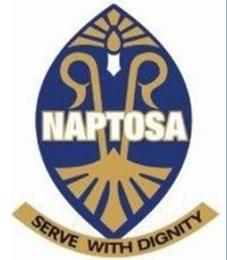




# NATIONAL NEWS FLASH



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NNF 05 of 2023 10 February 2023

## **NAPTOSA STATEMENT ON STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS (SONA), 2023**

As expected, the energy crisis dominated SONA 2023 with a not too surprising announcement that a State of Disaster has been declared to respond to the crisis. How this is going to assist in dealing with the crisis is not clear but will hopefully be spelt out in more detail when regulations are published.

It was bold of the President to recognise that the seeds of the current energy crisis were planted many years ago. The tragedy is that successive governments have allowed, what probably was a manageable problem years ago, to develop into a full-blown disaster.

The President's indication that important progress has been made in implementing the energy plan announced last year, is questionable, because the reality of daily loadshedding does not support this optimism.

That pervasive corruption and theft are being experienced at several power plants, prompting the establishment of a dedicated police team to deal with it, is deplorable. It again points to the fact that management at ESKOM is extremely poor and that no proactive work had been done to prevent the situation from developing.

What we take away from the President's statement on the energy crisis is that ongoing loadshedding, as opposed to intermittent loadshedding, is here to stay for the foreseeable future and that the political oversight of the crisis was just complicated further by the announcement that a Minister for Energy is going to be appointed in the Presidency.

We all know that a Minister cannot operate without bureaucratic support and that it takes time to establish such a structure, even a small one. So NAPTOSA is not holding its breath to any time soon see positive results from this development. This does fly in the face of reducing the bloated cabinet.

As far as infrastructure is concerned, the President alluded to many improvement projects that are underway, inter alia in respect of water supply, rail and road transport and bridges. These projects must somehow be undertaken covertly because in our view these infrastructure elements have generally further deteriorated over the past year.

According to the President the greatest obstacles to infrastructure investment are the lack of technical skills and project management capacity, prompting a R600m allocation for project preparation. This is all well and good, but it has been cadre deployment that has undermined the effective and efficient execution of infrastructure projects.

NAPTOSA welcomes the increase of the number of students to enter TVET Colleges as well as the contracting of 150 000 school assistants. What we need, however, is the creation of more full-time employment opportunities for our youth.

Matching the energy crisis is the poverty crisis in South Africa. We therefore support the announcement that the payment of the Social Relief of Disaster Grant will be further extended, with the rider that it should not be used by the State as employer in the next round of salary negotiations to motivate why a fair salary increase is not affordable. As taxpaying citizens, public servants are already making their contribution to the Grant extension.

Our expressed wish in our pre-SONA statement that school safety would become part of the President's agenda was partly realised by his assertion that schools must be safe to allow for effective learning. Unfortunately, the President chose only to focus on 55 000 toilets that have been built and not on the critical issue of increasing violence in and around schools. It is now up to the Minister of Basic Education to address this growing problem.

As with infrastructure, the President's claim that progress is being made in the fight against crime (arrests, convictions, and action against economic sabotage) is not borne out by the facts. It is also a serious indictment on the SAPS when the President must acknowledge that calls to the police's emergency number are not answered. The President should visit police stations to see how low the level of service really is.

Although not new information, it is still shocking to hear that more than 60% of municipalities are dysfunctional or in distress. In our pre-SONA statement, we expressed the hope that the President would announce effective measures to bring municipalities back to functionality. We do not believe that invoking the powers of national government where municipalities fail to meet their responsibilities is necessarily an effective measure, because many national departments themselves are struggling to be functional. It will be a matter of the blind leading the blind.

We note the intended rationalisation of government departments but will carefully monitor the process to ensure that it does not result in public service job losses.

NAPTOSA has always supported the professionalisation of the public service because we pride ourselves on the fact that this is one of our members' main qualities and we would like to see it displayed throughout the public service. The steps announced by the President in this regard (e.g. entry exams and integrity assessments) have unfortunately been mooted many times before. It remains to be seen if this time round it will translate to actual action.

In summary, NAPTOSA's assessment of SONA 2023 is that it was much of the same. We can only hope and pray to see implementation progress on the many issues facing our country.

**BASIL MANUEL**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**