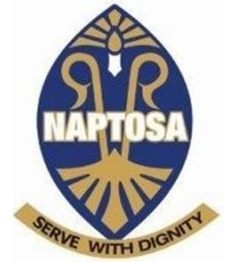


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REFLECTION ON THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS (SONA)

The recent reflection by the president on the 30 years of democracy has sparked mixed reactions. And justifiably so. While the history of our country is important to acknowledge, it is equally important to prioritise the needs of our present-day citizens.

Climate Change Response Fund: NAPTOSA acknowledges and appreciates the country's commitment to a just transition towards a green economy and the creation of green jobs. We do however have concerns regarding the effectiveness of proposed actions. NAPTOSA is skeptical about the Climate Change Response Fund being another avenue for fundraising without substantial action. A staggered approach is inadequate considering the urgency of addressing climate change. The impact which is felt in many provinces is evident that immediate and decisive action is imperative, as there is no "second earth" to fall back on.

Infrastructure Investment: Although investment in infrastructure, particularly the overhaul of Ports and Rails, was highlighted as crucial for economic growth and job creation, by the President, we are frustrated by delays in realising these projects. Our freeways have become racetracks for the trucking industry. NAPTOSA along with the rest of the country eagerly anticipates the benefits such investments could bring to the economy and employment opportunities, especially for the youth.

Water and Sanitation Projects: Highlighting the water and sanitation projects is noted as potentially beneficial for ensuring basic human rights, we are however concerned about the government's ability to effectively execute these initiatives. Confidence in the Department of Water and Sanitation's capacity to deliver on its promises is lacking, especially with the recent water shedding experiences and the Hammanskraal Cholera outbreak.

Education and Internet Access: NAPTOSA acknowledges the resilience of teachers and learners facing adversity, with praise for the role that internet access plays in broadening horizons for students. Tragically too few public-school learners are accessing this benefit. Basic education was ignored with no real plan for the ECD and the immediate compulsory inclusion of Grade R. NAPTOSA is adamant that the key to addressing literacy problems is to focus on the Foundations of Learning. There is a need for a long-term

post-basic education plan aimed at empowering citizens and fostering a sense of national contribution among the youth, rather than dependency on the state.

Poverty and Mental Health: There is recognition of the strides made in reducing poverty, NAPTOSA is however, concerned about the dire situations faced by vulnerable individuals. Starvation is threatening many households, with the soaring cost of basic goods, putting food security out of reach for many. The need for comprehensive support systems to address mental health and challenges arising from poverty requires urgent attention.

National Health Insurance: The President's response to the National Health Insurance bill is met with skepticism. The President needs to heed caution from various health care stakeholders. The NHI may appear to be a viable solution, implementing it, however, with the current state of our public health systems presents significant challenges.

Gender Based Violence and Police Reform: Despite progress made in empowering women, NAPTOSA remains alarmed over the rising incidents of violence against them, underscoring the urgency for concrete action to ensure their safety. In addition, the focus on educating our youth against gender-based violence must be prioritised. The need for reform within the police force cannot be over emphasized. The time for empty promises is over, NAPTOSA believes tangible improvements in their capacity and effectiveness is needed. As the police force continues to grow, it is essential that we ensure that it is fully accountable and empowered to address the challenges we face as a country. Only then can we truly address the issues of corruption, the high crime rate, murders and femicide, and ensure the safety and security of our communities.

NAPTOSA is disappointed that the President's address lacked focus on the urgent matters affecting citizens today. We are concerned about the translation of words into meaningful action. NAPTOSA is calling for accountability, urgency, and tangible results to address the current crises facing the nation.

Mr BL Manuel

Executive Director