



## **COSATU 2020 MAY DAY MESSAGE**

Delivered by the President, Zingiswa Losi on behalf of the NOBs and in conditions of a vicious pandemic, the COVID 19 Novel Virus Lockdown!

### Introduction

Greetings to all workers of South Africa, the African continent and the World

On behalf of the CEC of COSATU, please receive warm and revolutionary greetings fellow workers and compatriots.

Today is our day, a day about workers, for workers and by workers. It is the day on which the whole society recognises that without workers there is no life.

We are honoured to use this day to communicate directly with you directly in the frontlines of the most daring, titanic battle of our times, a battle against the deadly virus (COVID 19).

May we start by conveying our most sincere condolences and message of sympathy to workers and their families who have lost their loved ones in the frontlines of this vicious battle to save our lives. From South Africa to the UK, from Italy to the US, from China to Iran, workers are in the frontlines saving lives in very risky conditions.

In our own country, South Africa, we attest to the fact that across the country, we are witnessing the outstanding courage and bravery of our nurses, doctors, police, soldiers, retail workers, security guards, mineworkers, transport workers and all those men and women involved in risky work during these hard times.

We do wish to pay special attention to all our healthcare workers, the brave and dedicated doctors, nurses, community health carers, paramedics, allied health and social service practitioners, cleaners and morgue workers, who are facing an extraordinary assignment of taking care of the nation under extreme situations. These heroes and heroines are overworked and under-resourced in our overloaded health facilities.

We salute your courage and selflessness when it matters the most! The whole nation can feel and is always inspired by your devotion and sacrifice.

Thank you!

## **Workers Victories in the age of COVID 19**

We take this opportunity to salute our unions for their courageous victories for workers in many sectors. From Clothing and textile where great victories against abuses of the lockdown conditions have led to great gains for workers, to the health and social services sector where the fight for PPEs and better working conditions are still on and we support them fully.

In the Bargaining chambers, in the streets, in the workplaces, in schools, in NEDLAC and everywhere workers are waging battles against vicious and risky conditions and demand safe and healthy working conditions, as well as decent incomes for them and their families. This is the core of our mission and struggle!

**Covid-19: The battle we must win and we shall win!**

A global pandemic of untold proportions has already decimated numbers of human beings and resulted in huge sufferings in many parts of the world, not least in our own country.

We salute the Cuban health Professionals who have joined our titanic battle against COVID 19 and reaffirm our principled stance that the bond of solidarity between Cuba and the African continent has stood the test of time. It has transcended many generations and defeated many obstacles, from apartheid to disease and injustice. Thank you, Cuba, for your selflessness and COSATU workers welcome you with open hands to join our battle to save lives. We do know that certain vested interests are threatened by your acts of solidarity and true humanism. We urge a tight teamwork with our healthcare professionals and communities to save our people's lives.

The Covid-19 virus is showing us the damage of unfettered capitalism in our country and around the world. These glaring failures of the capitalism and the insatiable greed of those in leadership positions are a painful reminder of what lies ahead of us. We cannot be complacent in the fight against exploitation and corruption.

We must say upfront that we welcome the leadership of President Ramaphosa and the alliance for the bold and decisive steps taken to contain the drastic effects of this deadly virus.

However, we are saddened by the extent to which this has exposed the fault-lines of our post-apartheid reality and the legacy of persisting inequalities, hunger and poverty in many of our communities, workplaces, townships and rural areas, in particular.

This has also exposed the ugly reality of corruption, parasitism and rampant looting, as thieves are helping themselves to food parcels meant for the poor and suffering masses. COSATU is decisive that these thieves should be exposed and dealt with by law enforcement agencies. You cannot steal food parcels from the poor and still call yourself a leader.

We also support the Black Businesses in their fight to be included in government procurement and government business in general. Economic Transformation cannot be delayed or postponed any longer, and government cannot continue to do business with companies that are not complying with Employment Equity Laws.

Let us also strongly condemn those who continue to abuse women and children. Let us mobilise all of our available resources to tackle this national crisis head on.

The Break-in and the vandalism of our schools remains a disgraceful stain on our communities. We need tougher laws and sentences against these criminals. Let us isolate and expose them for the traitors they are. They are sabotaging the education of our children and stealing their future, hence the need for us to be decisive against such acts.

