

The President of the Republic, cde. Cyril Ramaphosa,
The leadership of COSATU and its Affiliate Unions,
Leadership of our sister Federations present here,
Leadership of our Alliance Partners, the ANC and the SACP,
Our invited guests from South Africa and internationally,
Delegates of our Affiliates present today,
Most importantly the ordinary members of COSATU and workers across South Africa,
Good morning,

Introductory Remarks

I have the honour on behalf of the leadership of COSATU of welcoming you to this historic Central Committee of your Federation, COSATU.

Before we commence, let us please observe a moment of silence for our fallen comrades. Since our Congress we have lost many comrades. These include the General Secretaries of NUM and SAMWU, David Siphunzi and Koena Ramatlou. It includes 85 000 South Africans including countless members of COSATU.

In the beginning of the year we paid farewell to Minister Jackson Mthembu, a former MAWU Organiser in Mpumalanga. Last week we mourned the loss of Deputy Minister, Hlengiwe Mkhize. And just this Saturday evening, we lost the Mayor of Joburg, Jolidee Matongo. There are simply too many comrades, friends and relatives we have all lost during this period.

These are no ordinary times. We are meeting today virtually for the first time as the Central Committee. This is necessitated due to the pandemic that has claimed the lives of more than 85 000 South Africans and millions more across the world.

2.2 million South African workers lost their jobs at the height of the lockdown in 2020. Millions more lost wages, pensions and benefits. Families went hungry. The economy is in its deepest recession in a century.

Workers more than ever need COSATU and its Affiliates to defend their rights, protect their salaries, secure their pensions and save their jobs. They need a COSATU that is united and fighting fit.

Our battles will not be won easily. There will be no victories handed to the working class on a silver platter. It requires us to work hand in hand with our sister Federations. A working class that is divided cannot be victorious.

It requires us to defend the gains of the democratic breakthrough of 1994. And to hold our Alliance Partners accountable to delivering upon the 2019 electoral mandate. It compels us to intensify the fight against corruption, to rebuild the state and grow the economy.

These are the issues we must interrogate. We must emerge with clear objectives, practical solutions and a concrete programme of action. We cannot afford to walk away with slogans and to outsource our tasks to government or business.

As the leadership of COSATU, the Federation of Elijah Barayi, we are confident that we will emerge more united and determined than ever to wage the battles to improve the lives of workers across South Africa.

International – Workers Under Siege

The challenges facing workers in South Africa are no different than those facing workers across the world. Workers in Zimbabwe have fled in numbers due to years of political and economic mismanagement. Thousands have left Somalia, a country which has not had a functioning government in 30 years.

Workers eSwatini continue to be abused by a decadent monarch. Our comrades in Western Sahara continue to bear the pain of lives in refugee camps. Our sisters in Palestine witness their land for an independent state being swallowed by Israel.

Our brothers in Venezuela suffer under economic hardship due to sanctions imposed by the United States. The poor in Brazil have been decimated by the deliberate mishandling of the pandemic by a right wing President. Cuba despite suffering under sanctions imposed upon it by the US, provides unbelievable solidarity across the world, and in particular to Africa.

The United States has removed Donald Trump from office but continues to be beset by a right wing and toxic political paralysis and seems intent on provoking a new Cold War with the People's Republic of China.

COSATU and our Affiliates have continued to engage and champion the cause of workers in SATUCC, ITUC, WFTU, the ILO and other international fora.

The Federation has led solidarity campaigns in support of eSwatini, Zimbabwe, Western Sahara, Cuba, Venezuela and Palestine. Let us reflect on how we can increase the practical solidarity we provide to our comrades across the world.

The National Democratic Revolution Under Siege

It is not an exaggeration to say that the NDR is under siege and facing some of its greatest challenges since 1994. The ANC's 2017 Nasrec Conference was a critical and progressive game changer in the history of the movement. It provided a chance to cleanse and heal the ANC that has been battered by the decade of state capture, corruption and factionalism.

