MEDIA RELEASE

14 July 2024

Minister Meth hits the ground running

Minister of Employment and Labour, Ms Nomakhosazana Meth has hit the ground running as she met senior management of the department, presented the Annual Performance Plan 2024/2025 at the Portfolio Committee on Employment and Labour and tabled the Budget Vote last week. She was accompanied by her Deputy Ministers; Mr Ntuthuko Sibiya and Ms Phumzile Mgcina throughout.

As she was introducing herself and the deputy ministers to the senior management of the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL), Meth commented: “I appreciate the fact that when the Acting DG introduced the department to me, she referred to it as the DEL family”. Indeed, at the end of the two days allocated for the overview presentation of DEL to the Minister and her Deputy Ministers, they felt the ethos of one family working together at play.

It became apparent from her sentiments that Minister Meth is geared up in a business unusual mode in order to take the work of the department to greater heights. The Minister emphasised, that there is value add in the work that the department and its entities are doing for the people of South Africa, but little is known by the public. Therefore, intentional work needs to be invested in creating more awareness.

DEL family through its programmes will continue to ensure its mandate is carried out in the sevenths administration.

1. **Administration** will continue to provide corporate support in line with applicable pieces of legislation like the PFMA to the core programmes of DEL and entities.
2. **Inspection and Enforcement Services (IES)** will continue to carry out the mandate of protecting workers through the enforcement of applicable employment law.
3. **Public Employment Services (PES)** will through its work provide assistance to companies and workers to adjust to changing labour market conditions and to regulate private employment agencies.
4. **Labour Market Policy & Industrial Relations (LP&IR)** remains critical in the facilitation and establishment of an equitable and sound labour relations environment and promotion of South Africa’s interest in international labour matters.
5. **Supported Employment Enterprises (SEE)** will strive for sustainable and active involvement of persons with disabilities in employment.
6. **Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF)** will continue to provide and improve its services striving to alleviate poverty though the provision of short-term unemployment insurance to workers who qualify.
7. **Compensation Fund (CF)** remains steadfast in its provision of social security to all qualifying employees who are injured at work or who have contracted diseases at work.
8. **Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA)** will not tire in providing the system of robust labour relations and fair labour practices including the preservation of jobs;
9. **National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC)** will continue to promote sound social dialogue platform for social partners: government, organised labour, organised business, and community organisations;

10. **Productivity South Africa (PSA)** will strive towards enhancing competitiveness and preserving jobs; and inspire productivity.

Following on the two days that the Minister Meth and her deputy ministers spent with senior management of DEL family, she committed to a separate session with provinces represented by the Chief Directors Provincial Operations (CDPOs), and to hold one-on-one meetings with all the branches of the department and its entities where she and the deputy ministers will be provided with more detailed presentations to better their insights about the DEL family.

Furthermore, other decisions taken from the two days meeting included improvements on the marketing and communication of departmental services, consolidation of the Minister's first 100 days in office programme, meeting with other stakeholders like the NEDLAC constituencies, boards of entities, investigate the possibility of overhauling the ICT system of the department, detailed narrative report about the financial position of department, detail what DEL is doing about the plight of the ex-mineworkers, revision of the current gender target of 47% female against 53% male to 50%/50% target, celebratory programmes for all entities birthdays starting with CCMA on 11 November 2024, strengthening of service delivery and Inter-governmental Relations (IGR) including partnerships with sister departments, local government, traditional leadership and private sector.

In her engagement with the Minister of Home Affairs, Meth said: "We have agreed to strengthen the relationship between Department of Employment and Labour and his Department on inspections continuing the fight against the employment and exploitation of undocumented foreign nationals.

Elevating the employment mandate of the department in her Budget Vote speech, Meth stated; "The department through the Labour Activation Programme (LAP) plans to recruit a further 360 000 unemployed people into skills development and employability enhancement programmes that will guarantee their employment at the end of their training period." She said this total, when achieved, will bring the overall number of people recruited and trained to 1 640 000 in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) period.

During the 06th Administration, the Department announced and launched plans to further strengthen measures to mitigate unemployment in the country through our Labour Activation Programme (LAP) - Training for Employment and Entrepreneurship programme, Meth said. She further stated that, DEL has allocated an amount of R23.8 billion nationally through LAP, targeting over 2 million unemployed beneficiaries. She said Phase one targets 333 recommended projects to provide training, small enterprise support and employment opportunities to 704,000 unemployed people. These multi-year opportunities will continue to run between 12 and 36 months.

