Address by (MP) Cde Audrey Sbongile Zuma on the Budget Vote Debate of the Department of Employment and Labour

21 July 2020

The African National Congress rises to adopt the Adjusted Budget Vote 31: Employment and Labour.

This year is the 65th anniversary of the Freedom Charter. As we mark this important anniversary in the history of our liberation struggle; the ANC  
recommits to the aspirations of that generation heroes and heroines who drafted the Charter.

When the 3000 delegates met at the Congress of the People (not Mr Lekota’s party - COPE), they said that that in a democratic South Africa “THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY”. With this declaration, they made a solemn commitment to fight for these rights for future generations of workers  
and work seekers.

As we face the unprecedented economic crisis visited on our country and the world by the COVID-19 pandemic, our government and social partners need the same courage to act decisively to create jobs and to protect employment. In the words of the Freedom Charter, this is a moment in which South Africans must realise that this country belongs to all who live in it, Black and White.

The ANC notes that the Inspection and Enforcement programme loses about SEVEN percent or 48 million of the funds that were allocated in the February budget. This is quite significant, considering that there is evidence that few unscrupulous employers are not adhering to the labour laws and lockdown regulations.

However, the ANC welcomes that both transfers and subsidies, and payment of capital asset budgets of Programme 2 have remained  
unchanged.

A study released last week estimates that between February and April, about three million workers lost their jobs. Out of the three million, two million are women. The implications of this are that pre-existing inequalities in South Africa have been exacerbated, with job and income losses concentrated  
among black people, women, low wage earners and manual labourers.

Our economy was not generating enough jobs to meet the needs of school leavers and many adults of working age. The COVID-19 pandemic has made a bad situation worse. We now require innovative ways to recover and create new jobs on a massive scale; as failure to do so will result in enormous social unrest and violence.

Our government has shown in its response to the crisis that it has the capacity to act as an entrepreneurial state and work in unusual ways when  
necessary in order to support our people. We call on the Department and the entities to continue working in this fashion. I urge each one of us to put our shoulders to the wheel and ask, what can we do for our country in this moment?

In order to play its part, the Committee has recommended that the Department of Employment and Labour and its entities must procure  
Personal Protective Equipment from the Supported Employment Enterprise factories. It must also lobby National Treasury for a special dispensation in  
relation to sales of goods to government departments; and approach Departments such as Health and Basic Education to conclude contracts for  
supplying PPE.

Government must lead social compacts to foster agreements on stabilising the labour market as an important pillar of the economic recovery, with a  
particular focus on protecting the existing jobs. While we acknowledge that now the economic situation has changed dramatically, government must  
continue engaging with social partners to deliver on their 2018 Presidential Jobs Summit.

In conclusion,the South African economy cannot go back to the structural unemployment, poverty and inequality that existed before COVID-19. We must grow the economy on new foundations of innovation, inclusion and development. The funding to the Inspection and Enforcement, as well as the Supported Employment Enterprises must increase in the medium term in order to be effective.