The election of the founding General Secretary of the National Union of Mine Workers, cde. Matamela Ramaphosa as President, has given hope for change for the better. On many fronts the President has begun the hard work of cleaning the movement and rebuilding government and growing the economy.

The challenges are steep. The economy is bleeding. Many organs of state have collapsed or are falling apart. These range from State Owned Enterprises e.g. SA

Express, SAA, DENEL, the Post Office, Metro Rail to dozens of municipalities who fail to pay their workers on time.

Billions are lost in the fiscus due to corruption, wasteful expenditure and tax evasion.

The credibility of government and the ANC is battered. Yet public surveys show that workers continue to support the President and hope for the ANC to return to its roots.

We welcome the efforts to clean the state and the ANC. The implementation of the step aside resolution is critical. The crack down on tax evasion is welcome. The recovering of stolen funds from Eskom is positive. This cleansing must be intensified. We cannot afford to lose the war against corruption.

If we are serious about winning the war against corruption, then there must be speedy not never ending prosecutions. The NPA, Hawks and SAPS must get their houses in order and deliver. Equally we must protect whistle blowers. It cannot be acceptable that we allow whistle blowers to be assassinated like some lawless republic.

We are heading to local government elections in less than 6 weeks. The ANC's manifesto will be launched within the week. It speaks to many of COSATU's demands including growing the economy, saving and creating jobs, tackling corruption, supporting local procurement and rebuilding local government.

We are all disappointed with the behaviour of many of our comrades in government. But let us not delude ourselves into thinking that workers will be better off with the ANC defeated. The DA will scrap all our progressive labour laws, including the national minimum wage that has improved the wages of 6 million workers.

The EFF has established a Labour Desk and sought to enter the workplace and displace trade unions. Let us not be complacent about organising, servicing and representing our members. We cannot afford to be found wanting.

Let us not waste time on commenting on the myriad of tiny parties.

The ANC has its faults, but it has worked with COSATU to pass the Labour Relations, Basic Conditions of Employment and National Minimum Wage Acts. It is working with COSATU to pass the Compensation of Injury on Duty Amendment Bill to ensure that domestic workers are covered and better protection is afforded mine workers and women.

It has ensured that Parliament passed the 3 Gender Based Violence Bills that will be a powerful tool in the fight against women, children and the vulnerable. It is the ANC that has tabled the NHI Bill at Parliament to ensure all will have medical care. It is the ANC that has tabled the Expropriation Bill and the Section 25 Constitutional Amendment Bill to accelerate land reform.

As the leadership of COSATU we must appreciate and applaud the tireless efforts of our Affiliates and members who went out and helped ensure the ANC was returned to office against all odds in the 2019 elections.

As we end this Central Committee on Thursday, let us go out and mobilise our members, their families and workers throughout our land to vote in their numbers and

ensure that we return the ANC to office on 1 November. But let us not then sit down and pray for delivery. We need to watch our Municipalities and force them to deliver on their mandates, to deal with corruption and outsourcing, to pay workers on time, to deliver basic services to all communities.

Working to Improve the Lives of Workers and Their Families

The period since our Congress in 2018 has been one of the most difficult for workers. The economy is battling a devastating recession. Many SOEs have collapsed or are collapsing. Local government is in deep distress. Many companies have closed.

This period saw an open attempt to collapse collective bargaining in the public service and local government. The former Minister for Finance, Tito Mboweni went to Parliament to announce a 4 year wage freeze. Treasury went to SALGA and instructed them to impose a wage freeze on municipal workers.

In the face of this unprecedented undermining of collective bargaining our Affiliates have done well. SAMWU has concluded a 3 year wage agreement with increases protecting workers' wages from being eroded from inflation. SATAWU has concluded similar progressive agreements in Transnet.

Our Affiliates in the PSCBC have been at the forefront of this attack. Against all odds they have managed to overturn the 2021 wage freeze and secure an increase for public servants. The 2020 wage agreement reneging is before the Constitutional Court. The 2022 wage negotiations must commence now.

Comrades if we are to emerge victorious in these battles, then we must be united as Affiliates. Our members may provide different mandates but we must as Affiliates find ways to bridge those gaps and walk together. What is clear is that workers cannot afford a COSATU that is divided.

