

DECLARATION OF THE COSATU 14TH NATIONAL CONGRESS 26th – 29th September 2022



Build working class unity for economic liberation towards Socialism

Introduction

We, the 1854 delegates to the 14th National Congress of COSATU, representing over 1.5 million members from across different sectors of the economy, gathered in Midrand on the 26th – 29th September 2022.

The Congress is held under the theme; “Build working class unity for economic liberation towards socialism”, which has been the focus of our deliberations over the past four days and the build up period to this Congress.

Congress received comprehensive reports and made a thorough assessment of the domestic and international balance of forces and their implications for the working class.

Congress further recognised the critical moment in the working class struggle against capitalism, with the heightened manifestations in the high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequalities.

The NDR as our direct route to Socialism

Towards that end, Congress reaffirmed our perspective of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as an intertwined struggle with our cause for socialism. We remain resolute in our commitment to the NDR as a struggle to advance the decisive resolution of the intersecting class, race and gender contradictions embedded in our society, which are the legacy of the triple forms of oppression that the majority of our people suffered under Colonialism of a Special Type (CST).

Congress was unequivocal that the Freedom Charter remains our yardstick in our conjunctural assessment of the direction of the NDR. To that extent, we emphasise that whilst we have noted the advances and gains that have been made since the 1994 democratic breakthrough, we are convinced that the persistence and deepening of the class, race and gender inequalities in our society is directly related to the Neoliberal trajectory that the country has pursued over nearly three decades.

Celebrating the legacy of a fighting and militant working class

We honour the proud struggles of workers and the heroic achievements that led to the defeat of apartheid colonialism and the attainment of democracy. In this context, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which is one of the founding and leading affiliates of our federation over the past 37 years of our unbroken struggles.

In the same vein, we proudly celebrate the 50 years since the Durban strikes, which shook the foundations of apartheid in 1973 and created the renewed impetus of trade union militancy that led to the birth of COSATU in 1985. This we shall commemorate in 2023 to coincide with the 50th anniversary as a major milestone in workers history.

The 14th National Congress was joined by our allies in both the domestic and international front; the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), ITUC Africa and the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) amongst others.

It was also attended by our domestic and international guests, a range of progressive organisations and representatives of our allied trade unions from our own continent, Africa, notably Cuba, Palestine, Venezuela, Brazil, Western Sahara, eSwatini, Ghana, Zimbabwe, China, Europe, US and many others.

The analysis since the advent of our democracy in 1994 and the ANC government

Throughout this period of six consecutive ANC-led governments, the rates of unemployment, poverty and inequalities have remained at crisis levels and in turn these triple-crises have reinforced the crisis of social reproduction, poverty wages and the cost of living experienced by the working class and rural poor, especially women and the youth.

This explains why our society continues to be engulfed by high-levels of crime, gender-based violence and the abuse of children. As part of this Neoliberal trajectory, the penetration of capital into the operation of the state through public-private-partnerships and the outsourcing of public functions and a predatory procurement process have engendered a widespread endemic of corruption across all spheres of government, State Owned Companies and agencies, as highlighted by the capture of the state we have and still experience.

Congress acknowledged that the balance of class forces remain in favour of monopoly capital. Despite the ANC being a leading agent in the political terrain, the structure of the economic base has not fundamentally changed. Instead, this balance of class forces

has locked the country in a Neoliberal trajectory which has been characterised by the shift to the low-wage services sector, deindustrialisation, financialisation, casualisation, mechanisation and retrenchments. The combined effects of all these multiple crises have plunged our revolution and the leading role of our movement into a crisis of legitimacy. The ANC as a leading component of the Alliance and a dominant party in government, is rapidly losing support as a leader of society.

