

**MEDIA RELEASE:** **World Ranger Day: PSA pays tribute to unsung heroes**

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On 31 July, World Ranger Day is celebrated to honour the brave men and women who dedicate their lives to serve as guardians of our natural world, despite facing significant risks and challenges.

Rangers across sectors work tirelessly to protect wildlife and natural habitats, often facing significant risks and challenges in the line of duty. The PSA, as a representative Union of public-sector employees, appreciates the incredible work of Rangers. Their dedication and bravery are commended as they continue to risk their lives in the interest of preservation of the planet's biodiversity. On average, around 150 rangers die each year in the line of duty. The PSA pays tribute to the Rangers who paid the highest price or were injured in the line of duty.

Rangers play a crucial role in conservation efforts that drive a flourishing tourism industry. They also stand at the frontline of combatting poaching, illegal logging, and wildlife trafficking. Their work involves patrolling protected areas, monitoring wildlife populations, and engaging with local communities to promote conservation awareness. The job of a Ranger comes with many dangers inherent to the profession. Rangers often operate in remote and often hostile environments, facing threats from poachers and wild animals. Despite these challenges, they remain dedicated to their mission, driven by a deep passion for nature and wildlife.

The PSA, as a caring Union, recently took on the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism to provide Rangers with essential working tools, including communication devices and uniforms. Rangers' importance is often ignored by government as their work is not as evident as that of other professions that are in the face of people. Rangers, despite spending most of their time away from home in protecting wildlife against poachers, were scarcely mentioned by government in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The PSA appeals to government to urgently address the Rangers' circumstances. Accommodation provided to Rangers are often in a deplorable state that do not comply with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and *Firearms Act*. Understaffing presents challenges to Rangers as their numbers were reduced from 1 300 to 350 in Limpopo as an example of chronic understaffing. The use of Expanded Public Works Programme workers and interns cannot replace Rangers in executing law-enforcement activities, firefighting, dealing with problem animals. Understaffing thus requires urgent attention.

Rangers must be honoured as the true heroes of society. On World Ranger Day, the PSA expresses sincere gratitude to the workers tasked with upholding the country's wildlife and natural habitats whose sacrifices go unnoticed, despite the immeasurable impact.

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