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MINI PLENARY - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
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VOTE NO 31 - EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR

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PROCEEDINGS OF MINI PLENARY SESSION - COMMITTEE ROOM M46

Members of the mini-plenary session met at Committee Room M46 at 14:00.

The House Chairperson Mr W Horn took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Debate on Vote No 31 - Employment and Labour:

The MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR: Hon House Chairperson, Ministers and Deputy Ministers present here, hon members, the Acting Director-General of department and senior management, the entities of the department as led by their respective leaders, distinguished guests, fellow South Africans. Hon Chairperson, we present an abridged version of Budget Vote 31

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speech as a moral reckoning with the crisis of unemployment that continues to grip our country. It is a policy instrument for reform and an institutional roadmap for a department that must do more, with less, for more people.

We meet amid the daily struggles of millions of South Africans, who rise each morning with hope, but without work. Young people who possess qualifications yet lack opportunity. Families who stretch every rand to meet basic needs. Workers who labour without adequate protection, voice, or dignity.

We confront the hard truth of unemployment and inequality which calls for us to account plainly and directly for where we stand. South Africa is not immune to global geopolitical instability. One of the more immediate risks lies in trade relations especially within the United Nations, where uncertainty surrounds our continued participation in the African Growth and Opportunity Act, Agoa. Should access to preferential trade be restricted, the impact would be felt deeply across key labour-intensive sectors including steel, automotive manufacturing, textiles, and agri-business. These sectors employ tens of thousands of workers, many of whom are women, youth, and from rural communities.

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Thus, the importance of a stable, equitable, and fair domestic labour market becomes even more critical. Labour laws remain a central defence, ensuring decent work conditions, protecting vulnerable workers, and supporting business continuity amid uncertainty. Emerging from a history in which the majority were denied dignity, decent work, and protection in the workplace, the labour laws of this country have undergone significant transformation.

They are now structured to create a fair, dynamic, and harmonised labour market that supports inclusive growth and economic transformation. These laws respond to evolving work arrangements, emerging technologies, and persistent inequalities.

During the 2024/25 financial year, the department promulgated three regulations explosives, physical agents and noise exposure. Further, we published the construction regulations for public comments. These seek to align occupational health and safety laws with the Constitution, promoting fair labour practices, and ensures coherence with related statutes such as the Labour Relations Act and the Mine Health and Safety Act.

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The National Minimum Wage has raised income levels for many low-wage workers, including domestic workers, farmworkers, women, and youth. It has supported household livelihoods and local economic activity. The department is advancing the National Labour Migration Policy and the Employment Services Amendment Bill. These instruments regulate access to employment in a fair, transparent, and rights-based manner. The approach promotes local participation while observing international obligations.

Hon House Chair, I am pleased to confirm that the National Labour Migration Policy has been approved by Cabinet. The Employment Services Amendment Bill was also approved by Cabinet for submission to Parliament. This provides a legal framework to regulate the employment of foreign nationals and addresses misuse by labour brokers and the exploitation of undocumented workers. Structural inequality in the workplace remains evident in employment equity data. Despite a robust legal framework, transformation that we have implemented but the progress is very slow since the dawn of democracy.

The recently published 24th Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report indicates, 62% of top management positions are

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occupied by white South Africans. Women hold 26,9% of top management and 37,7% of senior management positions. Persons with disabilities only make up 1,2% of the workforce. These figures show continued exclusion of many qualified South Africans from full economic participation. Addressing this is essential to building equity and promoting social and economic development.

The department continues to invest in new labour market research to ensure labour market policy is aligned with real-world developments. In 2025-26, research focus will be on the effects of the platform economy, including gig work, on employment patterns and worker protection. The application of equal pay for work of equal value, which remains a challenge in various sectors. The use and outcomes of employment equity tools, including codes of good practice and sectoral guidelines. Conditions of decent work in the hospitality sector, where informality and vulnerability remain common. The dominance of the higher education and training sector by foreign nationals in the executives. Contributions of demand-led sectors and the informal sector to job creation.

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This budget is aligned with the national priorities outlined in the Medium-Term Development Plan 2024-29 under the Government of National Unity. Every line item in this budget has been crafted to reflect the strategic imperatives of the Seventh Administration, as led by His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa, with a focus on ensuring that labour market interventions contribute directly to tangible social and economic outcomes.

One of the department's critical instruments to achieve this is the National Employment Policy, which is at advanced stages. This policy sets out a co-ordinating framework to align various policy instruments that promote employment growth. The National Employment Policy, NEP calls for a paradigm shift toward better policy co-ordination that enhances firm productivity and job absorption capacity, supported by macroeconomic, industrial, and skills development policies.

It promotes stronger public employment programmes by supporting both market and nonmarket forms of employment, to convert socially necessary but unpaid work into viable earning and learning opportunities, upholding the principle that

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everyone who wants to work should have the opportunity to do so. Working with private sector through the government business platform, we are intensifying co-ordination and collaboration for jobs drive, including creating opportunities for those in need for on-the-job training or experiential training.

We will be accelerating the vital work of the National Pathway Management Network co-ordinated in the presidency and operationally managed by Harambee. Notably, the SA Youth platform, which forms part of this network, has registered over 5 million young people and placed 1,57 million into earning opportunities, 70% of whom are women. These are not mere statistics. They reflect concrete outcomes, households supported, futures stabilised, and resilience built.

Aligned with our five-year strategic plan and the 2025-26 annual performance plan, the department has set a target of creating 2 million job opportunities by 2030 through an integrated employment agenda. Unemployment in South Africa is a crisis. As of the first quarter of 2025, the official unemployment rate stood at 32,9%, with youth unemployment at

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an alarming 62,4%. These figures speak to the urgency of placing employment at the heart of national development.

We are building a whole of government, whole of society approach to employment, one that is inclusive, strategic, and accountable. No job creation effort, whether in infrastructure, public works, industrial policy, or the social economy, should exist in isolation. The department will ensure all efforts are connected and directed towards common outcomes particularly for youth, women, persons with disabilities, and the long-term unemployed.

The department plays a central role in shaping the labour market through regulation, social protection, job placement, and institutional development. In a constrained fiscal environment, we are guided by realism, though not deterred by limited resources. Instead, we are responding with innovation through reprioritisation, institutional redesign, and administrative reform.

For the 2025-26 financial year, the Department of Employment and Labour has been allocated R4,153 billion, distributed as follows: R1,598 billion for Compensation Fund enabling core

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service delivery by funding inspectors, career counsellors, client services staff, and provincial managers.

R694,789 million for goods and services, covering critical operations, ICT tools, and stakeholder engagements that drive daily functionality. R1,738 billion for transfers and subsidies, supporting key partnerships with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, CCMA, Productivity SA, National Economic Development and Labour Council, Nedlac, and civil society actors involved in employment activation. R121,033 million for capital assets, financing digital infrastructure upgrades and modernisation of labour centres and satellite offices.

Major social protection interventions will be delivered through the Unemployment Insurance Fund and Compensation Fund. In 2025-26, the Unemployment Insurance Fund, UIF will manage R38,4 billion, with R19,02 billion for direct benefits. Over R10,98 billion is allocated to labour activation programmes targeting 240 000 placements this year and 690 000 over the medium term, half of which are reserved for youth, women, and persons with disabilities. An additional R1,4 billion is allocated to the Temporary Employee/Employee Relief Scheme, TERS to protect jobs in distressed companies, while R55

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million will fund the business turnaround programme to assist 80 companies and save 3 750 jobs.

To boost efficiency, R1,13 billion is committed to digital transformation, including biometric verification and integrated claims systems. Seventeen mobile buses will be procured to extend UIF access to less serviced areas. The Compensation Fund is allocated R1,6 billion, pensioners and injured workers, R5 billion for medical claims, and R1,85 billion for capacity building, supporting digitisation, medical staffing in provinces, and outreach to vulnerable workers.

In strengthening the institutional capacity, as of mid-June 2025, over 79% of funded vacancies have been advertised. We aim to reduce the vacancy rate to 12% by year-end. The focus is on posts critical to service delivery, labour centre operations heads, inspectors, career counsellors, and frontline staff. In parallel, we are modernising the department's digital ecosystem, bandwidth upgrades, new data centre and ICT infrastructure.

