

Swaziland National Association of Teachers



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EXPECTATIONS BY THE SNAT ON THE FORTH COMING 2021 NATIONAL BUDGET TO BE DELIVERED BY MR. NEAL RIJKENBERG

1. PROLOGUE

The Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) collective, that represents about 16 000 educators in the country, awaits the Finance Minister's 2021 National Budget to be presented to Parliament, with bated breath. The current global challenge that was posed by the corona pandemic, coupled with the ground realities of a stunted economic growth of individuals and corporations alike, demanded unmatched innovation on the side of the Central Government.

Our focus as the SNAT is the capacitation of critical sectors of the economy in a manner that will not render the central government, an upholder of the constitution and the decisions of the courts, *ultra vires* in the implementation of its due legal mandate. Taking all the foregoing issues in our country into serious consideration, as the SNAT, we expect the Budget Speech to be delivered by Mr. Neal Rijkenberg to embody the following reflections on the underlisted sectors, among others.



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2. GIST OF THE STATEMENT

I. Wage Bill

Since 2013, the then Minister of Finance Mr. Majozi Sithole grumbled about a huge wage Bill. Consequential to that, there was a Skills Audit Exercise that was then Commissioned in 2013 which sought to identify causes of the massive wage bill, chief amongst which was the issue of ‘ghost employees’ in the Civil Service. Unfortunately, the report of that exercise was never published and yet tax payers’ monies were used during that exercise. As the SNAT, we are sick and tired of that chorus by the Ministers of Finance, including the current one, who also sung it during the delivery of the 2020 National Budget. This time around we are expecting a clear report in terms of how this issue will be addressed in the current year (2021) so that there could be enough resources that could be available to fund other equally important public services.

II. Salary Review (SR)

The Financial Year 2021/2022 shall be the year in which there will be the Salary Review exercise for all employees under the employ of the government. When the Collective Agreement [CA] that effected the recommendations of the 2016/2017 Salary Review exercise was signed in 2016, the Government committed that the next Salary Review Exercise shall be held in the current Financial year [2021]. To further strengthen her commitment to this just course, the Government agreed that the 2016 Collective Agreement be made an Order of the Court so that it could be given a force of law. This was done on July, 06, 2016. Since our Government is defender number one for human and worker rights, she will ensure that this order of the court is not tempered with. Fortunately, talks at the Joint Negotiations Forum (JNF) are underway, in preparation for the 2021/2022 Salary Review exercise. Since E850 million was used to implement recommendations of the 2016/2017 SR, albeit partially, this year 2021, it is expected that a total of E2 billion shall be set aside by the Minister of Finance to cater for this exercise. This money shall be used to also normalise the so many grievances that arose as appeals to the 2016/2017 SR exercise such as normalising the salaries of School Administrators in both Primary and Secondary schools, normalising the salaries for Head of Departments in schools, housing allowance, commuting allowance, introduction of the Medical Aid for government employees and the hardship allowance for all civil servants who work in remote areas. All these issues were raised as recommendations by the 2016/2017 SR which could not be implemented by the Government, citing cash liquidity problems. In August 2020, the Government also entered into a



Collective Agreement [CA] with Public Sector Unions to the effect that during the 2021/2022 SR, all these allowances shall indeed be reviewed.

III. Education

The Ministry of Education and Training [MoET] is expected to get the lion's share of the budget which translates to 15 % of the total national budget. This is the international benchmark. However, as the SNAT we expect this amount to exclude personnel costs (salaries), as it is ideally supposed to be the case. This should be money directed to the procurement of educational resources and materials of all kinds. In this era of the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of the Government to consider this, can never be overemphasized. The SNAT expects a total budget of E3.5 billion (excluding personnel costs). This money will cater for Free Primary Education (FPE), Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC), Competency Based Education (CBE), Rolling out of Grade 0 in all schools (increasing from the current 80 schools) and construction of more schools and classrooms in line with the World Health Organization (WHO) and National Covid-19 Regulations. This budget will also fund scholarship for tertiary students. This is foremost in importance since it is a major step in the right direction if the country is to be set in the correct trajectory that will make it a fully developmental state.

IV. Health

Over the years, the Ministry of Health [MoH] has been regarded as a sector that gets the second highest allocation after the Education Department. However, ground realities always present a totally different picture. The acute shortage of medical supplies, drugs and equipment in all public health institutions clearly meant that the budget that is directed to this ministry on a yearly basis is inadequate. The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic was indeed a bag of mixed blessings in that, as a country, we were able to see vividly clear that our health systems were seriously incapacitated and could not handle the health challenges that were posed by the pandemic. As the SNAT, we expect a budget that will not be less than E3 billion. This money should not include personnel costs (salaries) as well. It should focus on further capacitating the health institutions and the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health professionals who have since become our frontline workers.

V. Infrastructure

As the SNAT, we believe that infrastructure plays a critical role in the development of any country. Swaziland is not an exception to this generalisation. But be that as it may, it will not be successful wisdom for the Minister and his



Government to pump huge amounts of money to this sector at the present moment since we are confronted by Covid-19 which is posing a serious threat to the existence of the human race. It calls for a change in our priorities as a country. Capital projects that consume a lot of money from the public purse and yet do not bring direct benefits to individual Swazis, such as the International Convention Centre (ICC) must be suspended. Re-aligning of the priority list in projects under this category has to be done so that the meagre national resources are channelled to where they are needed the most.

3. EPILOGUE

These expectations by the SNAT have not been crafted from the air but careful consideration was made, weighing the importance of any of these sectors in the upliftment and protection of the lives of the individual Swazi. We are of the ardent view that Mr. Neal, a business magnate, will be able to grapple with the ground realities of our socio-economic landscape as a people and present a budget that has a human face on it. He does not need to be a Harvard University graduate to know that the rough waters in which the ship he is steering is sailing demands that individual workers and citizens need improved salaries so as to be able to reinvigorate the already ailing economy. The appropriate remuneration of the over 44 000 Civil Servants, including members of the security forces, shall surely function as a game changer to all the problems that we are facing as a country.

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