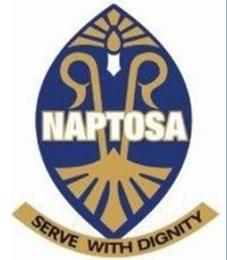




# NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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8 February 2023

## NAPTOSA'S PRE-STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS (SONA), 2023, STATEMENT

Thursday, 9 February 2023, is SONA 2023. Looking back over the year since SONA 2022, NAPTOSA is sad to say that we are unable to see improvement to our economy, to service delivery and ultimately the lives of citizens.

In our pre-SONA statement, we aim to focus on the issues that we expect the President to address in his SONA 2023 speech and what we would like to see him do about these issues.

We expect the same old "customers" (ESKOM, the economy, infrastructure, unemployment, crime and corruption) to again take centre stage, as it has the past number of years.

In 2022 the President cut short an international engagement to rush home to deal with the energy crisis when ESKOM pushed loadshedding to stage 6. Nowadays it seems to hardly garner any reaction or urgency from government – just another common occurrence.

We know the wheels of government turn slowly, but the response to the energy crisis has been ridiculously slow. How is it possible that in a year's time we have seen no improvement in the energy situation? – in fact, the situation has worsened with loadshedding now being a permanent feature of daily life.

NAPTOSA wishes to see the President, on behalf of government, take full responsibility for this untenable situation and not attempt to apportion blame to others. We expect him to display true leadership by announcing implementable action that would yield immediate alleviation of the energy crisis.

Unless the energy situation is addressed, economic recovery, which we desperately need to improve people's lives, will remain a pipe dream.

We also expect the President to (again) address the infrastructure dilemma. The Minister of Finance, last year, set aside specific funding for infrastructure improvement and referred to upgrades in roads, bridges, water and sewer works, transport, school infrastructure and hospitals and clinics. While we acknowledge that some of these upgrades have occurred, especially in those provinces devastated by the 2022 floods, the general deterioration of the country's aging infrastructure is outpacing any upgrade gains. Broken sewer plants, water supply problems, electricity supply problems (other than loadshedding) and worsening road conditions are the order of the day.

We need to see the President act decisively against those politicians and officials who are retarding, even undermining, infrastructure improvement. Underspending of infrastructure budgets can no longer be tolerated and those responsible should be replaced by competent persons. The same applies to the ineffective and inefficient spending of state finances, as recently demonstrated by the tourism marketing fiasco. To his credit, the President dealt swiftly with this matter.

Service delivery at municipal level is at an all-time low with many entities completely dysfunctional due to political rivalry and large-scale corruption. We believe the President should announce concrete plans to bring municipalities back to functionality.

With an economy hamstrung by the ongoing energy crisis, it is a miracle that there has been a decline, albeit small, in the unemployment rate in 2022. The President ought to cease this positive development to announce enhanced plans to address this ticking time bomb in society, especially with regard to the youth who are bearing the brunt.

Crime and violence continue to plague our society. This is not only a perception, but a reality, borne out by the crime statistics published by the SAPS from time to time. In education, the situation appears to be on a dangerous downward spiral with stabbings and shooting at or around schools becoming a common occurrence. We trust that school safety will find its way onto the President's agenda and that he will announce measures to arrest the situation.

All the above-mentioned negative issues impact the mental health of the population. Despondency, depression and stress permeate society. Many of the unemployed no longer make an effort to seek work. Effective government action to address these critical issues in the shortest possible time is therefore imperative, lest we end up with a society that is unable to dig itself out of the economic hole we find ourselves in.

Lastly, NAPTOSA hopes to see the President talk about the failed collective bargaining in the public service in 2022 and to give assurances that the employer will in 2023 approach the bargaining process in good faith and honour the 2021 collective agreement which determines that the monthly non-pensionable cash allowance being paid to public servants shall remain in force until a new agreement is reached between parties.

**BASIL MANUEL**  
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