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Hon Chair and hon members, Budget Vote 31 is a policy stance affirming that, even under fiscal strain, we will honour our duty to deliver public value with urgency, clarity, and measurable outcomes. Let us be remembered not for the challenges we inherited, but for the solutions we executed. This budget reflects a state that is working visibly, efficiently, and ethically for its people. I present Budget Vote 31 to this House. Let us use it as a lever of delivery, inclusion, and renewal. Let us move forward with purpose, unity, and resolve to leave no worker behind. I thank you hon House Chair. [Applause.]

Mr B M MANELI: Hon House Chairperson, hon members, in particular, members of the Portfolio Committee on Employment and Labour, Ministers and Deputy Ministers, in particular our Minister, hon Meth, Deputy Ministers Sibiya and Nemadzinga-Tshabalala, the administration as led by Director General, DG, leaders of entities, distinguished guests, and fellow South Africans.

It is with a deep sense of responsibility and unwavering commitment, that I stand before you today to deliberate on the Budget Vote 31 for the Department of Employment and Labour for

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the fiscal year 2025-2026. While acknowledging the challenges and shortcomings, especially concerning the system, we must also recognize the significant strides made towards fostering a more equitable, inclusive and productive labour market that aligns with our national development priorities.

The core national objectives remain clear: To build our economy, promote decent work and ensure that every worker and unemployed individual has access to sustainable opportunities. Our government's vision for employment and skills development is anchored in a comprehensive strategy, emphasizing not just job creation, but also ensuring the quality and sustainability of employment.

The strategy is underpinned by two critical pillars; an integrated employment and skills development approach and the strengthening of the labour market, governance and enforcement. These focus areas aim to address the multifaceted challenges in our labour sector, fostering an environment conducive for growth, fairness and justice.

In this context, it is vital that we prioritize skills development that aligns closely with the demands of our

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rapidly evolving markets. Technological advancements and digital transformation are reshaping industries, compelling us to adapt swiftly to keep our workforce future, ready.

Our departments initiatives to leverage technology and digital platforms for trainings are commendable as they enhance efficiency and improve access, especially in underserved communities.

Scaling up initiatives like the Labour Activation Programme to target unemployed youth and vulnerable groups remains a key intervention. Its success hinges on clear, measurable milestones that emphasize lasting skills development and viable career pathways, which are vital for meaningful economic participation, particularly for the youth, women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities.

Hon members, recognizing the importance of a collaborative approach, fostering public private partnerships, PPP, has become essential in supplementing government efforts, especially during times of fiscal constraints. These collaborations mobilize additional resources, share expertise, and foster innovative solutions and reskilling and employment

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facilitation. Their role is increasingly vital as we navigate fiscal challenges. Allowing us to extend our reach and impact beyond traditional government channels.

Such partnerships also foster the innovative approaches that can accelerate transitions into formal employment sectors, supporting sustainable economic growth and broadening opportunities for those who face barriers to entry the labour market.

However, amidst these efforts, we cannot ignore the existing shortfalls that threaten the integrity and effectiveness of our labour relations framework.

The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, CCMA, remains a cornerstone in mediating disputes and ensuring fair work practices. Yet it faces significant resource and capacity constraints, particularly on the essential services programme where the entity maintains a flat budget which may limit its capacity to address disputes and higher risk sectors. These limitations have led to case backlogs, delays in dispute resolution and ultimately compromise on workers' rights and employer confidence.

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The situation undermines the foundational principles of labour justice upon which our democratic gains are built. It is therefore imperative that we, as a committee advocate strongly for the department to revisit budget allocations and resource planning.

Our commitment must be to ensure that the department and all its entities are adequately funded, equipped with the latest technologies and staffed sufficiently to perform its crucial mandate, effectively.

Addressing these constraints involves exploring every possible avenue, including legislative measures and budgeting process, to secure additional funding. It is crucial that we also focus on innovative enforcement strategies, including leveraging technology for compliance, monitoring and enforcement.

Enhancing capacity in this area allows us to target non-compliant employers more precisely. Making enforcement both efficient and fair, raising awareness amongst workers regarding their rights through targeted campaigns can further reduce exploitation, fostering a culture of compliance and accountability within the labour sector.

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Moreover, the department strategy focus emphasizes, building an inclusive, resilient and future rate labour market. This entails aligning our policies with broader national development objectives, while responding dynamically to emerging challenges. Hence the employment Equity Amendment Act is essential to strengthen enforcement, promote fair employment practices and address disparities within the labour sector.

Ensuring access to sustainable opportunities remains a top priority, especially for vulnerable populations, including the youth, women, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities.

In this regard, the expansion and continuous improvement of training programs and employment services are critical. Digital platforms play a vital role in enhancing service delivery and access, particularly in remote areas, thereby ensuring that no one is left behind in our efforts to build the economy.

Fellow South Africans, strong collaboration with various stakeholders, including social partners and private sector, is

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fundamental in these endeavours. Engagement with social partners is essential to not only for oversight, but also for effective policy implementation and reform. Continuous dialogue and partnership, enables us to identify gaps, develop tailored interventions and ensure accountability for results.

The departments focus on fostering inclusive growth and promoting decent work, alliance with the broader constitutional values of dignity, equality and social justice.

Viewing the budget not merely as a financial allocation of four 4,153 billion, but a strategic investment, reinforces our collective responsibility to utilize resources efficiently for meaningful outcomes. Every rand spent should translate into tangible outcome, decent work and sustainable livelihoods for our people.

As we look to the future, our commitment must be to work collaboratively towards addressing current challenges and building a resilient, inclusive and fair labour market. This involves not only strengthening governance and enforcement but also innovating and adapting our policies to meet new realities.

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By doing so, we reaffirm the ... [Inaudible.] ... for all our citizens. Ultimately our success relies on partnerships, proactive policy implementation and rigorous oversight. We must continue engaging with stakeholders at all levels, listening to their concerns and responding with effective solutions. Our role extends beyond oversight. We are partners in reform, innovation and realization of our national aspirations.

Let us reaffirm our unwavering dedication to fostering a labour market that upholds the dignity of every worker, promotes inclusive growth and contributes meaningfully to the social and economic development of our nation, thereby creating employment opportunities.

With collective resolve and unwavering commitment, we can turn these goals into concrete realities, ensuring a brighter future where we all live and work as equals, under conditions of peace, as envisaged in the *Freedom Charter*. As the ANC, we support this budget. And I thank you, hon House Chair.

[Applause.]

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Ms H H MBELE: ... [Interjections.] ... Ja (Yes), I can see. [Interjections.] Ja, it's a sabotage. Ja, it is. [Laughter.] I can see the Minister is trying to persuade me. [Laughter.] Unfortunately ... ja ...

Hon House Chair, hon members, before we even debate the budget and bureaucratic line items, let us confront a brutal human truth. Right now, as I stand here, there are more than 11 million South Africans without work. Picture this! If every unemployed person in this country stood in a line shoulder to shoulder, that line would stretch from Johannesburg all the way to Cairo and back again.

These are not just the numbers on a statistic sheet, these are mothers skipping meals for their children to eat, fathers waking up at four o'clock to stand on the roadside hoping someone will pick them up for a day's work, but most days they return home empty-handed and humiliated.

And young people, the very hope, promise of this nation are now called the lost generation. They are graduates holding degrees in one hand and rejected letters on the other hand. This is the real state of our nation.

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I rise today on behalf of the MKP to reject the Budget Vote 31 on the Department of Employment and Labour for the 2025-26 financial year. [Laughter.] [Applause.]

South Africa, in the grip of deep and prolonged unemployed crisis, over 32% of our people are jobless, with youth unemployment even higher. Yet, the report before us is a slap in their face, of working class. It is filled with lofty promises, fancy slogans and bureaucratic sugar coated. But it does nothing to heal the wounds of the unemployed. [Applause.]

Let's talk about the so-called new employment mandate. It is nothing more than a tired public relations, PR, exercise. There is no serious plan to localize industries, no plan to rebuild the manufacturing, no plan to drive rural industrialisation. How do we tell the people in the communities without running water to apply for jobs online? That is not transformation. That is an insult.

The department is obsessed with the digitalization, imagining that every South African lives in Sandton with fibre internet and backup generators. Millions do not even have electricity, let alone data.

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This digital-only approach has become a new system of exclusion, another gatekeeping tool against the poor. And what about the billions being sunk into so-called Labour Activation Programme, LAP? R10 billion pumped into schemes that are nothing more than a cash cow for connected elites, ghost beneficiaries, fake training, fraudulent tenders; these are not rumours, they are documented facts.

Let us not forget Diphetogo Security Company. Submitted fake documents to win tenders and received R140 million from another department, verified by the same department now asking us to trust them with billions more. How can we sign off on budgets where the fox is guarding the henhouse?

