

## Message from the overall Government convenor – RAMS RAMASHIA



Rams Ramashia -  
Overall Government  
Convenor

It is just over 8 years since South Africans from all walks of life decided, via the ballot, to steer our country away from its painful and shameful past. A past characterised by negative economic growth, deepening fiscal deficit, and poor balance of payments. A past where racial oppression and denial of economic opportunities and social services to the majority of the population was the nerve centre of the policy of the regime of the day.

Through our Constitution, we committed ourselves jointly and severally to rid our country and its people of all forms of unfair discrimination and undertook together to build a prosperous and glorious future. Several pieces of legislation - including the NEDLAC Act were enacted to steer our country on a path of economic recovery and social development. Indeed, despite exogenous factors that drove most emerging economies on a downward spiral, we have been able to weather the storm. Our economy is beginning to show steady growth. Factors that constrain us from recording higher levels of growth include low levels of investments - both domestic and foreign. The recent call for a Growth and Development Summit by the President could not have come at a better time.

The time has come for us to unpack the contents of declaration of the 5th NEDLAC Annual Summit which commits us to making South Africa become “the leading emerging market and destination of first choice for investors - while retaining and expanding social equity and fair labour standards”. A Social Accord is a sine qua non for what we seek to create. By its very nature, a social accord inevitably requires us to rise above our natural propensity towards avoidance of pain and discomfort. We need to work towards avoiding self-serving ephemeral gratification and focus on long-term strategic goals, to achieve sustainable solutions.

In developing a social accord, leaders of government, organised business and labour; and the community constituencies will need to be mindful of the fact that unless they find a sustainable solution to the problem of low growth, low levels of investment, high unemployment rate and development deficit, the very fabric of our hard-earned democracy will remain threatened.

Those who have an appreciation of the intractability of our problems will realise that we can no longer afford the luxury of posturing and frivolous grandstanding while our country faces an unemployment crisis. This moment calls for a leadership with a vision - a vision of a South Africa where everybody has access to economic opportunities and social services. In pursuit of this vision, leaders of different constituencies will need to act decisively, lead from the front, look ahead and march forward; without leaving their constituencies behind. Given the way social partners have been able to resolve other highly contested issues in the past, I have no doubt in my mind that we shall pull through.

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## Message from the overall Labour convenor – EBRAHIM PATEL



Ebrahim Patel -  
Overall Labour Convenor

*" Nearly 3 600 children die every day from preventable diarrhoea, mostly caused by contaminated water. That's the equivalent of six jumbo jet planes full of children crashing daily"*

– Worldwatch Institute's State of the World 2002.

'Decent Work', the notion that society needs more and better jobs to challenge poverty and inequality, is at the centre of our contemporary challenge. Decent work is a means to provide a living wage to families in order to avoid preventable diarrhoea, and the many other tragedies that accompany poverty, ignorance and disease. It is the basis of policy at the ILO, and should be the framework of Nedlac's action in the year ahead.

Crucial  
challenges for  
Nedlac:  
continental  
unity and  
sustainable  
development.

The Proudly South Africa campaign is based on values that fit into the decent work framework: fair labour standards, sustainable environmental practices and quality products. It also promotes local content!

Proud as we are of our local capacity, we also seek to co-shape the world we live in. Two international events hosted by South Africa have both highlighted crucial challenges for Nedlac: that of continental unity and sustainable development.

The African Union was launched in Durban at the beginning of July 2002, and the AU's first Chairman, President Thabo Mbeki, called for a "continent of democracy". To complement this, we need to make Africa a continent of social dialogue and social justice too. The principles on which Nedlac is founded should now be continentalised, and the voices of Africa's workers, communities and businesses should find expression in Africa's decision-making forums.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development met in Johannesburg in late August 2002, and brought together a significant network of people and ideas to ensure that development meets the needs of all the world's people today, without, in the words of the Brundland Commission, compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

For the next 12 months, Nedlac can incorporate the insights from these events in our work programme, and focus on

- mainstreaming the decent work challenge in the operation of industrial, trade, fiscal, monetary and labour market policies, and in the outcomes of the Growth and Development Summit
- negotiating a prevention and treatment plan on HIV/Aids, to stop the disease and to care for those living with Aids
- moving the Proudly South Africa campaign to its next phase: consumer choice in favour of goods and services that respect the core values of the campaign
- building the AU as a forum for governments and the governed, a platform for people and communities, a home for trade unions and civil society.