At same time, these multiple national crises are now aggravated by the systemic effects of global capitalist accumulation, whose exploitation of nature is causing zoonotic pandemics such as the COVID-19 and an ecological crisis which is manifesting in climate change. As in other countries of the global-south, especially in Africa, the shifts in the long-term climate and weather patterns marked by regular heat-waves, droughts, floods and the expansion of deserts are costing lives, ruining livelihoods and intensifying food insecurity, migration and social instability.

Consistent with the overall analysis and conclusions from the proceedings of this Congress, we have adopted resolutions and a medium-term strategic vision that cut across all our pillars to gear the federation to fight for an alternative low-carbon and developmental trajectory as a key element of the NDR and the struggle for socialism.

1. POLITICAL PILLAR

Over the period under review and based on the mandate from the 13th National Congress, the priority of our political programme was to strengthen the federation as part of building working class hegemony to advance the NDR.

We called for the reconfiguration of the Alliance and undertook to support the ANC in the coming elections on that basis, but key to that undertaking is the fight for the renewal of the ANC and the end of factionalism. Based on the robust deliberations that ensued, this congress came to the following conclusions:

- That whilst there has been some improvement in the relations between the ANC and other components, the reconfiguration of the Alliance has not materialised in practice. Instead, fundamental disagreements on macroeconomic policies implemented by government remain and such disagreements have been the root cause of the lack of unity and cohesion within the Alliance.
- Whilst the ANC insists that it remains the sole strategic political centre of the Alliance, as an organisation the ANC remains deeply divided and organisationally paralysed. Objectively, the ANC can no longer claim to have the capacity to be the strategic political centre of the Alliance and to lead the NDR. The working class must take responsibility to reassert its leadership role as the primary motive force.
- The persisting fundamental divergences on macroeconomic policies for the future of the country and the deep-seated internal factional divisions and organisational paralysis of the ANC raise questions as to what would justify the continuation of the Alliance in the current form.

Congress noted and welcomed the fact that the SACP has recently held a successful 15th National Congress. The federation supports the SACP's overarching strategic political message of building a powerful socialist movement of the workers and the poor. Everything considered in the current conjuncture, our political programme shall be driven by the following key tasks:

- To build capacity of the federation and affiliates to undertake systematic ideological and political education on Marxism and Leninism and our conjunctural political programme based on our resolutions, with a special focus on our shop-stewards, organisers and staff and leadership at all levels. In this regard, we shall also develop a joint ideological and political training programme with the SACP.
- The tasks of building a powerful socialist movement of the workers and the poor shall be on the terrain of deepening of the NDR. In this regard, our Socialist-Axis shall endeavour to mobilise formations of the MDM and other mass community based organisations in responding to the immediate triple-crises, the high cost of living, the crisis of social reproduction and the struggle for a just transition.
- We shall establish and strengthen gender structures across all affiliates in order to build capacity and position the COSATU Gender Forum to play a catalyst role and be at the centre of building a working class led and radical national women's movement.
- We shall undertake concrete steps to strengthen our internal capacity to propagate our critique of capitalism and the Neoliberal economic trajectory. In this regard, we shall articulate our policy perspective on building the Developmental State as part of the battle of ideas and building working class hegemony as part of the struggle for socialism.

2. ORGANISATIONAL PILLAR

COSATU has always prioritise the building and strengthening of its engines to effectively organise and service members. Guided by our long standing tradition of worker control we recommit ourselves to go back to basics, worker militancy, campaigning federation, and servicing membership. In response to neoliberal structuring of the economy and the workplace as its basic unit, neoliberal austerity on public service and public servants, the negative impact of global capitalist crises, de-industrialisation, the wave of fragmentation that has impacted trade union unity in the industrial sectors, both public and private, COSATU will strengthen its organisational presence in both the public and private sector. To take this task forward, the federation will intensify its programme of organising the unorganised and strengthen workplace, economic and social policy campaigning. The federation will attach increased importance to grow itself from strength to strength among industrial workers and deepen its organisational presence in the public sector. The Central Executive Committee will set and monitor the achievement of membership targets.