Meanwhile, the Unemployment Insurance Fund, UIF, and Compensation Fund stockpiles surplus, instead of helping workers put food on their tables.

Our people are forced to watch from the sidelines while they are supposed ... safety nets become valls for bureaucratic hoarding.

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Then, hon members, there is the silent sabotage of our labour market by illegal foreign nationals. Let me be clear. This is not xenophobia, this is economic sabotage. Our citizens are displaced on farms, in kitchens, construction sites and in retail, not because they lack skills, but because they refuse to work for starvation wages. Employers prefer undocumented workers, precisely because they can be exploited without consequences.

Where is the department? Nowhere! No regulations, no enforcement, no accountability.

Our own people are sidelined in their motherland. Even our public servants, the nurses, the teachers, the municipal workers, are pushed beyond their limits, paid peanuts and forced into a recycling democratization. They become easy prey for petty corruption and those who can leave, do so, the brain drain bleeds this country of skills.

We invested in with taxpayer's money. What is the department's grand plan? To beg the private sector for partnership? We have been sold this neoliberal fairytale since 1994, and it has

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failed us miserably. [Applause.] We cannot partner our way out of poverty, we cannot outsource our justice.

Hon Chair, our people do not want handouts, they want work, dignity, opportunity, real empowerment.

The MKP stands for a new model, one that puts South Africans first in their sector, one that builds industries locally and creates real jobs, not empty slogans, one that stops treating workers as disposable commodities and starts treating them as citizens deserving of respect and fair wages, one that rejects the capture of public funds ... [Interjections.] [Laughter.] ... by politically connected parasites [Laughter.] ... one that rejects the capture of public funds by politically connected parasites.

The Freedom Charter declares: The people shall share in the country's wealth. Exactly. Today that promise is a sick joke.

The ANC, as you say, dares to involve the charter while presiding over economic apartheid against its own people.

[Applause.]

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We say enough is enough. We reject the budget vote. We reject the lies. We reject the continued betrayal of the working class. Thank you very much and thank you for being quiet, not howling. [Applause.]

Mrs D VAN DER WALT: Hon House Chair and members, now, more than ever, governance and policy in the Department of Employment and Labour are pivotal to the future of our country.

The DA advocates for the department focused on delivering on its mandate and moving towards an employment framework based on equality and opportunity.

The Unemployment Insurance Fund and Compensation Fund, together, will receive R39 billion from South African workers and businesses this year. These funds are supposed to provide a safety net in difficult times and compensate for injuries sustained while working, instead, they are being mismanaged and wasted.

My colleague, hon Bagraim, has already referred to the department's tendency to treat the UIF surplus as a credit

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card for its own programmes. Even more worrying is what is happening to the money contributed to the UIF and Compensation Fund once it reaches them.

The DA is extremely concerned over the stewardship of the fund's money by the Public Investment Corporation, PIC. Each fund contributed R400 million to the now failed Daybreak Farm's project through the PIC. Money which we will likely never recover. The money, workers and businesses paid to the funds must be used for their benefit, not for the benefit of the politically connected and corrupt.

This is not the only area where the department's entities have become deficient. The UIF's ability to pay the right people is also in question.

The hon members will be aware that the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, has so far recovered R229 million rand in fraudulent tax payments.

Here is just one example. Mrs Cotze went on maternity leave between 21 February 2022 and 21 June 2022. She is still

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waiting for her maternity UIF, three years later. Neither does she receive any responses on her queries.

There should be action taken for all cases not being dealt with appropriately within a specific time. It cannot be that those not entitled to money from the UIF find it easy to access it, whereas hardworking South Africans attempting to claim what is rightfully theirs must wait over three years with no payment and no reply.

Chairperson, instead of focusing on the nuts and bolts of making the department and its entities work, the Minister has spent far too much time pursuing race-based quotas that will impose arbitrary numerical targets on businesses, will not lead to meaningful empowerment and will throttle growth.

[Interjections.]

South Africa must address the injustices of the past through redress and empowerment. It is precisely for this reason that we regret that the Minister has refused to consider the DA's alternative to push for real empowerment in our country.

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Aligning our redress framework with the United Nations, UN's Sustainable Development Goals will ensure that the majority of South Africans benefit, rather than a small group of politically connected elites, rather than focusing on dividing South Africans along racial lines and forcing businesses to decide on the rest of employees on their behalf, we want to focus on addressing the drivers of unequal opportunity in today's South Africa. The Sustainable Development Goals give us the objective framework to do just that.

The DA family believes that the whole government must focus firmly on jobs and growth, as our Ministers have done since taking office. We hope that the Minister will change track and do the same. I thank you. [Applause.]

Mr C G NIEHAUS: Hon House Chairperson, I rise today to address the 2025-26 budget allocation for the Department of Employment and Labour. A department whose name promises hope but delivers little in the face of South Africa's crippling unemployment crisis. The addition of employment to its title creates a misleading impression that this department is equipped to create jobs. Let us be clear; it has neither the capacity nor

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the tools to do so. A name change does not conjure jobs out of thin air.

To ground this debate, let us confront the stark reality. South Africa has 25 million people who are ready, capable and willing to work. Yet only 16,7 million are employed across the formal sector, informal sector, agriculture and private households. This leaves 8,2 million unemployed and over 3,5 million discouraged work seekers who have given up hope. Combined, more than 12 million South Africans are excluded from the economy. The majority are young people, women and people living with disabilities, groups systematically marginalised and left behind.

It is shameful all that some, including members of the former liberation movement, have the audacity to claim South Africa does not have an unemployment crisis. Such statements are not only ignorant, but an insult to the millions who wake up daily with no prospects. Equally out of touch is the department's claim that it will create 2 million work opportunities by 2030. What exactly is a work opportunity? The term is vague, and the timeline is distant. Meanwhile, we lost two 290 000 jobs in the last quarter alone, with projections from economic

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analysts suggesting further losses in 2025 due to sluggish growth and global uncertainties.

The department's budget marred by cuts and below inflation increases cannot address this crisis. For a decade we have called for more labour inspectors to enforce compliance with labour laws. Yet initiatives like Project 20K which promises 20 000 inspectors across provinces remain a hollow gimmick with no funding or implementation plan. Workers in retail, hospitality, aviation and factories face rampant exploitation, paid in tips, working gruelling hours and denied benefits. Many earn below the national minimum wage of R27,58 per hour, yet inspectors are nowhere to be found.

The International Labour Organisation recommends one inspector per 10 thousand workers, but South Africa's ratio is closer to one per 30 000, leaving workers vulnerable. The Minister's budget speech was a litany of complaints about funding constraints - offering no solutions. High vacancy rates raised repeatedly in committee meetings remain unaddressed. The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, CCMA, which we have urged to expand its role in preventing disputes

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and promoting social stability, is hamstrung by budget cuts and cannot even fulfil its mandate.

Nedlac faces a 13% budget reduction over the medium term, further eroding its ability to foster dialogue between labour, business and government. The Compensation Fund and Unemployment Insurance Fund are in disarray. Mismanagement and theft during COVID-19 exposed their vulnerabilities, yet restructuring efforts remain stagnant. Reports from the Auditor-General highlights the persistent governance failures with senior managers implicated in conflicts of interest. Workers who rely on these funds for injury compensation or unemployment relief are left waiting, their dignity trampled on.

This department is in crisis, lacking direction strategy or a workable plan. The proposed budget, with its cuts and inadequate increases, will deepen the suffering of South African workers and the unemployed. The EFF reject this budget outright. We demand a radical overhaul, increased funding for labour inspections, a fully resourced CCMA and functional social security systems. Let us honour the 12 million excluded South Africans by rejecting this budget and demanding one that

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will truly serve the people of South Africa. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Mr T M LANGA: House Chairperson, ...

IsiZulu:

... angithobeke kuNgqongqoshe oSekela Ngqongqoshe abakhona, ubuholi boMnyango, abahlonishwa, ...

English:

... and fellow South Africans. This department sits at the heart of one of the greatest challenges facing our nation - unemployment -with over 7 million South Africans jobless and the growing youth bulge. The IFP believes that every rand appropriated must serve a clear, measurable and transformative purpose. It is in this context that we examine this budget.

We acknowledge the department's stated commitment to promoting employment and regulating the labour market, as well as the seven strategic priorities that seek to strengthen the regulatory capacity, enhance service delivery and expand employment interventions. We support these objectives in

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principle, but we are compelled to question the pace and efficacy of implementation.

