

Office bearers' pay hike angers public sector unions

Public sector unions are angered at President Jacob Zuma's approval of salary increases for public office bearers, including his own and that of the Cabinet. The unions said they would follow Zuma's lead during their wage negotiations as the government had demonstrated it was capable of sourcing more funds for its employees, even in tough economic conditions. **Business Day** reports that Zuma announced last week he had approved the recommendations of the Independent Commission for Remuneration of Public Office Bearers, which suggested increases of 4%-8% for public officials including MPs, judges and leaders of tribal authorities. **Although the President said he had considered the state of the economy when he made the decision, the unions disagreed.** Cosatu spokesperson Sizwe Pamla said Zuma was merely looking after himself and his Cabinet and unions would be forced to do the same.

There will be a 4% salary hike for Cabinet Ministers, their deputies, National Assembly Speaker Baleka Mbete, National Council of Provinces chairperson, members of provincial Cabinets, speakers of provincial legislatures and judges, reports **The Citizen**. Members of Parliament and provincial legislatures and kings and queens get a slightly higher increase of 4.5%, while the chairperson of the National House of Traditional Leaders and full-time deputy chairperson of provincial houses of traditional leaders will receive a 5% pay rise. Senior traditional leaders will see their salaries hiked by 8%. **A proposal for increases to the salaries of magistrates will, however, first have to be approved by Parliament, according to law.** 'The president has therefore requested parliament to approve that salaries of magistrates be adjusted by 5.5%.'

News24 reports that *the rational for the commission's recommendations are* that: 'Consideration was given to the consultations with the finance ministry and the dire straits faced by the economy in general and the fiscus in particular. **The current economic difficulties cannot be ignored and the majority of citizens are adversely affected by the poor economic growth rates and inflation.** The commission further considered an average inflation-linked increase in order to protect salaries against the increased cost of living. However, due to the state of the economy and affordability, the commission resolved that the impact of inflation can be absorbed better by higher earners than lower earners. A proportionately lower adjustment would, therefore, be appropriate for higher earners. It is believed that the remuneration levels of the highest earning POBs (public office bearers) provide them with a greater portion of disposable income, which can act as a buffer against the effects of inflation. The commission, therefore, agreed to consider appropriate adjustments to the remuneration of POBs on their salary band.' The report says last year Zuma accepted the commission's recommendation of no salary increases for top public office bearers 'as a patriotic sacrifice', which included the executive, MPs and members of provincial legislatures, judges and mayors.