In this regard, we amplify the courageous stand by our teacher's unions in defence of a healthy, safe and hygienic future for our children. No school must re-open without guarantees of basic standards for teachers and children.

Under this Covid-19 inspired lockdown, we are witnessing the painful reality where the living and working conditions of the working people are worsening, while the rich continue to live lavishly and enjoy profits of unimaginable proportions. Senior executives continue to award themselves huge bonuses. This has to change because it is not sustainable.

Our job as unions, at this time, is not only to ensure that we flatten the curve of the virus but also to flatten the curve of poverty, inequality and joblessness. Coronavirus has exposed the carelessness of some of our policy choices.

Twenty-six years after the democratic breakthrough; it is criminal that many people still do not have access to water, our housing and human settlement system is grossly inefficient and inadequate; our health system is poorly funded, and our economy is imploding because of poor and unreliable energy supply. The capacity of the state is being tested and the irrationality of voluntary austerity budgets that weaken the government is being painfully exposed.

We have observed with shock and rage how some employers are still acting to protect their narrow interests by taking decisions that are maximising their accumulation even under conditions of economic crisis. Governments all over the world, including in this country are still adopting policies that make it easier to take from the poor and give to the rich in the name of bailouts and tax incentives.

Policies are developed and regulations deliberately ignored, or policy loopholes deliberately created to allow capital to amass more wealth and squeeze the working class further into a dark corner of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Let us condemn the attempts by some to use this crisis as an opportunity for private accumulation. We must ensure that Covid 19 is not used by employers and big monopolies to take away workers' rights by retrenching workers, denying them their wages and their pensions.

As workers, we will not allow the relief and stimulus packages to be freely given to employers, so that they can take us back to our "normal" situation. Nothing has been normal for workers. Rampant exploitation and massive indebtedness are not normal.

The fact that more than 13 million workers in South Africa live on less than R10 a day is not normal. Millions of South Africans can barely buy one loaf of bread. This is not normal, and we should not allow this to be normalised.

- If our taxpayer's money is going to be used to bail out and help businesses, we need all those companies that are going to receive the money to agree to a moratorium on retrenchments.
- We cannot go out and borrow money from lenders outside the country while we maintain loose exchange controls that allow billions to be taken out of the country daily.
- We cannot give the unemployed people little stipends to help them keep afloat and then fail to impose price controls on all basic goods, especially those food items that are exempt to the VAT.
- Government cannot give tax breaks, incentives and bailouts to companies and still fail to tax the billions that are sitting in company bank accounts.

## **Going forward**

As we prepare to reopen the economy, we need to ensure that any employer wishing to reopen has a health and safety plan in place. These must be negotiated with and agreed to by workers and unions. Workers need to be provided safe transport to work. Workplaces should provide PPEs, adhere to social distancing, and perform screening and testing without fail. This must equally be applied to our educational institutions. This must be part of our new normal.

Health and Safety has been one of the cornerstones of our campaign and Covid-19 has strengthened our commitment to make health and safety an important element of collective bargaining. Worker sell their labour and not their lives.

Our message to all workers is simple, if employers do not comply with set conditions and protocols during this reopening, you down your tools and report them so that the workplace can be shutdown. We demand more labour inspectors, if we can mobilise resources to deploy soldiers, we can mobilise resources to protect our most valuable asset the workers.

We agree with President Cyril Ramaphosa that Post-Covid-19, we need a new people centred economy.

Going forward we need to ensure that the Post Covid-19 economic transition is characterised by more radical policies and decisive action to effect thorough-going socio-economic transformation. We need to work together with other social partners to develop a principled and sustainable response that will draw everybody's attention and energy on the total restructuring of our economy, so that it can be placed on a labour-absorbing trajectory.

We need a response that will eliminate the current monopolies and build an economy that will meet the basic needs of our people.

COSATU welcomes the economic relief measures announced by the President. We are happy with the help given to build the capacity of the UIF and an increase of social grants, including for the long term unemployed.

We look forward to the tabling of a new budget aligned to the needs of an economy reeling from Covid-19 and the shutdown. This budget needs to expand the stimulus package to a minimum of R1 trillion if we seek to defeat unemployment.