The total allocation of R4,15 billion for 2025-26 represents a modest increase over the previous year. We note, however, the uneven performance of the department's programmes and entities. The Public Employment Services Programme received over R1 billion this year, which is its highest allocation ever. This is a welcome sign, especially considering its aim to register 130 000 work seekers and create 70 000 opportunities. However, we urge the department to ensure that these are real long-term jobs, not short-term placements with no developmental impact. South Africa does not need temporary relief we need a labour market overall.

We are concerned about the ongoing challenges within the inspection and enforcement services program. Non-compliance with labour laws, especially in sectors like domestic work, agriculture and construction, remains rampant. We support the department's plan to increase the inspection capacity and digitalising informants' tools, but we stress effective law is enforced law. Too many workers remain unprotected in practice.

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A critical area that deserves stronger prioritization is the Supported Employment Enterprises. This initiative to create jobs for persons with disabilities must be seen as a flagship of inclusive employment. Yet, Supported Employment Enterprises, SEE, still operates in only eight provinces, with Mpumalanga lacking a single factory. This is unacceptable. We call on the department to fast-track the proposed satellite projects to ensure that the SEE becomes a national success, not marginalised afterthought.

We further raised concerns regarding Productivity SA whose work is crucial to retaining jobs in distressed firms and promoting competitiveness. We note gaps in rural outreach, especially among informal enterprises. If we are serious about township and rural economic revitalisation, this must change. The Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, CCMA, continues to receive the lion's share of labour policy and industrial relations funding. We support this, given the rising demand for dispute resolutions. But the backlog in finalising cases and the public frustration with turnaround times must be addressed with the urgency.

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We will support Budget Vote 31, but with conditions. We demand stronger oversight over implementation, faster turnaround times for employment support and meaningful protection of vulnerable workers. [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Order, hon members.

Mr T M LANGA: No, they are known for intimidating so it's not working. It won't work. This budget must serve the people, not bureaucracy. If we are to build a capable, ethical and developmental state, then the department must lead by example. I thank you, Chairperson. [Applause.]

Ms J S PETERSEN: Greetings, hon members, ... [Inaudible.] ... Chairperson, Minister, on behalf of the PA, I rise in support of the Portfolio Committee on Employment ... I know you know, I am just reminding you. [Laughter.]. Our nation stands at a critical juncture where job creation, labour rights and economic inclusion must be at the forefront of our legislative agenda. The PA firmly believes that the decent work and fair labour practices are the bedrock of a just and a prosperous South Africa.

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The report reflects the commitment of addressing unemployment, workplace inequality and skills development issues that disproportionately affect the working class and marginalised communities. We welcome the emphasis on expanding employment opportunities, strengthening labour inspectorate systems and protecting vulnerable workers from exploitation. However, Minister, we must ensure that these plans translate into tangible outcomes of our people.

The PA calls for accelerated implementation of job creation programmes particularly for youth and women, strict enforcement of labour laws to combat worker abuse, especially in sectors like farming and domestic work, greater collaboration with the private sector and community organisations to drive sustainable employment.

While we support this report, we urge the department to prioritise accountability and measurable results. Too often, plans remain on paper while our people suffer. The PA will monitor your progress closely and hold government to its promises. We support it. Thank you.

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Mrs H DENNER: House Chair, this department and its entities are of the utmost importance to ensure that effect is given to the most basic human rights enshrined in our Constitution – human dignity, equality, sound labour relations, the right to an environment that is not harmful to one's wellbeing, health care, food, water and social security. All of these rights and more are linked in some way or another to the Department of Employment and Labour's mandate to promote employment and ensure decent work and economic growth.

Afrikaans:

Het hierdie departement histories daarin geslaag om gevolg te gee aan hierdie mandaat? Slaag dit tans? Die Minister dink so, maar die data, Suid-Afrikaners oor die algemeen en baie van die partye wat vandag hier gepraat het sal verskil.

Ongelukkig is vier minute 'n bietjie min om al die belangrike punte aan te raak, maar ek sal van die belangrikste aanraak soos wat ek aangaan.

English:

In terms of inspection and enforcement services, our labour inspectors are overburdened, undervalued and undercapacitated.

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The risk of insufficient inspector capacity to cover vast geographical areas and higher employer volumes, as identified by the department, has been the case year after year, with an accompanying mitigation strategy of the recruitment of additional inspectors in each and every budget.

Afrikaans:

Hier het ons dit weer en ons sal dit waarskynlik in die volgende strategiese plan en begroting ook weer sien as daar nie nou ernstig erns gemaak word met hierdie kwessie nie.

Die regering moet dalk ook eers voor sy eie deur vee. Hoewel geen werkgewer mag toelaat dat enige werknemer onder enige nadelige toestande werk nie, is dit veral die regering se plig om toe te sien dat sy eie personeel nie onder haglike omstandighede werk nie, soos ons onlangs gesien het toe sale nege en tien by die Universitas-hospitaal in Bloemfontein weens daardie rede gesluit is. Ek moet byvoeg, dankie aan daardie arbeidsinspekteurs wat dit gedoen het.

English:

The Compensation Fund, CF, continues to be dysfunctional to the detriment of workers who are especially in dire need of

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assistance. Mr Hansie de Waal, a farm worker from Riviersonderend, has been waiting nearly two years just for an appointment with a specialist to assess his back injury for his appeal to the CF. The CF cannot succeed in securing someone to see him. He cannot work, he cannot provide for his family and he can hardly walk. How many Hansies are out there in dire need of assistance from the CF, and not for a lack of trying, I might add.

With regard to the Unemployment Insurance Fund, UIF, risks identified include adverse audit findings such as disclaimer opinions and delays in claim adjudication and benefit payments. Ms Lucinde Durr, another example, has been waiting two years for her maternity leave benefit payment to be paid out, just like Ms Kotze who was mentioned earlier. She needed that income to provide for her family and her newborn baby. How many Lucindes and Ms Kotzes are out there not receiving the necessary relief due to internal inefficiencies of the fund? I can go on, but I see my time is limited.

The Department of Labour's strategic priorities align towards inclusive growth and job creation, poverty reduction and a lower cost of living. This looks good on paper, but in reality

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it will never be obtained with the current economic policies, overregulation of the labour market and race-based labour legislation.

The vision of this department is a labour market which is conducive to investment, economic growth, employment creation and decent work, but this vision will never be realised while this department does not understand the definition of insanity, and continues to do the same thing over and over again, expecting a different outcome. I thank you.

Mr A D BEESLEY: House Chair, Minister, Deputy Ministers, hon members and fellow South Africans, Action SA is of the view that the Ministry of Employment and Labour should be renamed the Ministry of no jobs and no responsibility.

At the end of the Sixth Parliament, South Africa was already in the grip of an unemployment crisis. Under the government of national unity, GNU, and the current leadership of this Ministry, that crisis has only deepened. The expanded unemployment rate has worsened, climbing from 42,6% to 43,1%.

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According to the latest figures, nearly 300 000 people lost their jobs in the first quarter alone. That means 5 000 South Africans will return home today without jobs, another 5 000 tomorrow and the same every working day that follows.

There are now 8,2 million unemployed South Africans, with an additional 3,5 million so discouraged that they have given up even trying to find work. That's nearly 12 million people left without opportunity, without support and without hope.

These are not just statistics. They are the lived experience of millions of South Africans, real people suffering under a Ministry that has turned its back on them; a Ministry of no jobs.

What is most disconcerting is that when I asked the Minister whether she takes any responsibility for job losses, the answer was an emphatic no. Minister, if not you, then who? If not your department, then whose job is it to care? A Ministry of no responsibility.

We must also express serious concern about the ongoing governance failures at the UIF and CF. Instead of serving as

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lifelines for injured and unemployed workers, these funds have become a breeding ground for mass looting and impunity. The very institutions meant to provide relief in times of hardship are now robbing workers of their dignity and their right to financial security. It is unacceptable that both funds continue to receive qualified and adverse audit opinions year after year without any consequences.

To create an environment more conducive to job creation, Action SA will continue to champion reforms, including greater flexibility and innovation in labour practices and regulations, exemptions for small, medium, and micro enterprises, SMMEs, from agreements reached at collective bargaining councils, greater diversity in the private sector through incentives not coercion, increased insourcing within public departments and entities, and improved governance at the UIF and CF.

