

7th National Congress Declaration

21 September 2000

We, the 2 174 Delegates at the 7th National Congress of COSATU, women and men representing nineteen affiliated unions, with a total membership of 1 806 158 workers, adopt the following Declaration and commit ourselves to the Congress Programme of Action.

1. We are here more united, stronger, and more confident that the democratic trade union movement will play a central role in addressing the many challenges facing our country.

2. Our unity and strength is reflected in:

- The political cohesion and shared vision of delegates to this Congress, which emerges in the tradition of open and vigorous debate on issues affecting workers;
- The strong culture of worker control, which is translated into a deep tradition of internal democracy that has been demonstrated throughout this Congress;
- The continued growth of COSATU, despite the loss of members as a result of retrenchments, so that we remain one of the fastest-growing labour federations in the world; and
- The determination to mobilise workers and society more broadly behind a programme of social transformation, together with our Alliance and all democratic and patriotic forces.

3. We recognise the growing contestation over the direction of the NDR, based in deepening class contradictions. For this reason, we pledge to position the organised working class to protect and advance the National Democratic Revolution. We will ensure fulfilment of the NDR through the establishment of strong participatory democracy and the transformation of the economy. We make no bones about the fact that we want the NDR to work in the interests of the working class, the overwhelming majority of people in this country.

4. To that end, we have resolved to improve the working of the Alliance by strengthening its structures, developing a clear political programme, and defining its role in giving strategic guidance to government. Central to this is the urgent discussion and adoption of a detailed Alliance programme to implement the Freedom Charter, the RDP, and the 1999 Elections Manifesto. We have pledged to ensure that all COSATU members and shop stewards play an active role in the ANC and the SACP.

5. In that context, we recognise the central importance of maintaining a strong, active, developmental state. We will resist any attempt to downsize or outsource the functions of the public sector in the name of cutting spending or minimising the role of the state. For this reason, we will support the campaign for a moratorium in iGoli 2002, and the reinstatement of workers unfairly dismissed for campaigning against it.

6. We realise that the ANC is the only political party that can represent the interests of the majority of South Africans. For this reason, we will intensify our efforts to ensure an overwhelming victory in the upcoming municipal elections, based on a manifesto that will ensure progressive transformation of local government and protection for the rights of municipal workers.

7. We also turned our attention to the need to continually strengthen our organisation. We remain committed to the vision of one federation for all workers in our country, and to the campaign to organise the unorganised – including workers in the informal sector and other hard-to-reach industries, as well as supporting progressive organisations for the unemployed. We recognise that the basis for a successful recruitment drive is to maintain and improve the service we give our members. We have agreed to embark

on a mass educational and information programme to develop cadres with the political, intellectual, organisational and technical skills to advance the struggles of the working class.

8. We have adopted a Gender Policy that sets targets for the election of women into leadership positions, from shop steward to national office bearer; and proposes measures to support women's leadership and ensure that women's issues are consistently included in negotiations.

9. Internationally, COSATU will continue to strive to ensure a united progressive movement and to defend workers' rights around the world. To that end, we will call together forums of both African and international progressive forces to develop a common platform, as well as working in international bodies and South-South initiatives such as SIGTUR. We here pledge our solidarity with all workers, especially on our continent, who confront dictatorships and limits on their human and labour rights. We will campaign for them as they campaigned for us in the dark years of apartheid.

10. We here pledge to support people with AIDS and to help educate our people to protect themselves. We call on pharmaceutical companies to provide affordable medication for all our people, and on employers to ensure that all workers have access to treatment and condoms. Government must develop truly inclusive structures and programmes to mobilise our people against the pandemic, and provide the resources needed for effective treatment for HIV and related diseases, such as TB and STDs, as well as free condoms for all our people. The press must stop sensationalising the issues and begin to develop constructive information campaigns.

11. Our communities still suffer criminal violence, with the Western Cape in particular under attack from taxi violence, the rape and killing of children and women, and bombings. We call on all our people to unite against the elements behind these attacks, and on the government to take decisive action to protect our people.

12. We also recognise the many environmental threats confronting our communities and workers. We need a strategy that will focus on the real environmental problems, such as pit toilets and the reliance on coal and charcoal for energy, and manage the implications for employment. In this context, we call on government to consult more carefully on the proposed ban on plastic bags; and to make South Africa a nuclear-free zone, ending its funding of the Pebble-Based Modular Reactor and ensuring that the nuclear waste from Koeberg is not dumped in other parts of Africa.

13. We have again demanded a strategy for economic development that will protect quality jobs and ensure that more are created in the short and medium term, and expand social support for the unemployed. We reiterate our rejection of the GEAR strategy, which has failed utterly in reaching its target for growth, redistribution and employment creation.

14. The excessively rapid opening up of the economy since 1994, in the absence of a coherent industrial strategy, has dampened economic growth. It has cost hundreds of thousands of jobs in key industries such as clothing, equipment production and dairy. In this context, the failure to transform the financial sector has contributed to sluggish and inappropriate investment and helped maintain vast inequalities in wealth.

15. Cuts in the budget and high interest have discouraged public and private investment. It has led to the breaking up and partial privatisation of key state enterprises, notably Transnet, Eskom and Telkom, undermining the development of economic and, in poor communities, of household infrastructure and public transport, and leading to massive job losses. It has fuelled the downsizing of public services, most recently in proposals for tertiary education that will effectively entrench the racial, gender and class divisions inherited from the past.

16. To replace the GEAR strategy, we must develop an economic programme based on the Freedom Charter, the RDP and the Social Equity document. As a start to this process, we have adopted a Framework for Job Creation, which we will use to engage the Nedlac constituencies. We will support the

process further by mobilising our members and communities around the Jobs and Poverty Campaign and through constructive participation in the process of sector summits.

17. Finally, we here pledge to defend the programme of labour market transformation, which is now under threat. To this end the entire membership of COSATU and all progressive forces will be mobilised to reject the draft amendments to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and LRA, which threaten to reverse many of organised workers' hard-won gains, to undermine the position of the most vulnerable workers, and to plunge our workplaces into unprecedented conflict.

18. We pledge to campaign to the last ounce of our energies against these proposed amendments; to campaign for the introduction of amendments to consolidate worker gains; and to demand the implementation of agreements reached in the Alliance and with government on amendment of the LRA and BCEA. We will mobilise massively to carry out our programme of mass action to achieve these objectives.