso Shangase said they were not affiliated with the protest. “Our vehicles would be on the road on Monday taking people to work,” said Shangase.

The Chief Executive of the National Employers' Association of South Africa (NEASA), Gerhard Papenfus has criticised the march. He said it boggled the mind that Cosatu, a “marginalised worker representative body for government employee was embarking on a pointless and self-serving endeavour harbouring under the delusion that it can impact any public discourse on any of the issues it allegedly wants to address”.

“What is even more ironic is that the tripartite alliance (the ANC, COSATU, and the SACP), with its inability to govern effectively, its business-hostile policies, and its obsession with its socialist ideology, is responsible for the weakened economic conditions which cause the retrenchments and the rise in living costs they now protest against,” said Papenfus.

He said protest action has been approved by the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) and is therefore protected.

“Any employee who wishes to participate in the protest action may do so and no disciplinary steps may be taken against such employee,” added Papenfus.