In conclusion, when you look into the eyes of someone who is unemployed, you see pain and the longer they are unemployed, the deeper that pain becomes. It's not just the absence of work. It is a suffocating darkness that consumes hope, dignity and self-worth, a darkness caused by a failing government and

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a failing Ministry. On behalf of all those left behind, all those suffocating in that darkness, Action SA rejects the budget of the Ministry of no jobs and no responsibility. I thank you.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR (Mr N M Sibiyá): Hon Chairperson; hon Members of Parliament; Ministers and Deputy Ministers present; hon members of the portfolio committee led by hon Maneli; the departmental officials who are led by the acting director-general, DG; guests, ladies and gentlemen, we are living in a country that is really interesting. It is amazing how some of the opposition parties in this country are weak, very weak, Chair, to a level that you expect that while you criticise government or a department ...

An HON MEMBER: Thank you, House Chair. I just wanted to tell the Deputy Minister to return the school uniform to his boy. He must return the school uniform to his boy.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon member, hon member, can I address you? You do not just press the microphone and start speaking. Hon member, I will not allow spurious points

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of orders. May you, please, be orderly and respect the decorum of the House. Hon Deputy Minister, you can continue.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR (Mr N M Sibiya):

That's exactly the confirmation, Chairperson. How weak the opposition is, not even understanding the Rules of this Parliament. They don't bring solutions, all they do is to criticise and they expect the people of this country to take them seriously. Chairperson, these are the realities we are faced with is very, very painful, Chair. I wish at a certain point in time we can be in a situation where people stop grandstanding when it comes to debates and serving their own interests because they come with the names of people who are poor here, complaining that they are not being helped instead of bringing those names to us and respond to them and assist the people who are poor. We are able to do that we do it every day, Chairperson.

Chairperson, this year we commemorate Nelson Mandela International Day on 18 July, under the poignant theme: Is still in our hands to combat poverty and inequality. These words are more than a call to action, they are a reminder of our collective responsibility as the nation beyond our colour

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and creed. We have a responsibility to shape our country. We must make sure that our children inherit a better country than a country that we inherited.

Chairperson, I would like to pick up this debate on the issue of inspection and enforcement. It would be a cardinal error to underplay the role that is played by the inspectorate in the context of employment creation and job preservation. It is common knowledge that the unemployment rate has crept to unacceptable levels. The decent work done by the inspectorate plays a significant role in preventing the hemorrhaging of jobs. The Medium-Term Development Plan, MTDP, which is a blueprint of the Government of National Unity, has singled out, amongst others, the matter of tackling poverty and reducing the cost of living.

Chairperson, at the nucleus of employment laws is the matter of ensuring that the sheer numbers of vulnerable workforce do not toil in vain. The Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the National Minimum Wage are pivotal instruments in fortifying the right of workers to fair remuneration and standards of employment that bode well with workers' rights. In the financial year 2024-25, 310 798 inspections were

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carried out. Of these, 168 884 were Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the National Minimum Wage Act, whilst 107 808 were Occupational Health and Safety inspections.

Chair, while these numbers are not small, it is our desire to cast our nets as wide as possible. This is an indication that the inspection and enforcement is done and we are active and we are at work as the department to ensure adequate social security to the workforce. Our employer audit services inspectors conducted 30 33 inspections to test compliance with the Compensation of Injuries and Diseases Act and the Unemployment Insurance Act. During all these inspections R101 million 386 541 was enforced for various legislations. R78 million 669 849 was recovered on behalf of the vulnerable workers in the form of underpayment of wages and salaries. [Applause.]

Effectively, Chairperson, that was money that went to the pockets of employees by our own inspectors and the Inspection and Enforcement Services, IES, team that is at work in the Department of Employment and Labour. A demonstration that we are obsessed with making a real difference in the lives of the workers of this country.

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The compliance levels of employers at workplaces inspected during the 2024-25 financial year were as follows, Chairperson, per legislation: Basic Conditions of a National Minimum Wage, 89%; Occupational Health and Safety at 65%; employer audit the Unemployment Insurance Act, UIA; and the Unemployment Insurance Contributions Act, UICA, at 40%; Employment Equity Act on 38%; and the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, COIDA, at 31%. Nationally, for all labour legislation compliance was at an average of 53%, which is not a good picture. And, it needs all of us because amongst us here some of you are employers and you are also noncompliant on the legislation that we have put and enacted as the country. So, it must start with us as well.

Chairperson, I want to say it is very important that we take it seriously what we do as a country. We have collaborated with sister departments and institutions such as Department of Home Affairs, the South African Police Services, the South African Revenue Services, the bargaining councils and municipal law enforcers to conduct national high impact blitz inspections. To date, we have expanded these inspections to the following sectors: hospitality, construction, agriculture, textile and clothing, chemicals and wholesale and retail.

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Chair, we must say it here that there is a need in this country to deal with the issue of illegal immigrants who are working in different companies in this country. It needs all of us to collaborate in dealing with that because what we see during our inspections is a huge number of illegal immigrants who are working in our companies illegally and they are employed by South Africans. We must discourage employers who are employing illegal foreign immigrants because if we deal with that, if there is no one who employs them, we won't have them. So, it is very important to do that.

Chairperson, I must say that with the anger that I see on the left, they will need the Commission for the Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, CCMA, to deal with their challenges that they are faced with because they really need to be assisted. They are collapsing every day. The capacity in terms of numbers is desirable ... I knew it will hurt them, Chair.

Mr S NOMVALO: Thank you ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon member, can you, please, switch off your microphone. Hon member, Rule 79 says,

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you only speak when you are recognised. So, this tendency of just pressing on the microphone will not be ... If you raise your hand I will note you, if you raise your hand I will note you, hon member, and I will afford you the opportunity to speak, but please do not just press the mike and start screaming. It is entirely out of order. You are now recognised, hon member.

Mr S NOMVALO: Thank you, House Chair. House Chair, I am rising in terms of Rule 68 that the debate and the submissions that are being made by the Deputy Minister are irrelevant. We understand that the submissions of the MK Party were highly sophisticated. So, he doesn't understand them. We are debating about unemployment and employment in South Africa. Be in context!

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon member, you are saying you are raising a point of order on Rule 68 and that is just irrelevant. The speech that you are bringing is entirely out of order now because you have had your opportunity to speak through your member. Allow me, just to allow me to caution you, hon member, because we really need to allow the debate to continue but coming in with spurious points of orders and also

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not following the Rules of the House is entirely out of order from your side.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR (Mr N M Sibiya):
Thank you, Chair. You know, when you have an LLB degree and the MKP renders you useless, you will make that noise. Hon Chairperson, hon members, we are being lobbied for a very noble cause. We kindly request your support to the Supported Employment Enterprises, SEEs, brilliant government initiative of employing people with disabilities. The SEE currently employs one thousand people with disabilities and has the potential to grow this to over 3000 disabled persons, the most vulnerable in our society and the nation. This is a noble cause. I challenge each and every organ of the state to commit on spending at least 5% of its office furniture, school furniture, textiles and hospital linen, etc.

The budget on the SEEs is very important that we increase it. If public procurement is meant to address the inequality and empower vulnerable groups of our society, then it must boldly include disability empowerment in its design and execution. The SEE provides such an opportunity for our people. On the CCMA matters, which I think we can offer our services pro bono

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to some, CCMA is our pride as the country. It is entrusted with the important responsibility of creating an enabling labour dispute resolution environment to advance economic development, social justice, labour peace and democratisation of the workplace. Its legislative mandate gives effect to and regulate the fundamental rights conferred by section 23 of the Constitution.

The 2025-2030 CCMA strategic plan is titled: "The Momentum - Empowering Progress, Embracing Change" is designed to meet the evolving labour market demands and is built on three strategic thrusts ...

Mr L D SELEPE: Yes, Chair. Is it parliamentary to record videos with your cellphone during the proceedings of the session? recording your phone

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Recording uh ...

Mr L D SELEPE: ... with a phone.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Is it an hon member who is doing that?

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Mr L D SELEPE: Is the director-general, DG. The DG is recording.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon member, I did not see that.

Mr L D SELEPE: I did see her. I rose because she was recording

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Yes, but remember, the Chairperson has to be the one that is also ...

Mr L D SELEPE: ... hence I am asking! Hence, I am asking.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon member ... in the House sitting ...

IsiZulu:

Mnu L D SELEPE: Akaphume.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): No, it can't be, hon member. Hon member, hon member, can you switch off that microphone. Continue, Deputy Minister.