The federation's campaigning work will include working with the SACP to build popular left fronts around the common demands of the workers and working-class communities at large. This and working together with the SACP and other trade unions and worker organisations to build a powerful, socialist movement of the workers and poor, and to expand wider working-class unity, are essential components of our organisational programme arising from this historic 14th National Congress of our federation.

The Central Committee Resolution on an Annual Organising and Recruitment School shall be prioritised to build affiliates and the federations capacity to sustain and advance a true mass mobilisation of workers.

Congress affirmed that women are still subjected to all forms of discrimination at the workplace. This takes the form of, inter alia, the lack of childcare facilities and transport

after late night shifts, and being subjected to the indignity of being compelled to provide sexual favours for their survival at work.

Congress agreed that COSATU should establish a programme to mobilise all sectors of society to do more to curb the gender-based violence pandemic and called on the private sector and government to supply free sanitary products to all indigent women. COSATU welcomes the recent passage of the three Gender Based Violence Acts and will work to help ensure their implementation.

Congress identified collective bargaining as a platform to advance the campaign for gender equality and build women leaders. It resolved to use this platform and train women negotiators to participate in collective bargaining matters.

Also on bargaining councils, the Congress resolved to develop a campaign to defend bargaining councils, including to help stop the efforts to roll back our historical gains.

Congress identified collective bargaining as a tool to build unity in the federation. It noted that pursuing joint collective bargaining efforts across affiliates will promote unity. To encourage this unity, the CEC should annually develop one common and new collective bargaining demand which all affiliates should pursue.

Pursuing unity should also be the objective across federations and unions. Congress recognised that the fragmentation of the labour movement in South Africa has impacted negatively on the power of organised workers and our ability to win concessions from government and capital. This Congress has mandated the CEC to rigorously pursue the objective of uniting the trade union movement.

When new labour laws were introduced after the dawn of democracy, South Africa was touted as a trailblazer in defending workers' rights. However, since then, our rights have been eroded, piece by piece. Through a denial of basic trade union rights, pervasive casualisation, increased automation and attacks on labour market institutions including bargaining councils and the CCMA, workers do not receive the protection they used to. The COVID-19 pandemic has also been used by employers to renegotiate and vary downward working conditions, wages, and benefits.

At municipal level, precarious work, in the form of casualisation and outsourcing, is being facilitated by the EPWP programme. COSATU will demand an end to casualisation and launch an anti-casualisation campaign targeting EPWP and the CWP to ensure these programmes are insourced into the state and their participants integrated into the public service and local government employment structures.

The following elements of our Organisational strategy shall remain our core guiding focus areas as per our MTV and the Renewal process to strengthen unions and the federation itself.;

- a. Strengthening Workplace organisation
- b. Membership Recruitment and Retention
- c. Ideological training and capacity building
- d. Campaigns Work
- e. Organising the unorganised

- f. Improve research capacity in all structures of the federation.

3. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PILLAR

Workers have faced countless socio-economic crises since COSATU's 13th National Congress in 2018.

Unemployment reached an all-time high of 46% in 2021. Whilst some of these lost jobs have begun to be recovered during 2022, unemployment remains our number one crisis. No society can be sustained with 1 out of 2 people unemployed, with 70% youth unemployment.

We remain the world's most unequal society with rising levels of poverty and indebtedness.

In December 2019, few had heard of Covid-19. Yet within weeks, it had consumed the world. We lost more than 100 000 South Africans to it. We were compelled to shut down the economy and institute a state of disaster as we sought to contain and overcome it.