She further commended the Inspection and Enforcement Services (IES) branch for recovering R254 million from non-compliant employers. Meth said over R120 million was recovered on behalf of vulnerable workers and the balance of R134 million was made up of money recovered from companies who failed to pay their dues to Unemployment Insurance

Fund (UIF) and Compensation Fund (CF). She cautioned companies that were not compliant to improve as the inspectorate will continue to conduct national high impact inspections that target both problematic and high risk areas.

The Minister said the rebranding and repositioning of the inspectorate remains a priority, “requisite tools of trade will be procured for the inspectors. As part of digitalisation and modernising the department, we have also seen global innovations, which we intend rolling out, through the use of drones, sensors, and wearable technology, to improve occupational health and safety, as well as the use of virtual reality and simulation training to enhance the skills of Health and Safety representatives in workplaces, so that they assist in preventing workplace injuries and diseases”.

Meth said the Department, in its effort of strengthening the UIF and CF, was implementing the recommendations of an unbundling process. She said this will be focusing on stabilizing, modernizing, and repurposing the UIF and CF.

Commenting on policy, she was disturbed by the slow pace of transformation of the labour market. The implementation and enforcement of the proposed Employment Equity Amendments which provide for sector targets becomes a critical policy imperative and a game-changer, Meth said. She said the Department will during September 2024, consider and approve the National Labour Migration Policy and the Draft Employment Services Amendment Bill for Parliament’s consideration.

Employment and Labour Deputy Minister, Ntuthuko Sibiya reflecting on the work of entities he said, the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), since its establishment in 1996 has dealt with (4,039,265) cases, and its settlement rate has consistently hovered around 70%.

Sibiya said the majority of cases concern unfair dismissal, followed by unfair labour practices, collective bargaining, and severance pay.

The average turnaround time for conciliation is 26 days, instead of the 30 days as stipulated in the Labour Relations Act and average turnaround time for arbitration is 31 days, compared to 90 days, he said.

According to Sibiya as part of strengthening CCMA’s capacity, the Department has tabled a number of labour law reforms to ensure that CCMA’s efficiencies are strengthened, such as empowering CCMA to establish rules to expedite certain processes.

Sibiya said the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) had over the past three decades of democracy, consistently held a central position in fostering social dialogue between social partners - the Government, Organised Labour, Organised Business, and Community constituencies - in problem-solving and negotiation to tackle a spectrum of economic, labour, and developmental challenges confronting the nation.

“To ensure NEDLAC's work is strengthened, the organization has amended its funding protocols to remain fit for purpose,” Sibiya said.

Reflecting on Productivity SA, Sibiya said the organisation established in terms of the Employment Services Act, No. 4 of 2014 has as at December 2023, through its Business Turnaround and Recovery Programme (BT&R) programme enrolled 250 companies for assistance in enabling the turnaround and sustainability of the companies. “The programme effectively saved 20 723 jobs. The 250 companies that were enrolled in the BT&R programme were spread across the width and breadth of South Africa. 1 524 jobs were created resulting in 22 247 jobs being saved overall,” he emphasised.

“The achievements of CCMA, NEDLAC, and Productivity SA exemplify the dedication to fostering inclusive growth, equitable opportunities, and effective governance. The Department of Employment and Labour looks forward to continue to support these institutions in their mission to build a prosperous South Africa for all.

Employment and Labour Deputy Minister, Phumzile Mgcina reiterated the need to establish partnerships in the quest to reduce high unemployment levels. She said in contributing to employment, especially that of persons with disability: “We are currently exploring the establishment of one more factory in Mpumalanga. These Supported Employment Enterprises (SEEs) employ youth, men and women of different races with various disabilities and produce very good quality furniture, hospital linen and steel products”.

Mgcina said the Department would work closely with the Presidency in the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, to coordinate public employment programs and to search for innovative solutions that can bring about tangible changes in this area.

In closing her Ministerial Committee meeting, Meth highlighted the employment mandate of the department as one of the priority areas of the 07th Administration to fight the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

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Issued by: Department of Employment and Labour