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The DEPUTY MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR (Mr N M Sibiyá):
Thank you very much, Chair. On key strategic focus for 2025-26, the CCMA will do the following: One of the focusses will be on the labour market and its impact. While the CCMA continues to fulfil its legislative mandate, the reduced grant has resulted in longer turnaround times for dispute resolution processes such as arbitration, which is 85 days and 190 days for 2024-25. This is a challenge that we need to be frank about and tackle it head on.

Hon Chairperson, despite the reality of poor economic outlook, the labour market that continues to grapple with rail infrastructural challenges and tariffs that put pressure on the business to re-evaluate input costs and consider restructuring operations. The commitment and dedication of all role-players in mitigating against job losses. So, a CCMA facilitated processes resulting to 30 581 jobs being saved of those employees who were facing retrenchments, out of 64 919 000.

Hon Chairperson, I have mentioned that the CCMA is our pride, that the CCMA is our jewel and the centre of excellence in our country. We would want the CCMA to be supported and continue

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to do its work but also will continue to offer our services to those who are in need at any given moment. Thank you very much, Chairperson.

Mr S S ZIBI: Hon members, you must be careful with these nicknames because this is on TV now, somebody see me at the mall, and uses one of these nicknames, please. [Laughter.] House Chair. Out of this vote, I would like to discuss two issues for the consideration of the Minister and the portfolio committee. The first is providing support to job seekers. One of the things that I am really passionate about is the concept of a job seekers grant. All the members know very well that looking for work is expensive, especially given our spatial injustices. Many job seekers eventually give up not because they do not wish to work anymore, or opportunities are not available, but because they cannot afford to look for work.

Minister, I would like to ask that you consider this in future and perhaps we can look at partly funding it out of a remodeled inserting grant or the Unemployment Insurance Fund, UIF. I know that this would be challenging to administer, but we need a way to help people pay for airtime, access to the internet, payment for transport to get to interviews, and so

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on. Given our high unemployment rate, I think many of us here, as members, support a few relatives in this way while they look for work. Minister, I know that, given where you and I come from, this is especially expensive because towns are really far. Please look at what can be done about this.

The second relates to work readiness. During my career, I encountered many smart young people who just needed work readiness training. I was, in fact, involved with one such programme with Professor Nicholas Biekpe, who was then at the University of Stellenbosch and subsequently at the University of Cape Town. The transformation of a clearly talented young person who begins as a nervous wreck, who cannot deliver a powerpoint presentation, speak in front of people in a formal setting, or writing properly when doing business - is a wonder to see when they get the help that they need. Within six months, the same quietly spoken young people became confident, articulate, humorous, and coherent in the challenges given to them. You would think they had been working for a few years. These are the things that we can do in a structured manner to improve employability. We can partner with academic institutions where this is done either as a final year

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vocational training programme or post-qualification while the young person is looking for work.

We can also work with companies, sector education and training authority, Setas, and so on. For many families, one person getting a sustainable job is not only the difference between hunger and nutrition, but generational transformation of that family's fortunes. I know that all of us are trying but let us try more and give as many people as possible an opportunity to find work. We support the report. Thank you.

Mrs N L HLAZO-WEBSTER: Hon Chairperson, I would like to begin by stating upfront that here we are not dealing with the Department of Labour and Employment. We are actually dealing with the Department of Labour and Unemployment. I think it helps to frame it that way and to take it from that perspective because then it helps with the work which the Minister and the department have to do to have that understanding.

There are currently 11,7 million people who are trapped in unemployment and relegated to the outskirts of the economy in this country. Minister, what do you say to the graduate who

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has been unemployed for five years and is still owing the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, or the mother who works two jobs but is still earning less than a junior male colleague? You don't need statistics to understand that something is very deeply broken in our labour market, but the numbers do confirm it. The job statistics tell us that 427 000 more people joined the unemployment line in the last year. That's almost half a million more South Africans who are without work and cannot find employment.

This department should then be one of the most active in all of government, yet for far too long we had Ministers who promised jobs while presiding over an economy that does not grow, and a labour market that does not absorb that level of unemployment. The Minister has a duty and responsibility to lead with authority - and I want to say with urgency, in tackling unemployment.

Now that the Minister has had a full year in office, we think that she is settled, and we want to encourage that she urgently scales up the efforts of this department. Minister, in addition to this mandate, we as Bosa have a concurrent project which we wish for you and every Member of Parliament

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on the committee to join us in. It's a matter that goes to the heart of justice in the marketplace and deals with the uneven balance and power structures in South Africa's labour market, with employers holding all the cards when it comes to this.

When applying for jobs, candidates' salary histories are used against them to justify lower pay, and once that happens many find themselves trapped in a system that undervalues their skills and offers little power to negotiate a fair wage.

Basically, if you started on the back foot, the system says that you will always be on the back foot. So, this is what the Fair Pay Bill, which was introduced in Parliament in June, seeks to change. By amending the Employment Equity Act, this Bill would grant employees the right to discuss job offers, to talk openly about remuneration and job offers - breaking that secrecy that takes place in these areas. It would strengthen equal pay for equal work, ensuring pay must be based on merits, qualifications and experience, and it would require employers to declare salary ranges. And so, I wish to implore the Minister and Members of Parliament in this committee to read the Bill and strongly consider supporting it through the legislative process, and it's in that light that we give our support to this Budget Vote. I thank you. [Interjections.]

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Mr V ZUNGULA: Greetings to the commanders, fighters and all of the Progressive Caucus. We welcome the commitment by the department to recruit 20 000 labour inspectors as a step in the right direction when it comes to strengthening compliance with labour legislation. This intervention is urgently needed, given the current complement of inspectors, which is 1 400 nationally, is nowhere sufficient for a labour market the size and complexity of South Africa. Last year only 234 000 inspections were conducted across the country.

The inspectors must be adequately trained, and mechanisms must be put in place to prevent bribery and corruption. With over 2,6 million registered companies and more than five million workers in the informal sector, we remain critically understaffed in ensuring basic worker protections. This leaves many employers to act with impunity, especially in the most vulnerable sectors of our economy, which is domestic work, farms, retail, construction and security services.

In too many cases, workers are denied their most basic rights. There are no contracts, no UIF contributions, no health and safety measures, no overtime pay and no consequences for the employer. When the inspections are done, the focus is on the

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workers, hence they are arrested and deported. Yet the employers who are the source of the problem are not touched. If the department can aggressively deal with the employers who sideline local workers in favour of cheap and slave labour, the unemployment rate would be drastically reduced. Minister, go after the employers who create these problems.

The penalties for the employers who violate labour and immigration laws need to be reviewed. The current fine is not a deterrent. The country cannot be obsessed with international obligations, yet we are sitting with a crisis of having the highest unemployment levels. Our national interest must trump the so-called internationalism. We further urge the department to ensure the training and skilling programmes, such as those under the UIF and Labour Activation Programme, Lap, are made available outside the metropolitan areas.

Labour law compliance means nothing if the people do not know their rights. It means even less if they cannot access services to enforce those rights. Lastly Minister, the unemployment rate in South Africa is 42,1%, which is the expanded definition. It is not 10% or 32%. These are not abstract figures. They represent millions of shattered homes

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and households stripped of their dignity and income. Thank you.

Mr L W MAHLATSI: Chairperson and to the progressive caucus ...

Sesotho:

... kgotso, Maafrika.

English:

Hon members, unemployment in South Africa is not a mistake. It is the results of a deliberate economic structure, a microeconomic framework and labour market model designed to serve capital, not our communities. Since the 1970s, the capital labour ratio has doubled across all sectors, meaning that the machines have replaced the workers while the rich get richer and our people sink deeper into exclusion.

In mining, capital expenditure per worker has risen by over 230% in real terms. Yet jobs are disappearing. In manufacturing, the rise is over 120%. This vote does nothing to reverse this jobless growth model. Even worse, microeconomic policies inherited from gear, tight monetary policy, fiscal austerity and accelerated trade liberalisation

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continue to slash public investment, suffocate demand and promote deindustrialisation.

The result is shrinking home market, rising import and distract of local manufacturing jobs. Chairperson, the vote pretends to empower Labour while endorsing labour market deregulation and dwell labour markets. This spells the end of the living wage, the end of dignity for workers and the Trump casualisation and precarity.

Workers are expected to survive without benefits, without pension, without protection, and who suffers most? It is African workers, women, youth, still bearing the economic chains of apartheid job reserve laws, spatial segregation and institutionalised under education.

