

Date: September 08, 2023

Attention: News Editors/Business and Labour Reporters

Nedlac social partners respond to poly-crisis circumstances with a commitment to greater collaboration

Johannesburg, South Africa: With South Africa experiencing unforeseen events with greater frequency and intensity, the 28th National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) Annual Summit focussed on how the country can be more prepared for crisis-type situations in addition to our ongoing systemic challenges.

The clarion call from speakers at the summit was that a unified and proactive response was needed to deal with crises such as flooding and fires.

The Summit, themed “Resilience in the face of adversity: Social partners’ preparedness to manage crises”, heard Nedlac Executive Director, Lisa Seftel, speak on how South Africa is facing a poly-crisis.

“And a poly-crisis calls for a poly-response,” she told the Summit at Gallagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg.

Giving the keynote address, the Deputy President of South Africa, Paul Mashatile, reiterated the challenges the country faces.

“We can’t wish some of the sad features of our country away,” he said.

“Instead, we have to work at two levels – firstly, prepare better for what we can do to save lives and livelihoods when these crises occur and secondly, address the systemic issues, such as climate change and improved access to water,” he said.

Social partners and speakers at the Summit reflected on their efforts at collaboration over the last year and emphasised the need to intensify working together. The Deputy President said he was encouraged by moves towards social compacting like the recent commitment of more than 115 CEOs to work with the government to help reconstruct the economy.

The Nedlac Annual Report for the 2022/23 financial year was released at the Summit. The Minister of Employment and Labour, Thembelani Thulas Nxesi, welcomed the report and the achievements made by Nedlac in inputting into policy and legislation. He, however, voiced his concern about the slow progress of labour law reforms which means that proposed changes to labour legislation will not get to Parliament during this term of office.

Nxesi welcomed moves to make Nedlac fit for purpose by revising the Nedlac Constitution and Nedlac Bill. This will lead to long-awaited changes to issues of representativity in Nedlac without diminishing the stature of the significant stakeholders.

He also congratulated Nedlac on receiving an unqualified audit for the third year in a row with reduced findings and welcomed the South African Federation of Trade Unions into the ranks of organised labour at Nedlac.

The Nedlac’s Executive Director, Lisa Seftel reported on the performance of Nedlac, including the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) which is being housed at Nedlac. In the past year, the PCC have been seized with

making policy recommendations including on the just transition, increasing knowledge and reaching out to stakeholders and communities to socialise them on the impact of ignoring climate change.

The Summit saw the launch of the **COVID-19 Report: Learning the Lessons, creating a legacy** which detailed the lessons learnt by social partners in responding to the pandemic which can be applied to other crisis-type situations. This includes data-driven decision-making and building consensus on contentious issues such as lockdowns, mask-wearing and vaccination. The report also highlighted the need for employers and trade unions to pay more attention to occupational health and safety with respect to biological hazards that require improved ventilation.

A big part of Nedlac's work is inputting on draft bills. Nedlac's Parliamentary Tracker showed the progress of Bills considered by Parliament between 2015/16 and 2022/23. Forty-six Bills had been concluded, 14 had not yet been introduced to the National Assembly, four had been withdrawn, 11 were currently being considered by Parliament, three were awaiting consent and 14 had been signed into law.

Organised business, labour and community responded to Nedlac's performance and gave pointers that Nedlac should focus on going forward including greater preparedness and building resilience in the face of adversity.

Cas Coovadia, CEO of Business Unity South Africa urged the government to follow the money when addressing the crises of hijacked buildings in Gauteng and the recent deaths of 77 people in the Johannesburg Marshalltown fire.

The Summit heard that 90% of Southern Africa will experience drought with significant variability (extreme events) by the end of the century, with Dr Shafick Adams, Commissioner of the Presidential Climate Commission, saying that disasters, climate change and sustainable development were inextricably linked.

Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, founder of the Gift of the Givers, made an urgent appeal for a clear chain of command to tackle disasters and more resources such as firefighting equipment for disaster management units and communities that are often first responders.

Dr Tsakane Furumele, director of Communicable Disease Control at the Department of Health emphasised the importance of communication and information sharing in a presentation on government's response to the cholera epidemic earlier this year.

Martin Kingston, chairman of the steering committee of Business 4 South Africa, said that it was only by harnessing the skills, resources and commitment of social partners that “we will be able to avert the worst consequences of any crisis, often unanticipated, and achieve our potential as a country”.

Ends

For pictures go here: <https://nedlac.org.za/nedlac-annual-summit-2023/>

Issued by FBI Communications on behalf of Nedlac

For interviews contact Farhana Ismail on 0827876987/info@fbicommunications.com