

# South Africa: The Real Jobs Summit: a long journey to economic and political freedom

Wednesday 6 May 2020, by [JANKIE Re kang](#) (Date first published: 5 May 2020).

**In 2018, newly appointed President Cyril Ramaphosa's inaugural State of the Nation promised what would in effect be a presidency of Summits. This address promised a variety of marquee events meant to signal the state's ability to attract investment, "develop" the nation and create jobs. These Presidential Summits were seen as a crucial arena for creating a social compact that would lay the foundation for the rest of the Ramaphosa presidency.**

Ramaphosa had to obtain the support, even if symbolic, of Labour. He managed to do this by hosting The Presidential Jobs Summit featuring a wide array of social actors. This Summit was tasked with dealing with South Africa's stubborn and unrelenting unemployment rate. While the President was adamant about the inclusive and broad nature of this process, the 11 million unemployed and countless precariously employed South Africans found themselves without representation in the forum. The Jobs Summit's proposals (totalling "70 concrete measures") displayed the strong pro-business character of Ramaphosa's presidency, as multiple issues of *Amandla!*, have gone on to show.

It is the failure of this process that inspired the Assembly of the Unemployed (AoU) to protest Ramaphosa's Jobs Summit outside Gallagher Estate that year. The AoU comprises Abahlali baseMjondolo, Amadiba Crisis Committee, Amandla, Botshabelo Unemployed Movement, Progressive Civic Movement, South African Green Revolutionary Council and Unemployed People's Movement- Their slogan then, as it is now, was "nothing about us, without us".

Fast forward to 2020. Ramaphosa has abandoned all pretenses and stopped hosting Jobs Summits. Yet the problem that spurred the inaugural presidential Jobs Summit has not abated. In fact, following the first summit, the problem got worse. Unemployment, even by the limited narrow definition, went on to reach levels not seen since the Great Recession. This economic environment was exacerbated by the unrelenting Gender Based Violence, the effects of the climate crisis and other contemporary failings of neoliberal governance.

This period of crisis has escalated a push towards austerity that is bound to devastate the working class, whether employed, unemployed or precariously employed. Yet their voices have been conspicuously excluded. It is this exclusion that motivated the AoU, SAFTU and AMCU to join forces under the banner of the *Cry of the Xcluded*.

## Formation of coalition

The coalitions launch on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2020 and presented a draft programme of action against unemployment, austerity and job losses. The slogan was simple: "Jobs, Dignity and Services". The aim is to build a united force of the unemployed, employed and precariously employed to fight for a genuinely decent life for all.

The starting point of the campaign would be a *Caravan of the Xcluded* that would bring together 300 activists from Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Kwa-Zulu Natal, Eastern Cape, Free State and other regions to the Western Cape for a Real Jobs Summit.

The Real Jobs Summit hosted by the *Cry of the Excluded* assigned itself the task of

“the development of alternative strategies at several different levels to address the jobs and unemployment emergency:

- Immediate strategies and social action plans to address the suffering of the unemployed;
- Real job creation strategies, especially in the areas of meeting basic needs (housing, early learning, food production), climate jobs and creating rural livelihoods;
- education, training and skills programme for redeveloping artisanal workers;
- alternative economic development policies, especially alternative financing plans that underpin a mass job creation strategy

Five commissions presented their carefully thought out, and intensely debated proposals to a plenary that scrutinised them on the basis of their ability to deliver a decent life for the working class. The Summit eventually adopted a set of concrete proposals, and then began work on the strategies to achieve these aims. The proposals were drawn up into a living document that was presented at a #WorkForUs March on Budget Day. This is the Declaration from the Summit:

### **Declaration of the Xcluded: Budget Day 2020**

We are the ***Cry of the Xcluded*** : we are the women who are being battered, killed and unpaid for our labour; we are the working-class, the employed and the unemployed; but some of us have never experienced work or had income. We are the workers that have lost our rights at work. We are the new super-exploited workers: the casualised, informalised and labour brokered. Our black skins ensure our exploitation and oppression even in this so-called new South Africa. We are the foreign nationals, the undocumented, the vulnerable, forced into under-cutting the wages of our South African sisters and brothers in the interests of business. We are the landless and the homeless, who, if nothing changes, will never have safety and security. We built South Africa with our labour and we want to make South Africa **#WorkForUs**.

### ***Ours is a cry not of despair but of urgency!***

We have come together in the Real Jobs Summit, frustrated and angry at government's jobs and investor summits from which we are excluded. Excluded by our non-presence, excluded by the predominance of the interests of the ruling elites, excluded by the solutions that perpetuate our subordination, excluded by an ideology that cannot see beyond the market and values profit over people.

We refuse to be silenced, to be made invisible. To the **11 million unemployed** we say join the [Assembly of the Unemployed](#); add your voice to the ***Cry of the Xcluded*** ; organize, don't despair! To the elites, to the financiers, the captains of industry and the politicians that uphold the system: we are coming.

We have hope, we have power and we have a vision of justice, righteousness, dignity and equality. We are determined to rebuild our broken nation and together with allies in the labour and social movements we are going to make South Africa **#WorkForUs**

Our Real Jobs Summit analysed the multiple crises facing our country. We are convinced that the economic and social crises currently being experienced place our society at the precipice of no

return. At our summit we have discussed these crises at length. We have identified the problems and have **come up with solutions!** Contrary to the view of the few, we have proved that we possess agency, will and creativity to pave the way forward and address the crises our country is facing.

