

Address by Labour Constituency Leader at Nedlac: Bheki Ntshalintshali at the Opening of the Presidential Jobs Summit, Gallagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg

4 October 2018

Programme Director, Nedlac Executive Director,

President Ramaphosa,

Minister in the Presidency,

Minister of Labour,

Leaders of Organised Business,

Leaders and representatives of the Community constituent in Nedlac,

Leaders of Organised Labour,

Director of the ILO in Pretoria Office,

Distinguished guests, colleagues and comrades,

On occasions like this, compels us to shift aside what makes to differ and focus more on what make us to be one nation, one country and put the interest of those most vulnerable above everything else.

In our view today's gathering symbolises a commitment to discuss the future of our country in a very literal sense.

In 2017, we submitted section 77 Notice in Nedlac prompted by the massive job losses and increasing unemployment. The outcome of that engagement was the call for a job summit.

Today, we want to acknowledge President Ramaphosa for listening to our call by convening this Presidential Job summit.

Questions have been asked whether this will do justice. Many people and opinionists have already predicting that this will be another talk shop and that there will be nothing tangible will come out of this engagement.

This may only be possible if our coming together is to share platitudes and do not have real commitment to turn around this economy and fix the enormous problem of unemployment.

Our response is that this is not an event but a process, needing courage and people who are committed to walk the talk – not faint hearted people.

Nedlac constituents thought deeply on how the process of engagement should evolve leading to the summit. We agreed that for it to succeed it should be handled different from the previous other but should lean on the process we followed when we responded to the global crisis in 2009.

We want to this opportunity to thank all those who participated on the work that today presented us with the document to consider. In the process others have been hurt but they should find comfort to bring us where we are today.

There have been times where Organised Labour almost pulled out, but we remember that social dialogue is not easy. That trade union movement by its nature and its character is about social dialogue. Hence it surprises us when you hear others shouting proudly of boycotting engagement.

President Ramaphosa in your State of the Nation Address which Organised Labour had no contribution in writing it you said and I quote “the summit will need to take extra ordinary measurers to create jobs on a scale we have never before seen in our country”. Indeed we share the same sentiments.

Let us be reminded on what is the problem we are trying to address. It is an economy that is not growing as the pace required addressing the needs of our people. In that, it is shedding jobs on a massive scale at the same that it is producing or creating millionaires.

There are about 25.9 m economically active people. Out of this, 16.2m are employed of whom 50% earn less than R5000 a month (working poor). Over 9m are unemployed whose majority is the youth, some of whom no hope or prospect of working in their entire life time has.

Implications of this are devastating. Unemployment is primary cause to poverty and inequality, contributing immensely to social dysfunctional and political instability. Unemployment is an assault to the social fibre of our communities and human

dignity. It drives and exposes our youth to gangeterism, crime, violence etc. this is a crisis.

We are mentioning this, not because no one knows about but we want to drive the point that we have a crisis on our hands. We all know about these challenges. We have talked about them. We have debated for a long time and differed on how best we can address them. This gathering is not about debating them. It was planned in manner that avoids paralysis by analysis. Hence the purpose of our coming together is to develop and adopt solutions that are clear and measurable. If we cannot measure them, we should probably not adopt them.

Your guidance President was that this process is not a process for lamentation but a forum to provide concrete suggestions. For us as labour, is that in order to find a solution to any problem the cardinal pre-requisite is first, to fully comprehend what is the problem, the nature and the extent and the implications of not addressing it.

Coming to this summit we had our own demands which could be summarized as follows:

- We wanted a summit to engage on the problems we are facing-in a manner constituencies appreciated the problems faced by workers and the unemployed and provided solutions.
- Wanted a moratorium on retrenchments across all sectors of our economy, and the filling of critical vacancies in the public sector.
- We wanted bold decisive interventions in the sectors which are shedding jobs.
- We urgently wanted the training lay off scheme that is efficient and can save workers jobs.
- We wanted a regular space under the presidency for social partners to engage on solving the unemployment crises.
- For us, we demanded changes to the macro economic framework to address our quest for broad based industrialisation.
- We also wanted systematic interventions to address inclusive growth and reindustrialisation.
- We wanted an end to the investment strike by business at the same time labour is engaging itself on how to utilise its workers capital in a manner that can contribute to labour creation.

- We want a discussion on a just transition not only on climate change but also on the future of work and the 4th industrial revolution.

It gives us pleasure that at last the Nedlac constituents fully comprehend the unemployment crisis. It goes to say the problem is not insurmountable. It can be addressed and it will be attended to.

We are encouraged that all constituents appreciate that the time is not on our side. This in our view is very important.

Secondly, the understanding that addressing economy and unemployment challenges is not a once off or an event but a process, that needs leadership, time frames, assessment and evaluation along the way.

Thirdly, that capacity, coordination, reprioritisation and urgency are pre-requisite for any project to succeed.

Fourthly, that whatever agreement is reached, must be implemented and resources must be made available (financial and human).

Fifthly, the common understanding the negative and damaging impact of corruption that corruption anywhere pose the danger to the society everywhere. The pledge confirms that commitment.

The reports of our negotiators give us comfort that policies would be discussed in the next phase of engagement and we hope that all would walk the talk. But this phase is the foundation on what has to be urgently done to avoid a cliff or even a point of no return.

We have seen president that in the list of the people you have invited there are sections of the society that are not there. The student movement, faith based organisation, tradition healers. We understand your fear that some of those you invite refuse to attend, but when not invite they complain and threatens to attend. May we suggest that you keep inviting them so that they do not attend? Cont.