Against all odds, we did well. Workers and society responded to the call by the President for us to work as one to defeat this pandemic. Congress lauded the role Affiliates and the Federation played during this moment of crisis and the sacrifices of our nurses, doctors and paramedics who worked tirelessly to save millions of lives. COSATU applauds the tireless efforts by Affiliates to help workers receive their UIF monies during the lockdown as well as to encourage workers and their families to vaccinate and observe the health and safety measures to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

COSATU working with government, our sister federations and business managed to ensure that over R64 billion was released from the UIF to help more than 5.5 million workers, that the banks gave 3 months loan relief to consumers, that government provided relief to fragile economic sectors and that the SRD Grant was rolled-out to more than 10 million unemployed people. COSATU calls for the extension of the SRD Grant and its equalisation with the Food Poverty Line. With all its challenges, the SRD Grant is the foundation for the Basic Income Grant that we have long championed. Congress resolved to resuscitate our advocacy of the Basic Income Grant, including by building a coalition with other progressive organisations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the inequities of our already poor health care system and the predatory nature of the private health care system. The health system staggered under the weight of mass testing and caring for large numbers of severely ill people within a short space of time. The public health sector is still characterised by poor quality of service which has been exacerbated by reckless austerity budget cuts and rising frontline service vacancies.

Congress resolved to intensify our efforts to mobilise our members to ensure the implementation of the NHI and to fight against the extreme profiteering of the private health industry. COSATU welcomes the progress that has been made in processing the NHI Bill in Parliament and looks forward to its passage into law.

The Congress recognised that corruption between the public and private sectors is rife with the procurement of PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic being yet another horrific example. Congress resolved that the process of bringing to book those government officials and business people involved in corruption to be fast tracked.

The dismantling of workers' rights and attack on collective bargaining linked with many other features of our society, means that workers' incomes have stagnated and reduced while the incomes of the richest have sky-rocketed. COVID-19 has entrenched this. The result is that South Africa's record-beating inequality remains just that, the highest in the world.

The failures of our public transport SOE's and system are impacting on our members and workers more broadly who are now spending up to 20% of their income on transport to get to work because trains are not functioning effectively and reliably. The Congress mandated the Federation to initiate an aggressive campaign to overcome inequalities.

Organisation and mobilisation of our members will help to fight the challenges workers face but we also need to make amendments to our labour laws to pursue the decent work agenda and address gaps in the labour laws.

To help deal with the extent of unemployment and inequality set out above, COSATU has been engaging with government and business on the President's call for a social compact. Whilst the federation supports the call, we have made it clear to government that we will not sacrifice workers' hard-won rights. We will not allow workers to be thrown under the bus for the failures of government to govern or business to grow the economy. The social compact must be based upon progressive principles. It should defend the rights of workers, provide relief for the unemployed, rebuild the developmental state, reduce poverty and inequality, and address the fundamental obstacles to growing the economy, including by dealing with monetary and fiscal policies, and create decent work.

The foundation for the social compact must be the Economic Recovery and Reconstruction Programme, in particular its provisions to secure and rebuild Transnet and Metro Rail, to ramp up local procurement, to extend relief to the unemployed and rebuild the developmental state. COSATU has reaffirmed its support for the industrial master plans as key platforms to grow the industrial base of the economy, save and create jobs.

Congress called on the federation to lead the fight against austerity, commodification and corporatisation of government, including education and training and the security cluster.

On Eskom, Congress affirmed that it remains a national strategic asset that is indispensable in the socio-economic development of the country. It is pervaded by endemic corruption and poor governance.

The frequent loadshedding and deteriorating generation capacity at Eskom is of great concern, including because there is no end or solutions in sight. Workers, their communities and their jobs are being badly affected. The Eskom Social Compact

provides clear interventions for stabilizing and investing in Eskom so it can provide reliable and affordable energy without which the economy cannot grow.

Congress called on COSATU to support practical measures to end load-shedding, addressing criminality in and around Eskom, expand its maintenance budget, whilst at the same time vehemently opposing the efforts to fast-track the liberalisation of the electricity sector and the creation of an independent transmission company.

