

Organised Labour Input: Nedlac Annual Summit – 06 September 2024

COSATU General Secretary Solly Phetoe

Programme Director,

The Executive Director of Nedlac, Lisa Seftel,

Leadership of Government, Business, Labour, Community,

2024 marks the 30th anniversary of our young democracy. It is appropriate as we gather here today, that we have concluded as social partners and government at Nedlac a 30-year review of our achievements and challenges, and more importantly our recommendations to the new 7th administration.

As we gather today, it is important to remember our fundamental challenges as a nation, namely a 42% general and a 60% youth unemployment rate, resulting levels of poverty and inequality, endemic levels of crime and corruption, struggling public and municipal services, and fragile economic growth.

We welcome to the Nedlac family, our new Minister for Labour, comrade Meth and her Deputies Sibiya and Mgcina.

We look forward to working with the Minister and the Department to ensure that we conclude the 7th administration with modern fit for purpose Unemployment Insurance and Compensation of Occupational Injuries and Diseases Funds where workers do not struggle to receive their monies.

Similarly, we must prioritise giving the CCMA the resources it needs to fulfill its mandate to help resolve workplace grievances and boost labour market stability.

Nedlac is South Africa's legislated social dialogue where government and social partners seek to find consensus. It is in this spirit, that we must ensure our proposed amendments to the labour laws strengthen, not weaken workers' hard-won rights.

A discussion is long overdue on the role of the Employment mandate of the Department and how we can ensure government's employment programmes provide a pathway to finding decent permanent jobs for its participants. This includes raising the EPWP and CWP to the National Minimum Wage level.

Many critics have questioned the relevance of Nedlac, yet it is here where the Eskom Social Compact was finalized giving momentum for the debt relief package that today is helping Eskom shift its focus to maintenance and ending loadshedding.

The new Minister of Transport has brought renewed focus to rebuilding Transnet and Metro Rail. We must reflect on how we can do more to support this process as without an efficient rail network and ports, our economy will not take off.

A closer involvement is needed to ensure the new Mining Rights Application System is fast tracked to turn this critical industry around and stem the flood of retrenchments.

A frank discussion is needed on an urgent plan to turn local government around. On every indicator, it is in deep trouble and yet we hear little besides PowerPoint presentations on what will be done to save this key arm of service delivery.

More needs to be done to revive our engagements on how we can ease the pain of the rising cost of living on workers and the economy in line with President Ramaphosa's call to Parliament recently.

A year ago, South Africa's continue membership of the African Growth and Opportunities Act was in freefall. After strategic interventions by government, business and labour and our hosting of the AGOA Forum in November, today the discussion is on how AGOA can be strengthened, and workers' rights be placed on its agenda.

Similar efforts are needed to expedite the African Continental Free Trade Area as well as to reinforce the industrial master plans if we are to ensure the reindustrialization of our economy and to win the war against unemployment.

Government will table the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement at Parliament in a few weeks. Whilst our engagements with Treasury on the Budget are important, we need to elevate them to yield more meaningful interactions and to ensure the Budget stimulates the economy, creates jobs and capacitates the state.

We are pleased that from 1 September, labour's struggles to reform our pensions and ensure workers' needs occupy the centre of this debate have finally begun. Whilst the two pot reforms do not include all that we proposed, they provide the foundation for further engagements to ensure pensions support workers during their careers and in retirement.

We must do more as this collective to resolve the crisis of unclaimed pensions as well as to deal with employers in both the public and private sector who fail to pay workers' third-party benefits.

Leadership of government, some ill-informed critics of Nedlac are quick to dismiss it and often seek to undermine the Nedlac Act and bypass it when tabling legislation at Parliament. We hope this shameful behaviour will be a thing of the past.

Nedlac has time and again prove its value to government in enriching important legislation from the Public Procurement Act boosting locally produced goods to tackling corruption, to the Carbon Tax finding a fair path for a Just Transition.

It is Nedlac that forged consensus between government, business and labour on the historic National Minimum Wage raising the wages of 6 million workers.

During COVID-19 it was this collective that helped ensure R65 billion was released from the UIF helping 5.7 million workers, the introduction of the SRD Grant uplifting 8 million citizens and laying the foundation for a Basic Income Grant and oversee a highly successful health and safety campaign that saw more than 60% of society vaccinate saving millions of lives and jobs.

Nedlac symbolises the value of social compact where all parties contribute towards a common objective. We are here to help ensure the 7th administration is a success and most importantly that we give hope to our people that a better life is coming.

As I conclude, allow us to pay special tribute to two of our comrades here today, our former Overall Convenors of Organised Labour, Ebrahim Patel and Bheki Ntshalintshali. We are pleased that they could join us today to share with us some of the many lessons from their tenure.

We hope that they will continue to provide us with counsel over the years ahead, and that I will see them on Monday to give them tasks to build the labour movement.

Lastly allow us to thank the ED, Lisa Seftel, in particular, for her relentless efforts to steer Nedlac and to whip all of us into line and in shape. As well as her team for giving social partners their support and for tolerating our weaknesses.

Baie dankie. Enkosi. Thank you.