If we are to remain true to the legacy of Elijah Barayi, then we must at all times jealously guard the unity of COSATU. Yes, this will require for all to compromise. It will require for us to hear, listen and work to address each others' concerns. Slogans will not do that.

Many SOEs are dying. We need clear plans on what must be done to save them. Otherwise workers will pay the price in retrenchments and lost wages. This is what drove COSATU to draft the Eskom Social Compact that has now been agreed to be government and social partners at Nedlac and is now in varying stages of implementation.

We need Affiliates to develop proposals on what must be done to fix Transnet, Metro Rail, SABC, the Post Office, Denel and local government? We cannot afford to wait for others to develop solutions and hope that it will save workers' jobs.

A Presidential SOE Council has been established. COSATU led by cde. Deputy President Mike Shingange is representing workers there. We look forward to it tabling clear plans on how to turn our SOEs around. COSATU agrees that partnerships may be necessary in instances but we will remain opposed to privatisation.

COSATU worked tirelessly with SACTWU and SACCAWU to save Edcon, both before and during the lockdown. It was a hard won victory where with the support of the UIF and government, we were able to save 40 000 direct and 100 000 indirect clothing and retail workers jobs.

We must commend the efforts of SASBO who took on the banking sector and captured the nation's attention in the fight against job losses in the era of the 4th industrial revolution. The leadership of business showed its true colours when they won a court interdict against SASBO and COSATU's Section 77 strike certificate. We are pleased that we have now won this case at the Labour Appeal Court.

The past 18 months have seen the Federation with the support of Affiliates meeting and working at Nedlac 7 days a week. These collective efforts have seen over R53 billion paid from the UIF to ensure more than 5.5 million workers had money to buy food for their families. This has been the largest source of stimuli into the economy.

It has seen a package of relief measures to help protect workers, the unemployed, businesses and the economy put in place. This includes the R350 grant helping millions, tax relief for companies to keep them open, loan deferrals to assist consumers etc.

We must commend the excellent work done by SACTWU to ensure the delivery of the UIF TERS and vaccines to thousands of clothing and textile workers.

We must salute the heroic sacrifices of our health workers and members of NEHAWU, DENOSA, SAMATU and SAEPU. They have carried the nation on their shoulders. They have born the brunt of Covid-19 infections and many paying the ultimate sacrifice. When history is written, it will mark our nurses, doctors, paramedics and other health workers as the heroes of Covid-19.

This pandemic has devastated South Africa like none other in our lifetimes. It will remain with us for some time. We must learn to live with this new normal. We are fortunate to have the weapons to defeat it in our hands. These are for all of us to wear our masks, social distance and sanitise. Equally it is for all of us to go and vaccinate. The vaccine will not change your DNA. It is not a conspiracy. It is safe and will protect you, your family and your job. Government has done well to secure sufficient vaccines and to pay for them. We are working with government to ensure that mobile vaccine units are deployed to every township, informal area, village, farm, taxi rank and bus station and shopping centre.

There has been a positive turn around in vaccination numbers. We have now passed 16 million vaccines doses dispensed. We are averaging 1 million a week. But we need to double our rate. We need to engage every member, worker and their family on why this is critical not only to save their lives and jobs, but also their families. This is the only way for the economy to emerge safely. We owe it to our health workers.

Let us emerge from this CC with a clear call to go and out mobilise every worker and their family and ensure that all have received their vaccines by Christmas. We cannot afford to fail.

COSATU supports the call for every single person to vaccinate. This must be done through education, engagement and persuasion. We are a constitutional democracy that respects the rights of all. Mandatory vaccinations will not work and may in fact only serve to distract us from the work of convincing every person on the need to vaccinate. We cannot afford scandals of people selling vaccine certificates.

July marked a moment of shame for South Africa. Due to the factional infighting in the ANC we saw KZN and Gauteng devastated by criminal violence, arson and looting. The announcement of a panel to investigate it is welcome. But we need to see the ring leaders and culprits arrested, tried and convicted if we are serious about being a rule based society.