Time poverty excludes rural women who still fetch water and wood instead of participating in the economy. Youth unemployment stands above 45% and still the vote offers training programmes without jobs, without internship, without any future. This vote also ignored the spatial divide between urban job centre and rural communities. How can we build an exclusive economy when potential workers and potential jobs

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remain geographically and strained? And the state does nothing to resolve this dislocation created by colonial land theft and apartheid planning.

Chairperson, if we do not confront this historical structural injustice, no amount of labour inspection or job summit will save us. The UAT proposes an alternative path, a Pan African industrial policy driven by state led investment and workers own production.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubele): Hon member, you time has expired.

Sesotho:

Mong L W MAHLATSI: Motlatsi wa Letona o itse bohle ba hlophelang hae ba bue. O itse ha le hloka thuso, le ye kantorong ya hae.

English:

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubele): Hon member, it was going to be sufficient for you to raise your hand and allow me to recognise you.

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Mr L W MAHLATSI: I did. I did. For clarity, the UAT rejects.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubele): Hon members, please do not abuse the Rules. You had an opportunity to present and had access to your minutes. So, that is entirely out of order. Hon Thring, you can come forward.

Mr W M THRING: House Chairperson, the Department of Employment and Labour has been allocated a total budget of some R4,15 billion in the 2025-26 financial year. The ACDP acknowledges the department's strategic priority to drive inclusive growth and job creation.

With the official unemployment rate at 32,9%, the expanded unemployment rate at some 43,1% and youth unemployment at 62,4%, it is clear that this department and others dedicated to job creation are failing South African job seekers.

Regarding the Unemployment Insurance Fund, UIF payments hon Minister, the ACDP has received complaints of delays of up to 20 days for payment to be released. After a UIF claim has been approved, there is apparently another waiting period or approval process which takes place at the department's head

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office in Pretoria. However, the waiting period for dependents of deceased contributors can be up to 18 months and this adds insult to injury.

The ACDP calls on the department to rectify this to provide a dignified service to the unemployed. This department's R4,15 billion allocation while purpose driven is constrained. We note the prioritisation of employment facilitation, enforcement of labour rights, and inclusion of people with disabilities through the Supported Employment Enterprise or the SEE. Yet the SEE itself faces a projected deficit, raising questions about the sustainability of its constitutional mandate.

The ACDP acknowledges the intent to address unemployment, poverty and inequality. However, we remain deeply concerned that despite these plans, the unemployment crisis persists, with continuing disparities across the gender, race, with women and youth in particular facing disproportionately higher levels of unemployment.

The ACDP also agrees with Professor Bheki Mngomezulu of the Nelson Mandela University, who has argued that Broad-Based

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Black Economic Empowerment, BBBEE has been derailed by corruption and elite capture, fostering disillusionment hence it must be replaced with an empowerment system which benefits all South Africans.

As kingdom builders, the ACDP calls for the addressing of the root causes of unemployment, which includes policies stability, this has resulted in infrastructure collapse, hostile business environment and the root causes of unemployment. Instruments that are critical to aligning skills development with market demand and restoring dignity through work must be supported. As we stated in last year's debate, when unemployment rises in inverse proportion to gross domestic product, GDP, it becomes a threat to a national security. Thank you.

Mr M BAGRAIM: Hon Chair, the executive, my colleagues. Labour is not working. The bottom line is that we hold out a hand of friendship to the executive. We look forward to working with you. Let's take away the politics. Let's ensure that at the end of the day we create jobs.

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I'm fully aware that our government is cash strapped and must cut its cloth accordingly. Furthermore, I'm aware that every ministry has been instructed to curtail unnecessary expenditure in every single facet without affecting service delivery. That being said, the Department of Employment and Labour has notoriously been lacking in service delivery over the past 25 years.

The DA's court case in employment equity shows how destructive the matter can become, how destructive regulations become, in particular the UIF and the Compensation Fund Can hold up high the enormous failure. This failure has consistently disappointed and simultaneously angered the public, both these entities have been moved into separate standalone structures.

Both these entities received enormous funding directly from their employees and the employers of South Africa. The UIF and the compensation fund must use these incoming funds in order to drive service delivery and administration Rather than funding the department's other schemes.

We regularly see the department tapping into the UIF reserves to service other mad cap schemes such as investment in brand

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new entities with no history of service delivery at all. The purpose of these funds is to protect South African workers. Instead, they've been squandered for years and billions of rands have gone down the drain.

The Labour Activation Programme has likewise called up the UIF funds to the employees of South Africa and just about to embark on further expenditure of another R15 billion, bearing in mind the DA's commitment to curtailing wasteful expenditure, we need to reexamine Productivity South Africa. In the same breadth, we need to revisit supported employment enterprises who hardly make a dent in creating an employment environment for the disability sector.

These millions of rands could be better spent in supporting the disability sector directly, who have their own workshops and able to run factories and workshops more efficiently and more effectively. We keep reading about the workshops being forced to close down due to lack of finance when in fact they run their workshops on a tiny fraction of what the government spends. Two entities in the department need better funding and certainly a lot more support.

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Firstly, the jewel in the crown of the department, the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration, CCMA has had its budget cut for the past three years. This budget cut has been devastating to the public and indeed to the staff and management of the CCMA. Desperate dismissed employees who used to get their arbitrations within 60 days are now waiting up to 18 months and longer before their cases can be heard.

One can understand in a country such as South Africa, where we have the highest unemployment in the world that a labour dispute over an alleged unfair dismissal is not only urgent, but life changing. The CCMA's decline is bad for employers, employees alike.

Nedlac's ability to bring labour government and business to the table, is vital and will be more important over the forthcoming four years of this administration. We have seen some earth-shattering proposed amendments to our labour laws which will go to the core of job creation in South Africa. These proposed amendments emanate from the fruitful negotiations taking place around the table at Nedlac.

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Instead of the President earmarking R700 million for the formation of a new debating Chamber, we should be properly funding net Nedlac which already exists, already works and already has all the partners around the table.

It's important to ensure that every department, and in particular the Department of Employment Labour, uses its money wisely, efficiently and at the same time enhances delivery to our deserving citizens.

This department is there to act as a safety net for all South Africans, both employers and employees, and indeed consumers. The DA will continue to work to make sure it does. Once again, Minister, we hold out a hand of friendship. We look forward to resolving the unemployment crisis. Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Order, hon members. We invite hon Nontsele. [Applause.] Hon Zungula, I recognize you.

Mr V ZUNGULA: No, I am just checking if everything is fine with hon Nontsele. [Laughter.]

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): I think hon Nontsele has got his groove back. You may begin.

Mr M NONTSELE: Good afternoon to hon Minister and Deputy Ministers, hon chair of the portfolio committee, hon members and guests, hon House Chairperson, today, we gather to deliberate on the Budget Vote 31 of the Department of Employment and Labour for the fiscal year that is of 2025-2026. As we do so, we also commemorate to pivotal milestones that stands as pillars of our journey towards democracy, social justice and economic transformation. The 70th Anniversary of the Freedom Charter and the 30th Anniversary of the Constitutional Court being these highlights. These anniversaries served as profound reminders of our enduring struggle for liberation and the rule of law principles that continue to underpin our efforts to build the just, equitable and inclusive society. As we celebrate this month, the Mandela Month, we are reminded of the struggles and sacrifices made to attain our freedoms and ongoing responsibility to uphold these values through deliberate policies and effective execution.

In earlier submission, House Chair, there's been statements that has been made by hon Van Der Walt to say the amendments

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and the implementation to Employment Equity Act are, and in fact an entrenchment of racism, the targets and quarters that have been set by hon Minister and supported by this portfolio committee are in fact a setback. I'm paraphrasing her submissions. House Chair, that cannot be closer to truth because if we look into the history just like ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Nontsele, can you just hold. Hon member? Hon member? Hon member. Hon member, Mbele. Hon member, Mbele. Hon member Mbele, before you exit, when living the House, you cannot walk across a speaker. May you please maintain the decorum of the House? Continue.

[Interjections.]. Order, hon members. Continue, hon Nontsele.

Mr M NONTSELE: Hon House Chair, the points therefore raised by hon Van Der Walt should be rejected. These issues that we raised, Chair, underline the urgent need to rethink the resource allocation, improve management efficiencies and strengthening accountability mechanisms. They highlight that despite some administrative challenges our overarching goal remains to prioritize high impact programmes that deliver measurable outcomes, creating real opportunities for employment, poverty reduction and social upliftment. Despite

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these hurdles, we remained resolute to the strategic focus that must be on channelling investment into sectors with high potential for job creation and social impact, especially those that support township enterprises and underserved communities.

