



NEHAWU ON THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS WITH THE EXPECTATION OF A BLEAK BUDGET SPEECH AHEAD

07 February 2025

Issued by the office of the Secretariat



“We need a government that works for the people. We need a state that is capable and competent, underpinned by a professional public service.”

President
Cyril Ramaphosa,
SONA 2025

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The National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union [NEHAWU] notes the presentation of the State of the Nation Address (SONA), presented on Thursday, 06 February 2025, by the President of the Republic of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa.

The SONA was the first of the Seventh Administration and lays out a policy trajectory of the state, which is headed by the coalition of the African National Congress, Democratic Alliance and other minor political parties. NEHAWU would also like to use this opportunity to extend its condolences to members of the South African National Defence Force who tragically lost their lives recently in deployment to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). We express our solidarity with the people of the DRC, especially the working class and rural poor, some of whom are super-exploited by transnational mining capital, including the artisanal mining communities in which child-labour is often involved, who are at the mercy of various banditry gangs. It is an outrage that the extraction of the conflict 3Ts minerals in the eastern regions of the DRC, namely Tin, Tantalum and Tungsten which are required for the advanced technologies is through the most backward and barbaric practices involving the criminal collusions amongst the Congolese elites, rogue commercial channels through Rwanda and other corporations in Asia, Arab Gulf states and the West.





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We affirm the President's position on ensuring that our political and economic sovereignty is not undermined and threatened. The sacrosanctity of our sovereignty and Constitutional Democracy, which barely withstood state capture, still faces serious subversive acts and propaganda from fringe right-wing organisations who have a direct line to the White House. These latest affronts to our progressive policies, be it on: Palestine, the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act, National Health Insurance and the Expropriation Act, requires the state to withstand attempts to erode the will and mandate of our people and our policy positions. We therefore call for vigilance and steadfastness in defending both our progressive domestic and international policies.

The first SONA of the Seventh Administration also took place in the context of the seventieth anniversary of the Freedom Charter, yet millions of South Africans still face immense challenges related to war-like unemployment and poverty rates and the socio-economic conditions in general. Whilst we welcome the marginal advances in the various jobs funds, youth unemployment remains at crisis levels. We therefore call on the state to prioritise the filling of available and critical vacancies in the public sector. Our municipalities are in a state of collapse and there has been an annually increasing disinvestment in public infrastructure and in filling vital public service vacancies. This requires the state's immediate intervention. The President's insistence therefore, on a new District or Local Government Model has been repeated on numerous occasions with little impact being experienced and felt on the ground. We therefore look forward to interacting with the White Paper on Human Settlements and in making our input on the new municipal funding model mentioned by the President. Unfortunately, the President and the state's commitments to government spending on infrastructure through incentivising the private sector participation (the Presidential Infrastructure Fund) rings hollow.

NEHAWU wishes to condemn the recent misinformation around the National Health Insurance (NHI) Act peddled by the known mendacious newsrooms. These utterances have clearly influenced the SONA address, considering the President's meek remarks on the implementation of NHI. We no longer want to hear about preparatory steps, while over fifty-six thousand people die of tuberculosis annually. We want to see the President act decisively in promulgating the Act into law and ensuring full implementation of NHI, as guided by Section 57 of the NHI Act. We once again reiterate that the state's current macroeconomic and fiscal policy continues to directly undermine the implementation of NHI.





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We note the President's remarks in ensuring that the energy transition is kept at a pace at which we can control. However, NEHAWU again demands that the state re-assess the illogical insistence of accepting a commitment of R13 billion, dollar denominated loans from the International Partnership Group to fund the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET-IP). This is done within the context of National Treasury chasing a deficit and slashing budgets to vital public services.

We would also like to use this opportunity to congratulate the Matriculants of 2024 for record-breaking academic results, the highest pass rate and highest rate of bachelor passes in our thirty years of democracy. Whilst this milestone is incredible at the time when basic education faces a concerning crisis with only 50% of the current matric cohort of 2024 entering and completing their matric and the other 50% dropping out or not completing their senior certificate. We are also eagerly awaiting further feedback to our requests for an update on proposals by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) on funding models for the "missing-middle".

The President unfortunately missed an opportunity to detail plans to rectify the unconstitutional behaviour of National Treasury, South African Social Services Agency (SASSA) and the Department of Social Services as a result of the outcomes of the Pretoria High Court decisions related to the budgeting, mismanagement and dispensing of Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grants. The court's scathing rebuke of the state in mistreating millions of vulnerable South Africans through ridiculous regulations - restricting over eight million potential beneficiaries and warning National Treasury of dangerous overreach in placing a budgetary curb on beneficiaries should have been addressed. What concerns NEHAWU is that the very department that the High Court has found to have failed the most vulnerable in our society, is now appealing the court judgement.

Our expectations for SONA 2025 were overshadowed by the geopolitical and domestic polycrises facing workers and the poor. For our members and the communities we serve, we aim our focus towards the Budget Speech in order to have a thorough assessment of what the remainder of the Seventh Administration will look like.

