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NAPTOSA STATEMENT ON STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS (SONA), 2022

NAPTOSA welcomes the frankness with which President Cyril Ramaphosa in his State of the Nation Address (SONA) 2022, confronted the problems facing our country, and outlined plans to tackle them. The speech conveyed a sense that, more than before, there is a serious commitment to get South Africa back on track.

We agree that poverty, unemployment and inequality are unacceptable components of our society. The extension of the R 350 p.m. Social Relief of Distress Grant is therefore supported as well as the fact that work will be done during this period to come up with a viable replacement. The placement of 10 000 TVET graduates in workplaces from April 2022, and the revitalized National Youth Service that envisages the creation of 50 000 youth employment opportunities are positive steps but will unfortunately not make a dent in our youth unemployment rate of 75%. The President's call for the exclusion of experience as a prerequisite for jobs to assist new graduates is wholeheartedly endorsed as this will greatly assist the youth with sustainable jobs.

While these initiatives are welcomed, it is clear that the only real way out of the unemployment challenge is through strong economic growth. It was therefore encouraging to hear a President for the first time acknowledge that business, and not government, creates jobs and that business is often hamstrung by too many regulations that are complicated, costly and difficult to comply with.

The mobilization of social partners – government, labour, business and communities – to create a comprehensive social compact over 100 days to focus on growing the economy, creating jobs and combating hunger is an ambitious project. We are fully supportive of this initiative and as part of FEDUSA expect to play our part in the establishment of this compact.

We agree with the President that infrastructure is a critical cog in our economic recovery. The plans announced for improving our electricity supply (unfortunately previous announcements on this have come to naught), improving water delivery (especially important to schools), upgrading rural road infrastructure, improving the operational efficiencies of our ports and revitalizing our rail transport system, if these can be achieved, will go a long way in supporting our economic recovery. Let's hope and pray that these plans will come to fruition as well as the plans to restore the health of State-owned Enterprises. We welcome the fact that there is to be an exercise to determine which of these entities are to be retained, consolidated or disposed of and to minimize political interference in them.

We are concerned that the President mentioned a school infrastructure delivery program only briefly. In this day and age, it is sad that the country's schools are characterized by crumbling infrastructure and overcrowded classrooms. Many of these schools, infringe on the very constitutional rights that the President made reference to. NAPTOSA calls on the Minister of Basic Education to focus on addressing these pertinent issues.

We welcome the President's position that all individuals and companies responsible for state capture must now be held to account. We hope to see swift action by the prosecution authorities. We also await the President's indication that he will by 30 June 2022 present a plan of action in response to the Zondo commission's recommendations.

Another positive commitment from the SONA is the empowerment of women as well as the promise to intensify the fight against Gender Based Violence. These are issues that NAPTOSA is extremely passionate about.

The President's firm commitment to switching off analogue broadcasting is positive after too many delays. Successful conclusion will enable considerable enhanced networks and could lower the cost of data as well as close possible gaps between the haves and the have nots.

On climate change, it was pleasing to learn that South Africa's climate targets are now compatible with the international requirement to limit warming to 1,5°.

As expected, COVID-19, its impact on the economy and society and the successes in combatting the pandemic to the point that there is an intension by Government to lift the State of Disaster, again received considerable attention, especially the role of the vaccination program. As a stout vaccination supporter, NAPTOSA was pleased to hear the President, even in a personal testimony, give credence to the role that vaccinations played in saving the lives of many people.

In closing his address to the nation, the President called on all stakeholders to forge a consensus to unite behind a shared determination to reform and rebuild our country. The President can count on NAPTOSA.

BASIL MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR