

President Cyril Ramaphosa chairs special NEDLAC meeting on Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic

17 Apr 2020

President Cyril Ramaphosa has today, Friday, 17 April 2020, met with social partners represented in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) to discuss deepening cooperation as part of the national effort to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

The virtual meeting was attended by NEDLAC representatives from government, business, labour and the community constituency.

Participants agreed with the President that the pandemic was a health, economic and social crisis of unprecedented scale with far-reaching implications for the South African economy.

The meeting agreed that the health and well-being of all South Africans must be the overriding concern of all sections of society, and that it was therefore necessary to intensify the public health response to the pandemic.

Priority should be given to measures to contain the spread of the virus and to minimise loss of life.

The social partners also agreed that South Africa's economy and society will be fundamentally changed once the epidemic has been eradicated, and that it is imperative that South African citizens and businesses be protected from its adverse impact.

The social partners of NEDLAC were unanimous that they needed to lend their full support to proposed economic recovery measures and social support to support society's most vulnerable.

“In bracing ourselves for the worst economic fallout, South Africa is not alone. By most predictions there will be a global economic slowdown this year, and it is inevitable that emerging markets and developing country economies will be negatively impacted,” President Ramaphosa said.

While recognising the need to resume economic activity as soon as possible, NEDLAC partners expressed their appreciation of government's position that lifting the nationwide lockdown too abruptly could result in dire consequences.

They agreed that a risk-adjusted approach was necessary in determining the country's response.

The President expressed appreciation on behalf of government for the efforts by the various social partners of NEDLAC to contribute to the country's economic and social recovery.

The President said there was a need for business and labour to deepen cooperation to ensure social protection for workers during the lockdown.

The meeting also discussed ways to improve the provision of social support to vulnerable citizens and communities.

The meeting considered various suggestions on scaling up financial support to vulnerable households and agreed there was a need for greater consistency from financial institutions such as banks when it came to relief measures to heavily indebted and struggling clients.

The social partners agreed to continue working together to address problems with the implementation of the various support and relief measures.

“At a period of such difficulty for South Africa it is immensely gratifying that we are able to engage openly and constructively at NEDLAC. This structure has served us well throughout the democratic era and will continue to play a key role in bringing social partners together,” President Ramaphosa said.

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