

MEDIA STATEMENT

MINISTER LINDIWE ZULU PAYS TRIBUTE TO ALL SOCIAL WORKERS ON WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY

Pretoria, 22 March 2023: Today, the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu joins the international community and partners across the globe to celebrate World Social Work Day under this year's theme: "Respecting Diversity Through Joint Social Action".

Social Work day is celebrated worldwide every third Tuesday of March and the month of March is set aside to recognise and highlight the contribution of the social work professionals to the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities across the globe.

"As we celebrate Social Work Day, I would like to pay special tribute and extend my best wishes to all Social Workers serving in various capacities across our nation for their immeasurable contribution, dedication and commitment towards the call to selfless service of our people. Social Workers render services to some of the most vulnerable and marginalised in our society, because social work is a human rights-based profession aimed at improving the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

In South Africa, this day coincides with the celebration of the Human Rights Month, which acknowledges the historical link between the social work profession, human rights and social justice," said Minister Lindiwe Zulu.

Social workers are employed in a variety of settings to render psychosocial support services and implement developmental programmes that are designed to protect and assist the most vulnerable groups in society - women, children in need of care and support, children in conflict with the law, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons with mental health issues, survivors of gender-based violence and recovering substance users, amongst others.

Social workers are also at the forefront of government's response to disasters as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic and recent flood disasters in some parts of the country.

"While we celebrate Social Workers today, we also recognise the challenges of social work and the need to support our social workers in the public service and NGO sector for the crucial work they do in the life of our nation. Social work is a highly demanding job as social workers work in very challenging environments that put their own safety on the line. As early as 2003, social work was declared a scarce skill and critical profession. According to the National Development Plan, the country needs 55 000 social workers by 2030. For this reason, we have been working around the clock with sector departments to absorb the current pool of unemployed social workers in order meet the growing demand for appropriate social services," added Minister Zulu.

Currently, there are about 22 000 social workers employed in the public service. While this figure is a far cry from the NDP target, measures are already underway to address this deficit. The target for Priority 4 of the Medium-Term Strategic Framework is to increase the number of social service professionals to 31 744 at an estimated cost of 9 billion Rand by 2030.

As part of ongoing interim measures, the Department maintains a database of unemployed Social Work Graduates, which is used to capture details of social work professionals and link them with existing job opportunities, including internship programmes in the sector. The Department is working jointly with sector government departments and entities on a sector strategy to guide government departments on how to employ social service professionals in the public service.

The strategy proposes a permanent solution to the employment of 29 837 Social Service Professionals, ranging from social workers, social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers and community development practitioners. The employment of this additional capacity will strengthen the work of social workers in sector departments such as education, health, police and justice.

This will also contribute meaningfully to the implementation of national priorities such as the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide and the National Strategic Plan on HIV, TB and STIs. The DSD Portfolio is responsible for Pillar 4: response, care, support and healing of the NSP on GBVF. In terms of the National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS, TB and STIs, the DSD Portfolio is responsible for implementation of Goal 4, which seeks to address social and structural drivers of HIV, TB and STIs.

“On this day, we wish to remember and pay a special tribute to social workers, past and present, who sacrificed their lives in service for others. We pay a special tribute to the late Mama Winnie Mandela, the first black social worker whose activism contributed to the improvement of the social work profession in South Africa. I wish you all a happy Social Work Day,” Minister Zulu concluded.

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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