

NATIONAL

Paul Mashatile blames apartheid for SA's 'racialised' labour force

'We have inherited a labour force characterised by racial and gender inequities, skills shortages and high unemployment rates particularly among Africans'

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Deputy president Paul Mashatile. Picture: ALAISTER RUSSELL

Deputy president Paul Mashatile has become the third ANC politician in as many days to blame apartheid for socioeconomic ills dogging the country.

Addressing the annual national summit of the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) in Midrand on Friday, Mashatile hailed the policy formulation body for being at the forefront of shaping the labour market since the dawn of democracy.

"You have also promoted inclusion, consensus, and sustained socioeconomic development in SA through your persistent efforts. However, our labour market has experienced several obstacles," Mashatile said.

"The current condition of the labour market is indicative of the abiding legacy of our apartheid past, which presents a significant challenge today. We have inherited a labour force characterised by racial and gender inequities, skills shortages and high unemployment rates particularly among Africans."

In a bid to transform the workplace, the government passed the Employment Equity Amendment Act in April. The legislation allows employment and labour minister Thulas Nxesi to set employment equity targets for specific economic sectors, and to prescribe demographic targets for employers with more than 50 employees.

Companies seeking to do business with the government will need a certificate of compliance. In setting the targets, the minister must consult with the relevant sector stakeholders and take advice from the Commission for Employment Equity.

In June, Nxesi hailed a settlement agreement on the law as "groundbreaking", saying it demonstrated the role social dialogue could fulfil in promoting social justice. It stemmed from a complaint that trade union Solidarity lodged in 2021 with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a UN agency that deals with social justice and sets international labour standards, in which it complained that the country's employment equity legislation put too much emphasis on race to determine who should be "hired, red or promoted".

The ILO recommended the CCMA, the country's dispute resolution body, facilitate the dispute between the government and Solidarity. Solidarity chair Flip Buys has said the deal meant the government and companies may not use race to determine who is hired, red or promoted: "They must use a more nuanced approach. Race cannot be the only factor."

Meanwhile, Mashatile, who is also deputy president of the ANC, told the Nedlac summit the Covid-19 pandemic had further intensified economic setbacks, "resulting in increased unemployment and loss of jobs". "Nevertheless, we are pleased to note that the unemployment rate has declined to 32.6% in the second quarter of this year, down from 32.9% in the first quarter."

Mashatile's apartheid remarks come two days after co-operative and traditional affairs minister Thembu Nkandimeng addressed a summit of the SALocal Government Association (Salga) in Boksburg on Tuesday, blaming "evil apartheid" for the slew of service delivery failures plaguing the embattled local government sector.

Social development minister Lindiwe Zulu last week blamed apartheid for the tragic deaths of 77 people who died when a ve-storey, hijacked building caught re in the Johannesburg CBD.

ANC politicians seem to be upping the ante on blaming apartheid for the government's ineptitude as the country is set to hold its provincial and national elections in 2024, where the ANC's electoral support is expected to drop below 50%, according to several polls, including one by the governing party itself.

Update: September 8 2023

This article has been updated with new information.

mkentanel@businesslive.co.za

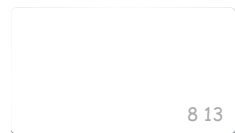

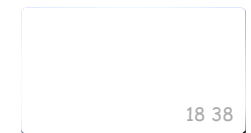
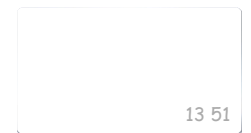

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