

COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi May Day address, Dan Qeque stadium

Greetings to workers and their families

Revolutionary greetings to COSATU, ANC, SACP and leaders of civil society

Special revolutionary greetings to our country Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe

Greetings to the family of John Gomomo and Vuyisile Mini as well as all families of our struggle heroes and heroines.

Religious and traditional leaders

The tradition of celebrating May Day comes from the struggle for the eight-hour day in 1886 in the United States and Canada. On 1 May 1886, during national strikes for an eight-hour day, Chicago police attacked striking workers, killing six. The next day a bomb exploded at a demonstration against police brutality, killing eight policemen. They arrested eight trade unionists and put them on trial. Whether they were guilty or innocent was irrelevant. They were labelled agitators, fomenting revolution and stirring up the working class, found guilty and executed.

In Paris in 1889, to commemorate these murdered workers, the International Working Men's Association declared May 1 an international working class day. The red flag symbolises their blood in the battle for workers' rights.

This year, 2014, is the 125th time workers all over the world have been observing May Day. In our country this year is also the year we celebrate 20 years of democracy, and must always remember the significance of 1994, and never forget just how evil was the system of colonialism and apartheid we destroyed.

Colonialism robbed us of our country's natural riches, ruthlessly exploited the cheap labour of migrant workers, and condemned the majority of our people to virtual slavery in order to amass super profits for the British ruling class.

Apartheid denied the majority of South Africans all basic human and democratic rights. It forced them to live and work where the government ordered, barred them from all the better paying jobs and even told them who they could or could not marry.

Now, thanks to the struggles of working class, led by tripartite alliance under the leadership of the ANC, we have a democratic constitution and laws, which guarantee freedoms and human rights. We can vote, join any party and protest against the government. We are protected from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, and from discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, religion or sexual orientation.

Workers, after decades of virtual slavery under apartheid, have won important constitutional guarantees, including the right to fair labour practices, the right to form and join trade unions, strike and picket, and the right to collective bargaining.

Our lives have begun to improve and we celebrate that:

- People receiving social grants have increased from 3 million to 16 million.
- Over 3.3 million houses have been built, for more than 16 million people.
- About 12 million households have electricity, 7 million more than in 1994.

- Around 92% of South Africans have access to potable water, compared to 60% in 1996.
- More than two million people are receiving antiretroviral medication.

But we know from experience that ensuring the implementation of a progressive mandate requires both ongoing support and at times critical engagement by the labour movement. Without a strong COSATU, electoral promises can be rolled back by the unceasing class war waged by the capitalist class.

We still have a long way to go to make our freedom complete!

May Day gives us an opportunity not only to look at victories and progress we have registered but also the setbacks and the remaining challenges.

The COSATU 11th National Congress held in September 2012, as well as the Collective Bargaining Organising and Campaigns Conference held on 15 March 2013, spelt out what should be the key programme we should follow to achieve our total emancipation as the workers.

As the COSATU Collective Bargaining, Organising and Campaigns Conference Declared: "While we have made important advances in the areas of democracy, human rights and social benefits, for which we give full credit to the efforts of our Alliance, and the ANC government, socio-economically, workers' lives have not been fundamentally transformed.

"The shocking levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality lie at the heart of the increasingly violent protests we are seeing in both workplaces and communities. It is creating what we have been calling 'ticking time bombs', which are now starting to explode."

Unemployment remains a number one concern of workers. Today, by the more realistic expanded definition, which includes discouraged work-seekers, unemployment stands at a catastrophic 34.1%, a huge waste of workers' potential to create wealth for both themselves and their families and to generate economic growth by increasing consumption.

The second arm of the crisis - poverty - is equally frightening. The 2011 National Census revealed that 41.4% live below the poverty line, which they define as R3, 864 per head per year (R10.5 a day) at 2000 prices. This only just pays for a loaf of brown bread, which currently costs R9.47. So 41.4% of workers in South Africa are working for a loaf of bread a day. It is still intrinsically a low-wage colonial economy.

Poverty inevitably leads to hunger. After nearly 20 years we cannot produce enough food to adequately feed all our people. The 2010 General Household Survey estimated that 24% of households have inadequate access to food. In the 2011 Survey, this figure has shown some improvement, but still shows 21% of households having inadequate access to food, which is roughly 10 million South Africans.

The third part of the crisis - inequality - is summed up in the statistic that the Gini coefficient, which measures inequality, stood at 0.64 in 1995 but increased to 0.68 in 2008, which made us the most unequal society in the world.

Today 50% of the population lives on 8% of national income in South Africa. The share of workers in national income declined from 55% in 2000 and is today below 50%

While most of the poorest South Africans are less poor than before 1994, the richest South Africans are far better off, which has massively widened the wealth gap.

And inequality is still very much defined along racial lines. The South African Race Relations Institute, analysing Statistics South Africa figures, show that the median salary for Africans in 2011 was R2 380, while Coloureds earned R3 030, Indians earned R6 800 and whites earned R10 000.

After 20 years into democracy the Freedom Charter`s demand that "men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work" is yet to be realised.

