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Budget allocation inadequate



More than 60 people affiliated to several civil society and grassroots organisations picketed at the gates of Parliament on Wednesday ahead of Finance minister Enoch Godongwana's Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement.

PHOTO: GROUNDUP

Civil society groups have welcomed the extension of the R350 grant but believe it's not enough to make a meaningful impact in the lives of millions of unemployed people. This follows Finance minister Enoch Godongwana's Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) at the City Hall in Cape Town.

In addition to extending the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant until March 2024, Godongwana announced bailouts for state-owned entities (SOEs). He said that the country's economy is expected to grow at an average of 1,6% over the next three years. "Over the next three years, spending increases will be prioritised to improve investment in infrastructure and boost the budgets for safety, security and fighting corruption."

More than 60 people affiliated with the Back2Work Campaign, the Peoples' Health Movement, Movement for Change and Social Justice Delegates, gathered outside Parliament ahead of the budget speech to discuss issues related to unemployment, public health, municipal services, and gender-based violence.

Picketers held up placards reading: "Improve public health," "No to budget cuts," "Stop privatisation of our energy and transport" and "We demand decent work now."

In response to the MTBPS, Reginald Mapempeni, secretary of the Back2Work campaign, said, "While we appreciate the R350 SRD grant, there are problems with it because everybody who is supposed to receive it does not get it."

Langa resident Luvo Nabe, who joined picketers, said Godongwana's budget was full of "empty promises."

"He mentioned nothing about the Basic Income Grant, only the SRD grant, which a lot of people don't even get," said Nabe. He also said he wanted work with the Expanded Public Works Programmes to last more than three to six months.

Madoda Cuphe of the Back2Work Campaign said, "There's 13 million people who want to work but cannot. Every unemployed person needs to be given a Basic Income Grant of R1 500."

"Government keeps saying they can't afford it. But government has forgotten the July unrest. You can't have millions of people going hungry. If something doesn't change, the situation is going to become dire," he said.

Godongwana also said that spending on building new and rehabilitating existing infrastructure will increase from R66,7 billion to R112,5 billion in 2025/26. This includes roads, bridges, storm-water systems and public buildings.

He said the largest allocations go to education, health and social development sectors. But No-whi Mdayi, chair of the People's Health Movement, said communities are sceptical they will see improvements. — GroundUp.