

Sadtu's response to SoNA

Education not declared essential service

The South African Democratic Teachers Union (Sadtu) welcomes the State of the Nation Address (SoNA) by State President Jacob Zuma. The speech has met some, but not all, of the union's expectations.

We welcome in particular the final explanation by the president that the government is not intending to declare education an essential service. This is important in a sector that is crying for dynamic leadership at the level of the department. We have always maintained that declaring education an essential service would be tantamount to treating the symptoms and not the root cause of the challenges.

In our view, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should rather focus on implementing existing policies and regulations consistently. The DBE's focus should be on implementing existing progressive initiatives such as the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) which encourages all stake holders to play their part and take responsibility in improving the quality of education. This includes the department itself and all the technocrats from the national to circuit offices.

The president has created certainty and political clarity and his message on combating corruption is welcomed by our union as we face a cult in the DBE. In assisting the president in this war against corruption, we shall intensify our

campaign to push Basic Education director general Bobby Soobrayan out. The second phase of our action will ensure that the principals and members of the teaching fraternity are not intimidated by the DBE when reporting and exposing inefficiencies and laxity in the department.

No principal will be charged for exercising his or her constitutional right to freedom of association, especially when reporting non-delivery of learning support materials. We call upon our principals to report to the union acts of intimidation so that we can show the DBE that we can't tolerate decorated reports by hiding incapacity and incompetency of the discredited director general of education. The attitude, posture and orientation of senior bureaucrats in the DBE must change and the current cult must be eradicated if education is to be seen as a public good and essential for the development of our country.

We welcome the plans to improve maths, science and technology which will involve the establishment of a national task team to strengthen the implementation of the science, maths and technology strategy. However, we feel this will require a new leadership at DBE.

It will require cadres who are orientated towards service delivery and not self enrichment. We feel government should put more resources in the training and development of teachers. The introduction of indigenous languages as a medium of teaching will help improve the pass rate of these subjects. We note that the president did not mention the introduction of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction as mentioned by the African National Congress (ANC) in Mangaung.

We welcome the president's assertion that collective bargaining needs strengthening and not weakening. We will therefore work even harder, inspired by the president's vision to strengthen this dispute prevention strategy which we believe will help us to avoid the disruption of education.

The prioritisation of teachers' terms and conditions of employment through the establishment of the presidential remuneration commission is a positive development. Adult Basic Education and Training (Abet) and Early Childhood Development (ECD) especially Grade R that the president mentioned are important. **LB**