COSATU tabled a 12 point disaster relief package at Nedlac in the wake of the violence. It was immediately agreed to by government and is in varying stages of being implemented.

This includes the reinstatement of the R350 grant. We now need to ensure this SRD Grant is made permanent and increased to the food poverty line. It is a stepping stone for the long championed BIG.

We must express our deep anger at the failures of the UIF to begin paying the TERS relief for workers affected by the violence. There is a sense of paralysis in the UIF by officials scared of being found wanting by the Auditor-General. However this is at the cost of thousands of workers waiting 3 months for relief. We need to engage the Minister for Employment and Labour to resolve this and ensure the UIF capacity challenges are addressed.

COSATU helped develop the Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Plan at Nedlac. Its key pillars are the Eskom Social Compact, tackling corruption, rebuilding Transnet and Metro Rail and other SOEs, ramping up local procurement, unblocking obstacles to economic growth and mobilising financial stimuli for the economy.

We need Affiliates to be the champions of local procurement in their workplaces, bargaining councils and sectors. We should not simply delegate this to government.

Organised labour has made a commitment to drive local procurement. This is one of the most effective ways to sustain and create manufacturing jobs. This means we must buy locally produced cars, clothes and furniture as unions. Our pension and investment funds must support local procurement. We must engage the employers at each work place to increase local procurement. Affiliates need to report on these monthly to COSATU to ensure we are making progress.

We are deeply worried about the level of participation of some Affiliates in the 15 industrial sectoral master plans. Some Affiliates are very active in them. SACTWU is leading the master plans in its sectors. But others Affiliates need to be active too. As a result some of the master plans like health, construction, mining have not even begun to be formulated. If we are serious about creating jobs, then we need to grab these opportunities.

Building a Strong COSATU to Defend Workers

I would like to thank the General Secretary and DGS of COSATU, cdes. Bheki Ntshalintshali and Solly Phetoe as well as the leadership of our Affiliates for ensuring that the Federation, despite its many challenges, has remained a well oiled machine.

This is despite limited resources and a shortage of person power. We have been able to achieve many victories from defending the right to strike, to passing the PIC Amendment Act to providing for paid leave to vaccinate with our limited resources.

The finances of the Federation will always remain stretched, but we have made progress in paying debt, reducing expenditure and finding more.

Let us use this CC to reflect on how we can further strengthen this Federation of Ray Alexander. In particular the heart of the Federation, our organising and campaigns. What can we do to strengthen our internal policy capacities of the Federation and Affiliates? We need all Affiliates not just a few, to actively participate in Nedlac. We are dependent upon a few comrades and a few Affiliates who participate in Nedlac yet these are critical engagements for workers. Each Affiliate needs to avail itself for Nedlac.

Some of our Affiliates have been struggling for some time. Others must not feel that these challenges could not someday affect them too. What can we do to help rebuild CEPPWAWU and SATAWU? These are Affiliates with a long history. They organise key sectors of the economy. What can we do to offer solidarity to NUM? How can we assist CWU to expand its foot print into the emerging e-sectors of the economy?

Are there ways for our larger Affiliates like SADTU, NEHAWU, POPCRU to provide support for our smaller Affiliates to grow.

We need to find ways to resolve matters of scoping and to ensure it does not become flashpoints that can divide us. The Federation is commissioning research by the University of Cape Town through the ILO. This is a critical matter. If we do not handle scoping with the sensitivity and maturity it requires, it will divide unions. It will set Affiliates as rivals to be fought against and not as comrades to be supported. But we can only manage this if Affiliates work with COSATU to resolve this issues.

We have all committed ourselves to supporting the emancipation of women. Yet no Affiliate currently has woman General Secretary. Only one Affiliate has a woman President. What is our plan to invest in a generation of women leaders? Or is ours just to shout Malibongwe?

We need to invest more in our gender structures and campaigns, both at a provincial and an Affiliate level. There are not vocal enough.