We must prioritize development efforts in local industries and sectors that uplift vulnerable groups such as youth, women, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities still grappling with remnants of apartheid era economic disparities. This approach aligns with the goals of the District Development Model, which emphasises localized development efforts that are tailored to the unique realities and potentials of each community by empowering local authorities and communities to take charge of their economic destinies. We foster sustainable growth that benefits those who need it most and reduces reliance on centralised decision making. The District Development Model enables more effective resource routine at grassroot level, supporting infrastructure development, local and reporting, entrepreneurship and employment opportunities. It aims to reduce socioeconomic inequalities by building communities capable of sustaining their development trajectories. This department role in supporting this model, especially through targeted investment

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like the labour absorption programme is therefore vital. These resources must be deployed strategically to promote and to formalise informal sector, in particular to stimulate and entrepreneurship and create work opportunities tailored to the specific needs of each district. Such an approach not only nurtures local economic development but also enhances accountability and by increasing proximity between policymakers and beneficiary. Furthermore, our social dialogue platforms such as National Economic Development and Labour Council, Nedlac, are crucial in fostering unity of purpose amongst government, labour and business. These platforms facilitate consensus building and coordinated action across sectors, strengthening our collective effort to implement inclusive growth strategies. By engaging all stakeholders will ensure that policies are better aligned and with realities faced on the ground and that the execution of developmental programme is more effective.

Inclusive dialogue serves as a vital mechanism to reinforce our shared commitment to social justice and economic fairness, ensuring that the benefits of growth are broadly distributed and that nobody is left behind. Therefore, the recent Cabinet

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approval of National Labour Migration Policy and Employment Services Amendment Bill is a step in the right direction.

Hon Bagraim, again, made a statement here to the effect that we are not taking steps to address the influx of illegal foreigners. The introduction of this policy, that is the National Labour Migration Policy is in fact directed to address that and to arrest the influx of illegal foreigners. That is coupled with the Employment Services Amendment Bill, which would in fact help to regulate how markets, particularly the areas that hon Bagraim has been speaking about, should be dealt with, particularly on areas of low concentration in terms of labour. Like for instance, if you're talking about in terms of the Employment Equity Act, the targets, you can't then assault us when talking about the low concentration of Africans on the western side of the country because apartheid designed it in that way. So, we must address that history, hon Bagraim and hon Van Der Walt. We can't leave it like that. Otherwise, we'll be collaborators perpetually with apartheid system, whilst we're saying we are a democratic state.

In moving forward, hon House Chair, a key component of government strategy remains the implementation of National

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Minimum Wage, which is a pivotal in reducing income inequality and providing a safety net for the most vulnerable workers, particularly farm and domestic workers. In recognizing these strategic priorities, we must also confront the realities of resource limitation and the need for more efficient management. This entails and strengthening audit procedures, enhancing monitoring mechanisms and ensuring that vacancies do not hinder programme implementation.

In conclusion, Chair, we are emboldened by our shared purpose of our commitment to transform South Africa into a society where opportunities are universal, dignity is a birthright and economic prosperity benefits all. We call on all stakeholders, government and labour, business and communities to renew their dedication and work together with unity and purpose and harness our collective strength to build an equitable and inclusive nation.

Together we can turn our vision into reality forging a society where social justice, economic opportunity, and dignity are not just ideal but lived realities for every citizen. As President Nelson Mandela said: "It always seems impossible

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until it is done". As the ANC, we support this budget. Thank you. [Applause.]

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Thank you, hon Nontsele. We will now invite the hon Minister of Labour to close the debate. Hon members, may I inform you that a minute was left by the Deputy Minister and that minute will be added to the Minister's allocated time. Thank you. [Applause.]

The MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR: Hon Chairperson.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Order, hon members!

The MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR: Hon Chairperson, sometimes it is very stressful to listen to the people that we are fighting for their transformation, to come here and reject our fight, including the white women of this country, because some of the people who are still down the ladder in terms of transformation is white women. So, it is very stressing to listen to the hon member from the DA coming here and bashing these transformative laws of employment. We have never shied away from acknowledging the historic and institutional

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challenges faced by the department, but we did not come here and lament and complain about the budget.

I think the hon member who made such a comment did not hear what I said. We have been forthright engaging in the findings of the Auditor-General and Portfolio Committee on Employment and Labour and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Scopa. If the hon members care to look beyond political point scoring, they would see that we are beginning to turn the tide around. Corrective action plans have been instituted, and key financial controls are being strengthened. Irregular and wasteful expenditure is being drastically reduced. Disciplinary processes are being enforced, not ignored, our leadership team has been stabilised, and accountability is no longer negotiable.

We are not claiming perfection, but we do claim progress grounded, measurable and backed by oversight bodies. This Budget Vote is not only about new targets it is about ensuring institutional credibility in how we serve workers, how we protect the unemployed and restore faith in the machinery of the state.

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Even as we sit in this very House, arrests are being made and are being executed by law-enforcement officers following a month-long investigation in a major fraud and corruption syndicate targeting Unemployed Insurance Fund, UIF. This is not speculation, it is action.

This morning the SA Police Service has conducted and co-ordinated a takedown operation in Bloemfontein, Bethlehem and Gauteng, arresting individuals involved in a sophisticated stamp involving UIF claims submitted through fictitious companies. [Applause.]

This, hon members, is but one example of where corruption is being rooted out and where our resolve to clean up the system is finding practical expression. We are working closely with the Hawks, SAPS and other agencies to ensure that no stone is left unturned, not only in the Free State and Gauteng, but across the entire system where fraud is suspected.

Let there be no confusion. We take corruption seriously, not just in words, but invisible co-ordinated action. Where there is wrongdoing, we will expose it, where there is a betrayal of

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public trust, we will prosecute, where systems are vulnerable, we will reform and strengthen them.

Hon Chairperson, it did not go unnoticed that the hon Van der Walt of DA chose to frame our efforts at advancing employment equity as being preoccupied with race-based legislation. Let us be clear. It is precisely that attitude that seeks to preserve the status quo, a status quo built on exclusion, dispossession and structural inequality.

What the hon member calls race-based legislation we call it constitutional redress, we call it equity, we call it justice, and we call it a moral obligation to undo centuries of systemic marginalisation in the workplace.

We cannot in good conscience ignore that the South African labour market still reflects patterns of privilege and power that mirror our apartheid past. Employment equity is not about exclusion it is about inclusion; it is about and creating fair opportunities in a society where race, gender and disability have long been used to determine economic destiny. To resist transformation under the guise of nonracialism is to weaponize a noble ideal in defence of historical injustice.

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Transformation is not a threat to excellence it is a condition for sustainable prosperity. We are not apologetic for standing firm on Employment Equity Amendment Act, it is aligned with the Constitution, informed by the Commission for Employment Equity data and reflective of the lived reality of millions of South Africans who remain locked out of meaningful participation in the economy. We will not allow the struggle for equality to be dismissed as a political inconvenience by those who benefit from inequality.

On the matter of unemployment have already outlined its seriousness and the deep economic, social and political implications it holds for the state if left unattended. Let me repeat for the record, no one is running away from the fact that it must equally be said and understood that government in isolation can never be solely responsible for job creation that will be economically unsound and institutionally unsustainable.

Our responsibility is to create a conducive safe environment, drives strategic investment and co-ordinate efforts across the public and private sector to expand decent work and work opportunities. Unemployment is a national emergency, and it

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demands practical, inclusive and collaborative responses. In that spirit, we welcome ideas from all corners of this House.

Let me specifically thank hon Zibi for putting forward the proposal of a Job Seekers Grant. It is a contribution that deserves. [Applause.] [Time expired.]

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): You have gone in excess of your allocated time.

The MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR: Thank you, Chairperson.

I thought I had that one minute, so I thank every member who contributed, including the criticism. Let us work together. [Applause.]

Siswati:

SIHLALO (Mk L S Makhubela): Malunga lahlon, sesifike emaphetselweni enkhulumomphikiswano yeLuphaketotali lweTemisebenti. Asikhumbute emalunga lahlon, kutsi luphaketotali nenkhulumomphikiswano kuyachubeka.

English:

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Good Hope Chamber at half past four, M46 at half past four.

The debate will be on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. Good Hope Chamber it is International Relations and Co-operation.

Siswati:

Malunga lahlon, Indlu iyaguca.

Debate Concluded.

The mini-plenary session rose at 15:55.