Congress considered the climate crisis. It recognised that the world is facing an unprecedented ecological crisis but emphasised that this should not be separated from the broader critique of the bourgeois political economy. It resolved that the Federation should call for the implementation of the 2019 ANC election commitment on the repositioning of Eskom to play an active role in the renewable energy infrastructure.

The same problems being experienced at Eskom are evident at other SOEs with many close to collapse, threatening our members' jobs and the delivery of services. We must come with concrete solutions that will ensure these SOEs are saved.

The failures of our public transport SOEs and system are impacting on our members and workers more broadly, who are now spending up to 20% of their incomes on transport to get to work because trains are not functioning effectively and reliably.

The dysfunction in the public education system continues to have a stifling impact on the working class, not allowing this to be a key vehicle out of poverty. A large part of this can be placed at the door of the disproportionate funding allocation between the public and private education systems. This puts working class children at a disadvantage in relation to opportunities in tertiary education and the labour market.

Workers' jobs are threatened on an unprecedented scale. To create some relief, the Federation discussed two measures.

First, when companies are liquidated, workers are not guaranteed to receive one cent; and when companies are in business rescue, workers suffer great uncertainty and may not receive incomes.

This needs to change including by prioritising the preference claims of workers in insolvency and making changes to the Business Rescue regime. To do so, we will propose amendments to the Insolvency and Companies Acts.

Second, Congress resolved that workers should have access to part of their retirement funds whilst they are employed to help them deal with short-time and layoffs when they don't receive wages and other emergencies.

Congress discussed other issues around retirement funds, including the amendments to Regulation 28 of the Pension Fund Act pertaining to the relaxation of restrictions on overseas investments. Congress expressed its unhappiness with this amendment, emphasising that more investments should go towards local investment, including in infrastructure, to grow jobs and our economy.

Congress also mandated COSATU to convene a conference to develop a shared policy framework on retirement fund investment mandates to ensure our savings are used in the sustainable development of domestic manufacturing and infrastructure.

To alleviate the indebtedness of our members and workers in general, Congress declared that the National Credit Regulator (NCR) should revisit its fee guidelines to lessen the burden on consumers while they seek relief. Debt councillors and the NCR should be empowered to consolidate debt and/or write off a portion of the outstanding amount and/or reduce the interest rate and lower the repayment instalment terms where circumstances justify it.

COSATU will work with government to ensure the implementation of the National Credit Amendment Act providing for protection of consumers who have fallen behind with their debt payments, from having their essential possessions being repossessed.

Congress reviewed the housing situation and concluded that while government has provided free housing to the poor and mostly unemployed through the RDP scheme, workers have largely been excluded. It was resolved that the Federation should call on the government and the private sector to avail serviced land for free to allow workers to build their own houses.

Discussing the state of municipalities, Congress noted that they have a constitutional obligation to deliver services to residents, irrespective if residents are able to pay for rates and taxes due to high levels of poverty and unemployment, and that the number of municipalities that require intervention due to political instability and financial distress has been growing. This means that municipalities are often unable to pay employees wages.

To deal with this, Congress resolved that the equitable share allocation for poorer municipalities should be increased and that Provincial Governments should rigorously execute their constitutional mandate of playing an oversight role over the affairs of municipalities. There is a need to review the municipal funding model and for a road map towards the District Development Model to ensure the rebuilding of local government and its ability to fulfil its constitutional mandates.

4. INTERNATIONAL PILLAR

The 14th National Congress of COSATU having received and considered the international report on the obtaining balance of power, the deepening crisis of capitalism and the brutal deterioration of the conditions of workers and the poor.

Further, it is now more manifest in the vicious race to the bottom in terms of labour standards, quality of life and work, impact of delivery to the poor and all other measurements in human development terms, which are imposed by the dominant system of capitalism.