We witnessed a rise in GBV in the beginning of the lockdown. The 3 GBV Bills are likely to come into effect by the end of 2021. Can we develop campaigns to make sure all our members and workers are aware of the protections these Bills will bring? Can we also make sure that all criminals and abusers of women and children know the consequences of their abusive behaviour?

Comrades we have won many victories since the 2018 Congress yet we are not claiming them. The National Minimum Wage has improved the wages of 6 million

farm, domestic, construction, retail, hospitality and other workers? SACTWU and SACCAWU have had education programmes and campaigns to help enforce the NMW. What about other Affiliates?

AFADWU, SACTWU and SACCACWU have done excellent work in recruiting thousands of food and farm workers. But we have far to go still.

SADSAWU is correct to feel that we have not given them enough support to sign up domestic workers. The COIDA Bill will be passed into law by mid-2022, can we not run recruitment campaigns to sign up domestic workers and ensure they are registered for the Compensation Fund?

11 out of 16 million workers are registered for the UIF. What are the plans of Affiliates and Provinces to ensure we organise the remaining 5 million workers to register for the UIF?

Are we happy for our membership to remain 1.5 million? We have set bold recruitment targets to reach 2 million. SASBO and SACCAWU have shown positive progress. But we need to do much more.

COSATU can only be strong nationally if we have active provinces. Provinces can only be strong if we have vibrant locals. Yet many Affiliates are not active in these structures. Instead we rely upon a few Affiliates to cover for us. This is not sustainable.

We have workers in every ward, town, village and city. So why are we not signing them up? What are we doing to ensure that we actively service them as Affiliates? All too often members and workers call COSATU for help and complain that their Shopsteward is not assisting them. We cannot afford for this gap to grow.

One of our most fundamental tasks to ensure the long term survival of the Federation is to recruit young workers. Yet only 2 Affiliates have established young workers structures. What is our plan to recruit the youth? To ensure that young people understand why we need trade unions? We should not rely upon past victories of 1985, 1990 and 1994 to attract the youth. They need to know what will unions do for them in 2021, 2025 and 2030?

A few years ago, the prophets of doom, even some of our own comrades wrote off COSATU. Some in the media mocked us as a spent force. That is no longer the case.

Not a day will pass without all media institutions calling COSATU to ask for its views on what must be done to fix the economy, provide relief to workers, stabilise Eskom, tackle corruption, roll out vaccines, protect women from abuse etc.

This is because COSATU not only has a highly effective communications department but also because our Affiliates are leading in their sectors. It is because despite all our differences we are united. It is because we speak sense and we have clear and pragmatic solutions. It is because they know that COSATU is getting things done despite all the difficulties and challenges.

There are organisations out there who spout all sorts of silly ideas. No one takes them seriously or bothers to call them.

Concluding Remarks

Comrade leadership and delegates allow me to thank you for the countless hours and years you have spent and continue to spend in pursuit of improving the lives of workers. Thank you for the robust engagements that you have provided at the CEC and will I'm sure do at this CC. Thank you for making our national day of action in October 2020 an overwhelming success despite a pandemic.

Thank you for defending the rights of mine workers to a living wage, for ensuring that clothing workers receive above inflation increases, for protecting Eskom workers from retrenchments. Thank you for ensuring that Parliament adopted ILO Convention 190 on tackling sexual harassment at the workplace and for forcing government to reinstate the R350 grant and help millions receive relief from the UIF.

Thank you Affiliates for ensuring that COSATU remains the largest Federation, for ensuring that COSATU remains the key voice of society and the working class, for ensuring that this Federation continues to hold government accountable and cleans the ANC of the demons of factionalism and state capture.

Allow me to thank the National Office Bearers of COSATU and our Affiliates for the support that they have given me as President. Without this unity, none of our victories would have been possible.

The legendary American trade unionist, socialist and civil rights leader, A. Phillip Randolph eloquently said "The essence of trade unionism is social uplift. The labour movement has been the haven for the disposed, the despised, the neglected, the downtrodden, the poor". That is why we are here. Let us emerge from this CC reinvigorated and with clear marching orders in this battle on behalf of the working class.

Thank you. Matla!