

08 September 2023

Programme Director,

Deputy President of the Republic, Paul Mashatile,

Executive Director of Nedlac, Lisa Seftel,

Leadership of government, organised labour, business and community,

And the broader Nedlac fraternity,

Good morning,

It is a pleasure to be with you as we mark this important occasion for Nedlac.

Today is a moment for us to collectively reflect on what we have and have not been able to achieve over the past year. More importantly it must serve as a rallying point for us to deliberate together on the challenges we must endeavour to overcome.

At times some forget why we gather under the Nedlac umbrella. Our fundamental mandate at all times is to resolve the ticking time bomb of unemployment. No society can sustain itself when 4 out of 10 citizens, 6 out of 10 youth cannot find a job.

We cannot be proud as a nation when we remain the most unequal in the world, nor when despite all our efforts since 1994, we witness rising levels of poverty. It is worse when we reflect on the damage that state capture has done to the state and economy as the toll it and our legacies of apartheid have done to our moral fabric as a nation.

We have no excuse for these setbacks when we consider South Africa's natural endowments, our infrastructure and our people's passion to work.

Some critics are tempted to mock Nedlac as a place where policies go to die.

The facts and experiences of millions of workers and businesses tell a different story.

6 million farm, domestic, construction, retail, fuel, security and other workers who not long ago were paid as little as R6 an hour, are today entitled to the National Minimum Wage of R25.42. This is not a living wage, but a foundation from which we will now seek to raise the minimum wage to the level of a living wage. Whilst we applaud these achievements, we need to do better to raise compliance levels to 100%.

Organised Labour is proud of the relentless efforts and synergy of minds we showed as the Nedlac community during the pandemic to ensure that we released over R64 billion from the Unemployment Insurance Fund to help 5.7 million workers care for their families and the mass roll out of the vaccination campaign that reached over 60% of society in particular the most vulnerable. That is a social compact in action!

Over the past year we have worked with government to prioritise and expedite key progressive legislation and ensure that Parliament will be able to pass them into law as the 6th administration wraps up its work.

Last Friday we welcomed the coming into effect of the Compensation of Occupational Injuries and Diseases Amendment Act extending cover to over 900 000 domestic

workers and increasing protections for all workers as well as the Employment Equity Amendment Act requiring companies doing business with the state to be in compliance with the Employment Equity and the National Minimum Wage Acts.

Key bills we look to seeing enacted include the:

- National Health Insurance Bill ensuring quality and affordable healthcare for all.
- Expropriation Bill empowering the state to expedite land reform.
- Mine Health and Safety Amendment Bill further protecting mine workers.
- Public Procurement Bill establishing a single, transparent public procurement system for the entire state, boosting local procurement and tackling corruption.
- Companies Amendment Bill requiring the disclosure of the wage gap between the highest and the lowest paid workers as we push to narrow the wage gap.
- Employment Services Amendment Bill regulating migrant workers' employment.

As we enter the final stretch of this administration, we must accelerate our interventions to turn South Africa around. Workers cannot afford complacency. We must in the Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement and the February Budget:

- Allocate additional support to Eskom to reduce and end loadshedding.
- Undertake urgent interventions to secure and rebuild Transnet and Prasa.
- Overhaul collapsing municipalities and embattled State-Owned Enterprises.
- Provide more resources to SARS to tackle tax evasion and conduct lifestyle audits as well as the SAPS, NPA and courts to combat crime and corruption.
- Extend the Presidential Employment Programme to accommodate 1 million active participants by October and 2 million by February.
- Raise the SRD Grant to the Food Poverty Line and link its recipients to skills and job opportunities.

The economy will not grow by some miracle with a business-as-usual approach nor will it rebound with an approach that chokes the state of the resources it needs to provide quality public services that businesses, workers and communities depend on.

2024 will be uncharted waters, it is incumbent upon this leadership here to help steer the nation. Some may be tempted to grandstand and offer slogans, others may prefer to lament, neither will create a single job or rebuild a single public services.

It is important we be honest amongst ourselves. Government needs to do better, to not allow Bills that have left Nedlac to gather dust for years on the desks of Ministers when they should be in Parliament.

Business needs to ensure that employers embrace their responsibilities under our labour laws and seek ways to create jobs. Community needs to mobilise residents to protect public infrastructure and pay for services. We as labour must ensure our workplaces comply with our labour laws and expose corruption where we see it.

Ours is to offer solutions and collectively work to implement them. The colours of our t-shirts differ but we all need a South Africa where everyone can enjoy that better life.

Allow me to conclude by thanking the Executive Director, Lisa Seftel and her team. They continue to do us proud. They are consistent, dedicated and raise the standards of Nedlac to new heights each year. Lisa in particular has been a breath of fresh air and a relentless warrior, holding all of us accountable.

It is important that we also appreciate the partnerships we have developed with our colleagues in government, business and community, and of course within organised labour too. We applaud all of your efforts on behalf of workers.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge how you have welcomed me personally into the Nedlac community since I took over as the Overall Convenor of Organised Labour and to honour the legacies left by my predecessor, comrade. Bheki Ntshalintshali.

Thank you very much. Matla!