### ***Land and agrarian reform for food sovereignty and livelihoods***

Our inequalities are a consequence of dispossession and the continued exclusion from land. This long standing historical and large-scale dispossession of land must be acknowledged and face redress. **But, since the start of our democracy, no transformation has taken place.** The ANC government has failed to even deliver on the modest 30% land reform target set in 1994. Instead, the state supports the capitalist agricultural model and does not provide any form of support to small scale and subsistence farmers. In order to radically transform land and agriculture we must link land, water, value chains and local markets.

Farm workers and dwellers remain at the margins of the industry, with very little rights, limited power and their agency denied. With no support and no capacity development, existing power relations remain intact and access to shared benefits has not been realized. Mining companies have preferential land rights over communities who are denied their tenure and livelihood security. Our **Right To Say No must prevail!**

Experience across Africa illustrates that land which is nationalised continues to take power away from those that work the land and produce the food that feeds us all. Today producers of food are side-lined, as supermarkets control access to food. Therefore, the socialisation of land should be at the basis of a radical land demand. **We have to demand that the commons - land, water, oceans and forests - will not be commodified.**

#### **We further demand that:**

- Access to land is given as a means to secure livelihoods and income.
- Expropriation without compensation be advanced for farm workers and dwellers.
- Government provides skills development and capacity building for different land uses.
- Abandoned mines and water affected by acid mine drainage must be rehabilitated through the creation of work for the unemployed youth.
- Land owned by mining companies must be released to communities for small scale agro-ecological farming.
- Establishment of support for the development of processing and value addition of local agricultural production.
- Government must finance and create local, rural markets that support community and school feeding schemes.
- Our **Right to Say No** be imposed on mining, industrial and agricultural development.

### ***An Economy that #WorksForUs***

The economy is broken, and the Xcluded know this fact better than most. We have a different idea of the kind of economy we want: an economy that works for us. Decent work and livelihoods are not impossible dreams, but they will remain distant hopes if we do not restructure our economy and redistribute wealth.

Our most urgent and pressing demand is an **end to austerity.** Cutting the budget in a time of economic stagnation will destroy the very tools and resources we need to jump-start the economy. This requires a **huge mobilisation of state resources** that will pump life back into our economy.

Alongside this is our demand for an **end to casualisation and temporary work**. EPWP workers must be insourced and given the benefits afforded to permanent workers.

We further **reject the privatisation and commodification** that is creeping into every aspect of our lives. We cannot allow the provision of essentials of life to be driven by the pursuit of profit. **Companies are accountable** to nobody except investors and shareholders; they will not act in our best interest.

### ***A Basic Income Grant***

People are starving and without food. To end this, the state should look to progressively introduce an **unconditional universal basic income grant**. We need a basic income now for **18 - 59 year-olds** who are without stable income.

This grant would boost the economy, creating demand for products and services, and thus many jobs. Government must focus on attracting the people back into the economy instead of just foreign investors.

- We demand a **basic income grant of R12,500 that meets the immediate living needs of the unemployed**.
  - To those that say this is too high, that is only because they believe wages should be so low!
  - This is a demand for a living wage, to cover the basics our families depend on. How can we be expected to demand anything less?

### ***The just transition towards overcoming climate crisis***

We the Xcluded recognise the existence of climate change as an emergency for our people and the planet which we are experiencing in our daily lives.

**We therefore demand that** our government oversee a **just transition** from our current economy to a low-carbon economy **based on 100% renewable energy** by 2030 to avoid the crisis of a 1.5C° increase.

- They **must leave not one worker behind!**
- Government must reject its ties to fossil capital and advances by businesses through the REI4P; they want **to capture our renewable energy resources for private profit**.
- We reject and condemn all those who wish to privatise Eskom and who welcome its death spiral. We demand a new transparent and accountable Eskom, free from corruption, that moves to generate 100% renewable energy at the cheapest possible price.

We further demand that our government meet the climate crisis through these other areas:

- The provision of **fully public, quality, safe, affordable public transport!** Specifically, the government must urgently intervene in the crisis at PRASA and **deal with the looters**.
- A housing plan for well-located homes and that gives us dignity! **These houses must be climate houses** with solar panels, rainwater catchment and greywater systems.
- Proper sanitation services! **We are sick of living in shit**; we want decent toilets and proper sewage and stormwater systems. All of this will help us adapt to the future droughts of climate change which will make the spread of disease more likely.
- The creation of public parks and a mass tree-planting programme **so we can thrive alongside our biodiversity**.

In all of these areas we are demanding that the government **put us to work and we will build these things** as we have done for everything else in this economy that excludes us.

And when the voices of the ruling class say that what we demand is impossible and unrealistic, and when they rhetorically ask “who will pay for all this?”, **we will give them our answer!**

“Tax the rich and the big polluters so that the poor can live! Allow us to save our planet because the rich certainly will not!”

Finally, we say this: **We are calling on our people to rise-up!** We call on our people, the working class, employed and unemployed, to unite, to resist and, in your resistance, to show there is another way, a fair, just and righteous path – a path deserving of the sacrifices of the Chris Hanis, Ruth Firsts, Steve Bikos, Robert Sobukwes, Solomon Mahlangus, Andries Tatanes, Mambush Nokis and the other mineworkers murdered at Marikana. We built South Africa and South Africa belongs to us, now is the time to make SA **#WorkForUs**.

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**Rekang Jankie**

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**P.S.**

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