

*THE SA Parastatal and Tertiary Institutions Union has issued a statement regarding proposed salary increases.*

**T**HE salaries of legal professionals have been a matter of discussion between a task team comprised of the Department of Justice, the National Treasury and the Public Service, including the Legal Aid

Board (LAB), over the past few years.

The purpose of this task team was to ensure that salaries in the justice cluster be aligned to ensure equity and fairness through an occupational dispensation process (OSD).

In March 2007, when LAB employees and South African Parastatal and Tertiary Institutions (SAPTU) members protested outside parliament and a letter was addressed to the Minister of Justice, a task team proposed that Occupational Specific Dispensation (OSD) would address the concerns of legal professionals in the justice cluster.

#### **Legal**

This alignment was essential, as legal professionals employed by the LAB are remunerated at a much lower rate than other legal professionals at the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration (KZNPA) and the Department of Justice.

Salaries are a major problem because they are too low to attract legal professionals when in competition with the private sector.

The salaries of legal professionals in the Department of Justice and the KZNPA had been upgraded in 2005/2006, but the Legal Aid Board had not been given money to provide similar increases for its staff.

This backlog severely prejudices LAB employees.

SAPTU and other major unions have monitored the OSD processes, and resolutions were made to implement alignment of all salaries in the legal cluster. Salaries would increase and back-pay was to be paid as from July 1, 2007. SAPTU has been informed that the LAB has complied with all

requisites and deadlines to submit salary dispensation proposals.

The OSD was negotiated with employers over many months at the General Public Service Bargaining Chamber. SAPTU, as a trade union monitored the process and also represented its members at the forum, as observers, where agreement was reached on implementing the alignment of all salaries in the legal cluster.

Since this agreement, no ministerial determination to implement the new agreed salary dispensation has been signed. It is now a new financial year, and LAB employees now doubt the statements of the OSD.

There is a limited pool of experienced legal professionals in the country and they are lured by private companies, the magistracy and the KZNPA. This presents staff retention problems. Staffers are concerned about inflation and the increase in the price of basic food-stuffs and petrol.

The LAB has come from a position of virtual collapse in the 1990s to delivering legal aid to more than 400 000 people across the country last year. Strike action at the board would set back the court rolls still further.

The workload resulting from serious crimes had increased by 23 percent in the past 10 years. The number of cases brought to court by the LAB doubled between 1999 and 2003.

Flowing from this, LAB employees protested outside parliament and the courts nationally, in their call for mass action. LAB employees have also instructed SAPTU to consider possible strike action.

LAB employees demand immediate implementation of aligned salaries for all staff.