

## NFP Debate on 2015 Workers' Parliament

Honorable speaker

Honorable Chairperson

Honorable Members

All guests

This year, the Workers Parliament convened under the theme **“Workers’ Struggle Addressing Inequality, Creating Employment and Advancing Vulnerable Workers Right”**. As we celebrate 21 years of democracy, there is no doubt that the lives of working people have improved significantly. We now have some of the most progressive labour law regulations in the world but as with everything, we need to constantly take time to reflect and assess if these laws are yielding the desired impact.

Through this parliament we have been able to learn that one of the challenges facing workers is that of transformation in the workplace; be it gender, race or disability related- we are still far away from where we need to be. It is for this reason that the NFP supports amendments giving the Department of Labour the power to take employers to court if they fail to come up with an Employment Equity Plan. We strongly advise the department to enforce this diligently in order to fast track transformation in the sector.

Another major challenge we need to collectively work on in the coming year is the employment of foreigners and the ill-treatment of foreigners in the workplace. This year’s theme places emphasis on vulnerable workers rights and foreigners are one such group.

During the Workers Parliament visits in Abaqulisi, we learned that there is a trend in parts of Newcastle where illegal immigrants, particularly from Lesotho, are employed, they are ill-treated and not even registered for UIF and they do not get paid what is dictated by the minimum wage. The employment of foreigners for cheap labour also means that South Africans are not getting employed. This entire situation is unacceptable.

As the NFP we firmly believe that employers must give South African citizens first preference when it comes to employment. But we must also be responsible and we must avoid a situation where we seem as though we are against foreigners in the country. Xenophobia must never be condoned, even in the workplace. If foreigners are employed for certain skills that they have, they must also be treated fairly and employers who exploit them should face the full might of the law.

Workers cannot be expected to perform to the best of their abilities when they do not have the tools of trade they need. We learned that in the education sector particularly, schools still experience lack of equipment and facilities they need for effective teaching. Basic necessities such as telephones, internet connectivity, offices and learner support materials were unavailable. Teachers are constantly criticised for not performing well but we seldom look at whether they receive the support they need. We need to put an end to this.

There is also an unreasonable expectation in workers to perform beyond what is legally expected of them and people end up feeling exploited and overburdened. We saw this at Newcastle Hospital where there is a shortage of Nursing Staff and General Assistants which results in high levels of nurses being absent

because they are tired and this affects the quality of services provided to patients at the hospital. There is also an issue of a policy that discriminates against hospital staff when it comes to staff accommodation. We urge government to intervene and make sure that adequate accommodation is provided for all critical staff so that the hospital can function properly.

Honorable Members, every year we witness striking activity from all labour sectors. The issue of salaries and wages is an issue that employers find difficult to confront. The economy is not doing well and both business and workers are facing tough times. But honorable members it is unacceptable that people can work full time and still live below the poverty line. This is the reason the NFP calls for the introduction of a national minimum wage across the board. This wage must take into account the standard of living and rising inflation rates. This will not only build confidence in the labour force but it will ensure that our people are able to live dignified lives and provide for their families.

Thank you

**Presented by:** Hon Njabulo Mlaba