



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### URGENT CALL TO REVERSE AUSTERITY MEASURES KILLING SOUTH AFRICA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

#### **'Education is a Right, not a Budget Line'**

The South African education system is in a state of crisis. The implementation of austerity measures by the National Treasury has had devastating consequences on the quality, accessibility, and equity of education across the country. As stakeholders in the future of our nation, NATU cannot remain silent while the constitutional right to basic education, enshrined in Section 29 of the Constitution, is systematically eroded.

During the 2023/24 financial year, over 23,000 posts in provincial education departments across the country were cut, with the total number of unfilled but funded vacancies exceeding 46,000. This has led to dangerously overcrowded classrooms, where learners are deprived of individual attention and teachers are stretched beyond capacity. Owing to many years of budget cuts, we are now left with a chronic state of underfunding and infrastructural decay – leaving many schools with dilapidated classrooms, school infrastructure, a lack of basic amenities such as toilets, electricity, and safe classrooms. Promises to improve infrastructure have not materialized, leaving learners in unsafe and undignified conditions. More specifically, the lack of adequate support staff and security measures has contributed to rising incidents of violence in schools. Teachers and learners are exposed to unsafe environments, further undermining the learning process.

Furthermore, Grade R practitioners – the foundation of early childhood education, have consistently been neglected and continue to work under precarious conditions with poor remuneration and limited job security. Their critical role in shaping young minds must be recognized through improved employment conditions and professional development opportunities. Lastly, and mainly due to the provincial education departments' non-compliance with the post provisioning norms, teachers have increasingly been burdened with administrative tasks, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate support. This has led to burnout, mental health challenges and a poor state of teacher wellness, generally.

Despite extensive engagements with provincial departments of education and the Department of Basic Education, NATU has exhausted all diplomatic avenues to address these critical issues. Consequently, we are compelled to initiate picket actions to demand urgent change. We call on all school principals to refrain from using personal funds to sustain school operations, as it is the responsibility of the Department to provide all necessary resources for the June exams. NATU members will not subsidize departmental shortcomings. Furthermore, we urge all members to boycott any unfunded departmental workshops or events, reinforcing our collective stand for a fully supported education system.

In view of the foregoing, NATU hereby puts forward the following demands:

- An immediate reversal of all austerity measures directed at the education sector.
- An urgent filling of all funded vacant teaching posts.
- Increased investment in school infrastructure, as well as learning and teaching support materials.
- Implementation of comprehensive safety and psychosocial support programmes in schools, for both learners and teachers.
- Formal recognition and fair employment conditions for Grade R practitioners.
- A national dialogue on restoring dignity and quality to public education.

In conclusion, we call on government to prioritise education in ways that will restore the integrity of the public school sector and fulfil its constitutional obligations.

**ISSUED BY NATIONAL TEACHERS' UNION**  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**  
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