Equally the private sector, the banks in particular must come to the party. The Public and private sector investments must be coordinated to ensure that they are geared towards productive economic investments that will spur inclusive economic growth and create jobs in areas like ports, railways, energy, health, broadband spectrum etc.

At the heart of rebuilding our economy must be local procurement. Government and the private sector and indeed all consumers must come to the party. We must all actively and consciously buy locally produced goods. The days of cheap foreign imports must come to an end.

We need to learn lessons from this crisis, so that we make better choices going forward. This should make us reflect on whether our own organisations have requisite organisational and political capacity to provide practical answers to this crisis going forward. What are some of the big lessons that we need to learn?

- Public health is a very important sector and requires major investment to develop its capacity to fight such pandemics and in general ensure health for all the people.
- The Political economy of health has reminded us that a healthy and productive workforce is a condition for a healthy and productive economy and people!
- National Health Insurance is not a luxury, but it is a necessity and we cannot delay it any further. So, let us build the NHI now and not later. Let us take the profit motive out of the NHI. Health is not a commodity. Let us build a well-resourced, capable and dignified health system for all now.
- Public service workers are not a nuisance like we have been repeatedly told by neoliberals, but they are an asset and a precious resource because they keep us alive and protect us. Ordinary workers who look after us, who clean, produce food from the farms, transport us, dig wealth from the ground, and cook for us; must be accordingly treated as national heroes and rewarded accordingly. Now we know that the true celebrities that needs to be celebrated are ordinary workers!
- As we speak here today, Public service employees, our frontline soldiers against the virus, are engaged in a titanic struggle with the employer at the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) to protect collective bargaining and fight for their money. We salute our unions for never wavering in their fight for better wages and improved conditions. Government, as an employer, needs to honour Resolution 1 of 2018 and this is non-negotiable. The fact that they need to fight for what is due to them is embarrassing.
- We have also learned that the workplace will never be the same. We have been talking about the Future of work and the 4IR, now we are living it. We must act

fast to ensure that these new technological systems and developments work for everyone and that no one is left behind.

- Lastly, a democratic, developmental and capable state is very important to confronting any and all forms of abuse, corruption, parasitism, looting and self-serving interests. We must build a new culture of a state that serves the needs and interests of the poor and working masses.

## **Conclusion**

In the face of this crisis, the rivalry between unions looks and sounds so trivial and meaningless. Let us work to close the gap between leaders and members and lead our workers in the struggle against the continued exploitation by employers.

Let us build programmes of unity in action to resist exploitation of workers and attempts by capital to divide and mislead workers. We need to work to make sure that unions across the board work together to overcome non-antagonistic differences.

**To all COSATU members**, we should continue to work together to build and strengthen this organisation into an even sharper instrument of class war, which has the capacity of taking up the problems and challenges facing working people and their communities.

**To Shop stewards**, it is through your struggles in the workplace and activism in communities where you live that this federation remains a resilient and exemplary protective shield for the millions of workers in the continent and beyond. It is this courage, resilience and fortitude that has resulted to millions of workers wanting to join COSATU, since the outbreak of Covid-19.

The massive changes that are happening in the workplace have reminded workers of the value of trade unions. If you are not a member of a trade union, it means you do not have a seat at the table and you are leaving your fate at the hands of vultures, who will not hesitate to crush you. Let us mobilise and fight together! Let us join unions.

COSATU remains a mass-based organisation, which derives its perspectives from the masses. The reason our Federation is not populist and has low tolerance for demagoguery is that we do not identify with the people out of pity, but we are grounded, and we genuinely identify and connect with community struggles. We know that there are no easy answers, perfect solutions and that sometimes trade-offs are necessary to fix problems.

We remain a fighting organisation that continues to enjoy respect and credibility by the working class because we are capable of presenting solutions to the challenges confronting society. We cannot be complacent though. The challenges of the future mean that some of the solutions of the past have become redundant. Let us continue to be a forward-looking organisation that grapples with new developments like 4IR and Climate change and ensure that they are not imposed on workers recklessly.

Guided by the concluding words of the Communist Manifesto, our message is clear; "Proletarians of all countries unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains".

**I thank you!**  
**Amandla!**