Towards this end, workers globally are waging struggles against the deepening crisis of unemployment, inequalities and poverty. This results from the monopolistic and concentrated ownership of the economy by a few in the whole world. It also relates

closely to the ever growing belligerence of the global ruling classes as more wars are being waged in seeking to conquer territories and new spheres of economic subjugation. Hence the intensified struggle for “new” and more profitable frontiers of capital accumulation.

This also brings us to the question of war and the essence of the militarisation of global affairs by the powerful classes to enforce and further the subjugation of other nations, workers, races, women and people with disabilities as examples. War is a permanent feature of capitalism, because the search for profits require the conquest of ever new spheres of accumulation for raw materials and markets. The arms industry relies on wars to make profit and enforce the interests of the ruling classes, particularly of the advanced capitalist countries.

The formalisation of this militarisation of international power is best expressed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the worlds biggest military conglomeration, whose principal mission is to bully all countries and people to comply with the power and rule of global capital and the might of the US led global system of imperialism.

The emergence of the post war victors, included the establishment of the Bretton woods institutions; IMF and the World Bank to take charge of the design of the world economy in accordance with strict capitalist dictates. It was also closely linked to the establishment of the predecessor to the WTO, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which is the prime organ of enforcing the world market rules or the global market system we now know.

However, the deepening crises of the global financial and economic system has led to calls for a fundamental review of the world monetary and financial system, with some advocating a move to a multipolar system in which the dollar shares its international currency status with the euro, the Chinese Remnibi and or the Special Drawing rights of the IMF. Particularly, the Cannes Summit in 2011, where G20 leaders committed to taking “concrete steps” to ensure the adaptation of the international monetary system to reflect what was characterised as the “changing equilibrium and emergence of new international currencies”.

In the ultimate end, every war is about resources and power and therefore, the current international balance of power reflect that dynamism and fact. The pursuit of profit for multinational companies of the most dominant countries, creates the basis for further tensions and war.

While much attention has been paid to the Russia-Ukraine war, the most defining feature of the world situation today is war and violence resulting in the conquest of new spheres of resources and markets, subjugation and reproduction of under-development, as in Africa and the rest of the global south have illustrated.

The Biggest manifestation of the crises are in our own continent, Africa, the true site of fierce inter-and intra imperialist rivalries that further the under development,

exploitation and subjugation of the people of Africa, by the vicious forces of global looting.

COSATU programme on International work

The struggle for working class in our era requires that the following constitute the critical elements of our programme for the next four years;

1. Prioritisation of the work of building the international trade union movement and uniting workers against all forms of oppression and exploitation, globally
2. Fighting against the Ecological and climate change crisis - as a result of the model of development, capitalism
3. Fighting against deindustrialisation, anti-developmental policies and growing crisis of unemployment and job losses
4. Fighting GBV, and towards an end to all forms of exploitation and abuse of women and children
5. Fighting the ruthless power of Multinational Companies and corrupt elites
6. Fighting against the militarisation of international relations and the huge erosion of democratic gains of workers, human rights, justice and end to the wars of imperialism
7. Building a global working class movement for solidarity against attacks on workers' rights, inequalities, poverty, GBV and poor wages

Towards this end, international solidarity mobilisation and campaigning, working with other trade unions and progressive forces on the African continent, throughout the global south and all over the world remains our very important focus.

In this regard, the 14th National Congress clearly pronounce on the work to intensify solidarity with the people Cuba, Palestine, Venezuela, Western Sahara, eSwatini, Zimbabwe particularly.

We shall work further to strengthen COSATU work with the ITUC, WFTU, OATUU, ITUC Africa and SATUCC to drive a united, effective and transformative struggle for workers rights and democracy, development and industrialisation on the continent, fight against monopoly companies and demand job creation to end hunger, poverty and unemployment.

Conclusion

Towards this end, the 14th National Congress of COSATU has concluded its work and emerges out of this Workers Parliament more united, resolute in pursuit of its perspectives and focussed on advancing the national democratic revolution for economic liberation towards Socialism!

Ends