

## WAGE DISPUTE

# Municipal workers' strike action chaos feared

**JAMES MAHLOKWANE**

james.mahlokwane@inl.co.za

WAGE negotiations for all 257 municipalities in the country have collapsed, paving the way for a nationwide strike.

SA Local Government Association (Salga) spokesperson Sivuyile Mbambato told the Pretoria News that municipalities were opposed to the proposal by the SA Municipal Workers Union (Samwu) to take the failed negotiations to the streets.

Mbambato said such action would end labour peace and stability, and interrupt service delivery. He said the union prematurely declared a negotiations deadlock while representatives of municipalities were confident that an agreement would be reached.

A facilitator at the bargaining council proposed a 4% across the board salary hike linked to a multi-year agreement, but that was declined by all parties.

Salga, however, said a strike right now would not serve any good, and "noted with disappointment" the union's decision to pull out of negotiations despite the potential for a consensus to be reached.

Mbambato said: "We opted for Section 74 referral in terms of the Labour Relations Act due to the fact that all municipalities perform the designated essential services. Employees in designated essential services are prohibited from participating in strike action in terms of the Labour Relations Act.

"In these circumstances, the dispute

can only be resolved through interest arbitration as opposed to strike action."

But the union's deputy general secretary, Dumisane Magagula, said they had already filed papers to the bargaining council declaring a dispute.

Magagula said: "Salga from the onset negotiated in bad faith, telling workers that their principals at municipalities have mandated them not to give workers an increase that is above inflation, and workers' benefits that are linked to salaries should be frozen.

"Our negotiation team was told on July 1 by Salga that 'you can do whatever you want, including going on strike, but there is no way that we are going to budge on our position'.

"For us this is positional negotia-

tions on the part of Salga. They were not willing to compromise on anything throughout the negotiations, yet they expected workers to continually revise their demands whereas there was no reciprocation on their part."

The union said that Salga could not out of the blue argue that municipal workers were essential service workers when it suited the employer.

"Why were municipal workers not considered essential service when they were denied a Covid allowance? Why were these same workers not deemed to be essential service workers when other workers are busy getting the vaccinations, leaving municipal workers exposed and vulnerable?

"Most importantly, why are municipal workers not considered essential

service when they demand a decent salary and wage increase?"

The union's original demand was for a single-year salary and wage agreement, R4 000 salary increase for all workers under the auspices of the bargaining council, R15 000 sectoral minimum wage and a R 3 500 housing allowance for all workers.

This included an 80% employer medical aid contribution and 20% employee contribution; six months full paid maternal leave and one month fully paid paternity leave; a 25% employer contribution towards pension; absorption of all Expanded Public Works Programme and Community Work Programme workers in municipalities and the rationalisation of pension funds in the sector.