The Sunday Times` Rich List provides irrefutable evidence to support COSATU`s call for a legislated national minimum wage to address poverty and inequalities.

Faced with this ongoing crisis, the struggle for a radical economic transformation of our economy cannot be suspended or delayed. Our demands are very clear.

At the level of the economy, we spell out what could constitute the 'radical economic shift' which would change the trajectory in terms of distribution of income, employment, access to assets etc.

Our demands for this 2014 May Day are as follows!

1. An end to apartheid wage policies and the introduction of a new incomes and wage policy that will seek to close the gap between the lowest and highest paid workers
2. We demand a national minimum wage linked to the Minimum Living Level of R4500 a month
3. We demand a wall to wall legalized central bargaining system to force all bosses in all sectors of the economy to negotiate with their employees
4. A coherent package of economic policies which ensure that macro-economic policies, industrial policy, labour market policies, and social protection, are all driven by one agenda, unlike the current situation, where policies contradict each other, and are held hostage by key centres of economic power, particularly the Treasury and the SA Reserve Bank
5. A strategic set of interventions to harness the power of the state to redirect the economy. We demand strategic nationalisation and a full implementation of the Freedom Charter. Failure to do these things would mean that we continue to pay lip service to economic shifts, while in reality the market, and power centres aligned to finance capital, or the new elite, continue to drive the agenda.
6. We demand that the NDP be changed and be aligned to the concept of a radical economic transformation
7. A comprehensive social security system as against the piecemeal approach that only seeks to stop workers to use their provident funds even when they have been unemployed for months.
8. A total ban of the labour brokering system, an end to casualisation, sub construction. We demand full adherence to the ILO principle of equal pay for work of equal value
9. An end to corruption in both private and public sector but more importantly within our own unions.
10. An agreement on an Alliance platform that will ensure that the alliance does not just function closer to the elections but lie idle throughout five years.
11. Mobilisation of the civil society and all our people behind this programme

This programme requires a strong and united COSATU

The key problem with all these demands is implementation. We can issue congress declarations and conference resolutions, government white papers and election manifestos with good alternative policies. But unless we mobilise the masses on the

streets and work with government to start putting their words into deeds, we will change nothing and the neoliberal hegemony will continue to rule over us.

Tragically, however, just when we need to be at our strongest to meet these challenges, COSATU is experiencing the worst forms of divisions in its entire history, which have weakened it politically and organisationally. The forces of change have been hamstrung, with potentially disastrous consequences unless we re-forge unity.

This May Day we must all commit ourselves to rebuilding a strong, united trade union movement, independently controlled by the workers, and led by dedicated servants of the working class, who never put their personal interests ahead of those of the workers who elected them.

It will make no sense however to recruit workers to join our unions unless we provide them with the service they need. Let us not forget that the most important reason workers give for joining a COSATU union is protection against unfair dismissal and unfair discipline (38% of our members), followed by improving wages, benefits and working conditions (33% of our members). This is where we have to put our efforts first and foremost, and pull up our socks in all areas of service.

It is with this in mind that we have welcomed the intervention led by the ANC Task Team. We pledge to work with the Task Team in order to leave no stone unturned in our search for the unity of the federation. We know workers desperately need a united federation capable of leading and engineering a radical economic transformation.

We pledge to work with the ANC Task Team to achieve the strategic goal of worker unity. We remain committed to achieve our long-term goal for creation of a single federation in our country and a single union in every industry or sector of the economy.

Vote on 7 May!

We urge all workers to exercise their hard won right to vote on the 7 May. We call on the employers, in particular in the agriculture, retail, wholesale including shops and restaurants not to deny workers this basic human right to choose a government of their choice. We remain resolute with our demand that May Day, 27 April and 07 May, which will be a voting day, and all other struggle related holidays such as 16 June and 9 August be declared non-trading public holidays. By this we mean no employer should be allowed to open their doors on these days unless they doing essential services such as in hospitals, police and the army.

I am strong believer in the supremacy of the organisation instead of individuals. Some of my friends from both the left and right and others who are just confused are expressing a view that I, as Zwelinzima Vavi, should distance myself from a decision taken by the majority at the COSATU CEC to mobilize workers to vote for the ANC in the coming elections.

Let me categorically state that I am not an individual above the structures but a General Secretary of all 19 COSATU affiliated unions and must be bound by the decisions taken by the collective even if I was not present as it is the case today. If I was to do the opposite then I would no longer be a General Secretary whose role must be to unite all COSATU unions. So those calling me a sell-out for stating this may just as well continue to call me names.

Whilst I will continue to mobilize workers behind the 11th national congress resolution I will not undermine the call COSATU CEC has made on workers to vote ANC on 7 May.

International solidarity

As on every May Day, we must step up our campaigns of international solidarity of support for:

- The Palestine people's justified struggle for national sovereignty and the withdrawal of the apartheid Israeli regime from illegally occupied Palestinian territories,
- The workers of Swaziland in their struggle against the corrupt monarchist dictatorship and for democracy and human rights.
- The battle of the people of Western Sahara for independence from Morocco,
- Solidarity with the people of Cuba and for the end of The US economic boycott.