

Swaziland National Association of Teachers



EST.1928

AFFILIATED TO: EI, SATO, TUCOSWA

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO BE
ADDRESSED TO THE
SECRETARY GENERAL
SNAT CENTRE
OPPOSITE WILLIAM PITCHER
PO BOX 1575
MANZINI, SWAZILAND
[+268] 2505 2603
[+268] 2505 6267
E-mail: snatcentre@gmail.com
snatgs02@gmail.com
Web: www.snat.org.sz

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Dlamini Mbongwa
7661 9050

DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Dlamini Celucolo Dino
7608 8788

NATIONAL TREASURER

Sithebe Khumbuzile
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THE 2021 NEW YEAR STATEMENT BY THE SNAT

1. INTRODUCTION

Last year (2020) was the most difficult year for the SNAT since its inception in 1928. As an organisation, we have witnessed many deaths than ever before. The advent of the Coronavirus Pandemic which continues to ravage both developing and developed societies alike has presented us, as the SNAT, with an unsurmountable challenge. The failure of the Government of Swaziland to properly adjust salaries of her workers worsened the conditions of her employees, teachers included. Our projections as the SNAT are that this year (2021) shall present more serious challenges not only for the SNAT and her members but also for the general Swazi populace.

2. CRUX OF THE STATEMENT

As the SNAT NEC, we wish to highlight the following. That;

- I. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to cancel our Annual Union events, such as Conferences and the World Teachers Day commemoration last year and destabilised our operations as an organisation. Many of our comrades who are employed on a



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contract basis could not be re-engaged by the Government under the guise that COVID-19 required few numbers of people in duty stations. As much as we frown upon precarious employment, such regrettable turn of events increased unemployment amongst our comrades. Even those who were employed found themselves with huge teaching loads and were therefore overstretched. The result was that those with underlying medical conditions [comorbidities] could not cope with such immense pressure. Consequently, the number of deaths among educators shot-up markedly. The current COVID-19 statistics paint a gloomy picture for the whole country and as the SNAT we will not be spared from this. The Health System country-wide has collapsed and all services have been overstretched. As we speak, new COVID-19 cases are not admissible in our health systems. Many of our comrades are falling in the battlefield. The invisible enemy is firing a salvo towards the human race and comrades are hit by these deadly bullets just in front of us and on the side-lines. Those of us who remain standing have one [1] option available and that is to fight on: the struggle continues.

II. Casualisation of teaching is a perennial cancer that troubles our members. This has been exacerbated by the fact that there has been an overproduction of teachers by mushrooming tertiary institutions in the country. Many of our kids, comrades and friends are roaming the streets. Such a reality is of government's making since the Government does not want to review the curriculum in schools and tertiary institutions so as to adequately meet the demands of a truly developmental state. The country's authorities have been preaching about the attainment of a First World Status by the year 2022, which is 12 months away from now. As a Country, we continue to make those articulations without any tangible data that has been produced through conducting a Needs Analysis in terms of identifying [concretely] what the country needs or will need to attain that perceived illusion of a First World Status. Unless and until our Government invests adequately in education and health, our disabilities as a people will be permanent. The greatest resource that any country can boast about is the Human Resource whereupon the development of such a resource to reach its full potential, is an inescapable desideratum.

III. The General working and living conditions for the teachers have not improved last year (2020). This was due to the fact that the Government of Swaziland has always been raising the cash liquidity card every time such issues were put on the table for discussion. The Government only awarded an insignificant 3% Cost of Living Adjustment [CoLA] to all workers, much against the appropriate cumulative percentage of 19.6% inflation since the 2017/2018 financial year. Fringe benefits were last reviewed in 2004-sixteen [16] years ago. Currently our members are faced with



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high commuting costs, high housing rentals and no medical aid. The 2016 Salary Review exercise recommended improved housing and commuting allowances and an introduction of a Medical Aid. The Government, instead, promised to implement these during the implementation of the 2021/2022 Salary Review Exercise. During this year, the Salary Review exercise shall take precedence at the Joint Negotiations Forum [JNF].

IV. The advent of COVID-19 has ushered us as the global community to a new normal. Therefore, as the SNAT, we also plan to hold our National Events this year in full compliance with the World Health Organisation [WHO] and National COVID-19 Safety and Health Protocols. This means that the numbers that will be required during such events shall be greatly reduced. As the SNAT, we have made a commitment to join hands with other organisations domestically and abroad in fighting against the spread of the pandemic.

V. At bilateral level, the SNAT NEC has prioritised engagements on professional and sectoral issues with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). Many of such issues are already before certain bodies that deal with such issues for example courts or Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration Commission (CMAC). These include: Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value, No-Work-No-Pay Cases, Suspension and Dismissal or Individual Comrades. Reports on these issues shall be availed to the membership as days go by. However, clarity ought to be made that once matters are referred to such bodies, the rate at which they are addressed is beyond our control as a Union. Other issues whose conclusion is underway include signing of the Agency Shop Agreement, finalisation of the Schemes of Service for Educators and the review of the Recognition Agreement (RA) that the SNAT has with the employer. The SNAT awaits a date from the MoET on which to deal with these fundamental issues.

3. CONCLUSION

Taking full cognisance of all issues raised in this narrative, we are aware that our critics will doubt the scale of our ambitions, thinking that we will not prevail as the SNAT. Those will have a rude awakening when they see what a united SNAT can do this year. Whilst we know that we will prevail, the reality tells us that this year (2021) will be an eventful one for the SNAT and as such, it may as well present us with bigger challenges than the recently completed year. The greatest challenge is the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic which is capable of having ripple effects on the socio-economic status of our members. We are aware of the fact that those in Government pray hard for schools to re-open despite the escalating COVID-19 cases and deaths. Our prime objective as an organisation is to ensure that our members are protected



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from contracting the lethal virus. We have presented workable solutions to some of these problems to the Government of Swaziland. These include, but not limited to; allowing our comrades to take early retirement. As the SNAT NEC, we are committed to ensuring that our members receive gains from these engagements.

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SIKELELA J. DLAMINI
(SECRETARY GENERAL)

**SWAZILAND NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS**
P. O. BOX 1575, MANZINI
TEL: 2505 2603



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