

MEDIA RELEASE **2025 State of the Nation Address: PSA response**

DATE 07 February 2025

EMBARGO None

ENQUIRIES communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 240 000 public-sector employees, acknowledges President Cyril Ramaphosa's State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered on 6 February 2025. Whilst the PSA welcomes the President's emphasis on unity, cooperation, and economic recovery, the Union remains concerned about the practical implementation of key policies, particularly those that directly impact public servants and the broader working class.

The President's announcement that the remains of 14 South African soldiers who tragically lost their lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo will be returned home is acknowledged as a meaningful step towards closure for their loved ones and a recognition of their service to the nation. The PSA honours the courage and sacrifice of these soldiers.

The PSA fully supports the call for a government that works for the people, built upon a professional, ethical, and competent public service. Government's commitment to strengthening the Public Service Commission and improving graduate recruitment must, however, be coupled with tangible action. Public servants continue to face significant challenges such as understaffing, wage stagnation, and the erosion of collective bargaining rights. These systemic issues undermine the delivery of public services and contribute to growing dissatisfaction amongst employees. Any efforts to professionalise the public service must therefore include fair and equitable compensation, job security, and meaningful engagement with unions.

The President's focus on reforming municipalities and local government is long overdue. The PSA has repeatedly raised concerns about deteriorating service delivery, financial mismanagement, and corruption at municipal level. The proposal to establish professionally managed, ring-fenced utilities for water and electricity services welcomed. The PSA, however, stresses that this will only succeed if there is strong accountability and a commitment to eliminating political interference in these essential services. Without proper governance and management, these initiatives risk being undermined.

The PSA acknowledges government's intention to invest over R940 billion in infrastructure over the next three years, which is essential for boosting the economy. Whilst infrastructure development is crucial, it will not be sufficient to address South Africa's high unemployment rate.

The PSA further urges government to ensure job security for public servants, fair wages, and protection from exploitative labour practices. Continued delays in resolving wage disputes and implementing collective agreements undermine trust in government's commitment to improving the livelihoods of its employees. Public servants deserve the security and respect that comes with being treated fairly in the workplace.

In respect of fighting corruption, the PSA takes note of government's commitment to fostering ethical leadership and addressing state capture. The PSA, however, believes that more decisive action is needed to hold accountable those implicated in financial mismanagement and corruption, especially at state-owned enterprises. Public servants who work tirelessly to uphold service delivery should not bear the brunt of leadership failures and systemic inefficiencies.

The PSA welcomes efforts to modernise South Africa's digital public infrastructure but stresses that many citizens still struggle to access basic services such as water, electricity, and healthcare. Digital transformation should not replace physical service delivery but rather complement it to ensure accessibility for all South Africans, including those in rural areas, who often bear the brunt of service delivery failures. Public-sector workers are essential to making these services accessible and effective, and their role should not be diminished by an over-reliance on digital solutions.

As South Africa moves forward, the PSA calls on government to engage meaningfully with labour unions, ensuring the implementation of fair labour practices and protecting public servants' rights. A truly capable, ethical, and developmental state must place workers at the centre of governance and decision-making processes. The PSA remains committed to advocating for the Union's members and holding government accountable for the promises made in the SONA. Government must take concrete steps to improve the working conditions, job security, and dignity of public servants.

In addressing the country's water crisis, the PSA welcomes government's commitment to investing in water resources and expediting delayed projects such as the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and the uMkhomazi Dam. The PSA, however, warns that effective oversight is essential to prevent corruption and inefficiencies that have historically plagued water infrastructure projects. Transparent, accountable management is critical to ensuring that these investments lead to a sustainable and reliable water supply for all South Africans.

The PSA supports government's focus on economic transformation and job creation. Whilst initiatives such as the R20 billion transformation fund for Black-owned businesses and SMEs are commendable, the success of these initiatives will depend on transparent management, accessibility to deserving businesses, and ensuring fair competition. Long-term job creation will require structural changes to the economy, with particular focus on high-growth industries such as renewable energy, green manufacturing, and the digital economy.

Whilst the SONA outlined bold reforms and significant progress in many areas, the PSA emphasizes that their success hinges on effective implementation, fair treatment of workers, and a commitment to safeguarding public-sector jobs. The PSA will continue to monitor government's progress and advocate for tangible improvements in the working conditions, economic justice, and service delivery that affect all South Africans.

END