



## **NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LABOUR COUNCIL**

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Attention News Editors/Business and Labour reporters

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### **Nedlac's social partners contribution to fight the Covid19 pandemic recognised**

Johannesburg, South Africa: At Nedlac's 26th Annual National Summit in Johannesburg held yesterday, Minister of Employment and Labour, Thembelani Thulas Nxesi congratulated the social partners for their collective effort to fight the Covid19 pandemic.

Ms. Boitumelo Moloi, the Deputy Minister in the Department of Employment and Labour, was present at the summit. Speakers included Nedlac Executive Director Lisa Seftel, Valli Moosa, deputy chair of the Presidential Climate Change Coordinating Commission, economist Mzwanele Ntshwanti, economist, and Professor Koleka Mlisana, Chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) of Covid-19, and Executive Manager Research and Quality Assurance at the National Health Laboratory Service.

Overall community convenor Thulani Tshefuta, and labour convenor Bheki Ntshalintshali, and CEO for Business Unity South Africa Cas Coovadia also provided their reflections on behalf of their constituencies.

The summit is held annually to inform the public of achievements, reflect on the past year and identify issues for the year ahead. This year it was held online with a focus on the key issues facing South Africa including the economic crisis, high levels of unemployment, the imperative to address climate change and the impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

Minister Nxesi said that in such periods of economic social and political crisis "the need for social dialogue and strong institutions such as Nedlac become very apparent".

He said Nedlac facilitated an all-of-society response from the social partners in a number of areas including enhancing occupations health and safety to safeguard the workplace from Covid-19.

There is a consensus on the need to promote vaccinations to prevent further lockdown, loss of lives and livelihoods. There is further consensus



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that vaccinations is an effective way to do this and in the face of Omicron variant, social partners have put proposals to government on mandatory vaccination in workplace and only vaccinated allowed entry.

The Minister quoted the position of the Nedlac Rapid Response Task which states that health and safety direction of his department should be strengthened so that vaccination can become mandatory where a risk assessment at the workplace requires this.

While, the social partners believed that vaccine mandates will pass constitutional scrutiny, they supported the work of Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) to get a declarator from the Constitutional Court to seek an order for compulsory Covid-19 vaccination in the workplace, the minister said.

Seftel in her presentation on Nedlac's performance said: "The devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic would have been even more severe if it had not been for the collective efforts of the social partners on issues of relief, vaccinations and collaborating on regulations to safely open up the economy.

"The most important measures that all social partners agree on is that ramping up vaccinations, including through positive and negative incentives, is critical, as well as the ongoing promotions of pharmaceutical interventions," said Seftel.

The Unemployment Fund distributed over R63 billion in terms of the Covid-19 Ters benefits – supporting distressed employers and reaching millions of laid-off workers, their families, and injecting cash into local economies across the country.

Seftel said the social partners had responded speedily to the "Eight days in July" crisis in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in which various businesses were destroyed. The partners met to stabilize the country, securing essential supplies, provide relief and support the re-establishment of businesses.

After President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), Nedlac set up processes to track the implementation of commitments and collaborate in identified areas.



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Various structures were set up and areas of focus were identified, including the unlocking of blockages in freight and improving public transport.

Minister Nxesi told the summit how Nedlac should look ahead tackling various priorities including plugging the holes in the social protection safety net for the informal sector, gig workers and the vulnerable workers in general. He said people should be trained for technological change and the Fourth Industrial Revolution which was hugely disruptive of existing labour processes and employment patterns.

Minister Nxesi said Nedlac will be called upon to address issues of energy and sustainability. The country needed a plan for coal – and to negotiate a “just transition”. Valli Moosa, deputy chairperson of the Presidential Climate Commission invited to share his reflections on the impact of climate change, said that South Africa had significant opportunities in the climate transition as it had some of the best renewable energy resources in the world.

“The good news is that a future green economy will create more jobs in new low-carbon sectors than are lost in declining fossil fuel sectors,” he said.

Also presenting at the summit, Professor Koleka Mlisana, Executive Manager of the National Health Laboratory Services and Chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee, said that there were several lessons that had been learned from Covid-19 and previous pandemics.

She said the pandemic had biological and social drivers. While science was addressing the biological, behavioural modification is key for the social drivers. She added the antisocial drivers included the impact of alcohol on health systems and family structure; corruption and accountability related to COVID-19 resources.

There should be an “urgent plan to translate from containment to mitigation - learning to live with SARS-CoV-2”, she said.

In the responses of the social partners, Cas Coovadia, speaking for organised business said that while 2020-2021 was a challenging year due to Covid, the July unrest, the dwindling economy and the political climate, Nedlac had done well and should draw lessons from its interventions.



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Thulani Tshefuta, overall community convener, following the summit, said: "We must follow the economic patterns that inform the changing nature of work and adapt accordingly. We are also keen to see improved collective implementation of the commitments of ERRP by social partners."

Labour convenor Bheki Ntshalintshali said it was important for the public to reflect on Nedlac's performance report and give their feedback. He added it was a lost opportunity that government did not report on the performance or lack of progress of the ERRP (aimed at stimulating equitable and inclusive growth) which was implemented one year old.

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