## Message from the overall **Business** convenor –

**RAYMOND PARSONS**



Raymond Parsons -  
Overall Business Convenor

NEDLAC is primarily an institution to foster effective social dialogue. Over the past year NEDLAC has once again addressed a variety of key issues, some more successfully than others. The rôle of social dialogue is also being taken beyond the borders of South Africa – both through NEDLAC's participation in the International Association of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions (IAESCSI) and in the unfolding developments in NEPAD and the AU.

A key pre-condition for successful social dialogue is that the stakeholders need to work together towards forging a common agenda so that they can compete on the global stage. Although NEDLAC has made progress on this score, much more needs to be done in certain areas. First prize would clearly be for the social partners to agree upon a well co-ordinated strategic plan comprising of a series of interrelated and workable policy measures. While some progress is being made at various levels, a broader and more coordinated process needs to gain momentum in NEDLAC.

It would be of enormous benefit if the social partners could agree on steps that now go beyond macro-economic balances and address the areas in which our economic performance still falls short. Growth, investment, unemployment and poverty remain serious issues on the national agenda. The recent fall in the rand and its inflationary consequences have permeated several areas of policy and need to be addressed sensibly.

Effective social dialogue can be a valuable way of taking an holistic view of what needs to be done. NEDLAC's rôle in this process is both critical and indisputable. The quality of NEDLAC's outcomes hinges to a large extent on the capacity of stakeholders to contribute constructively to the social dialogue process, to look beyond their immediate interests, and to find acceptable solutions where possible. There is therefore also a reciprocal responsibility on the NEDLAC constituencies to support their inputs with adequate research and proper mandating.

This is why the President's growth and development 'summit' early in 2003 – together with a possible 'social compact' – assume great significance. If such a gathering is to avoid becoming just another 'talk shop', it will need to yield some strategic agreements that will make a positive difference to South Africa's economic performance in future. This is the year in which NEDLAC structures can show their mettle in making a positive contribution to the process.

Growth, investment, unemployment and poverty remain serious issues on the national agenda.

## Message from the overall **Community** convenor – **KHULU MBONGO**



**Khulu Mbongo -**  
Overall Community Convenor

The year 2002 in Nedlac brought to the fore serious challenges facing an evolving process for social dialogue in South Africa. Nedlac has been hectic for all the Constituencies but many thanks to all the leaders for all the efforts, commitment and sacrifices they have put in this institution to make it a better place, especially the Executive Director, Phillip Dexter and the Staff.

### **Achievements**

Challenges: The success of the many Summits in the year ahead.

This year, finally we move into a new building and must thank the Department of Labour, without which this move could not have been possible. A programme on Sector Summits is finally off the ground. We have realigned the work programme with the 2000 Summit Declaration, specifically on the key issues of national priorities. Internal publications have improved, and we saw the first edition of the socio-economic bulletin. There has been increasing membership of the Proudly South African Campaign, in line with targets.

### **Weaknesses**

The large staff turnover at Nedlac has been a problem. It is ironic that Nedlac was the place where the National Skills Development Strategy was agreed to, yet not a single learnership has been created at Nedlac to date. Tracking legislative processes has proved difficult, especially the Immigration Bill and the Minerals and Petroleum Development Bill, resulting in poor interaction on these crucial pieces of legislation.

### **Challenges**

Nedlac's influence on the HIV/AIDS debates and specifically dealing with prevention, treatment, care and support measures. There is a poor link between Nedlac and local government issues, especially in terms of the restructuring of local government. Nepad implementation and the launch of the African Union which Nedlac should be leading discussions on and defining the role of social dialogue in SADC and in the African continent is another challenge, as is the success of the many Summits in the year ahead, especially the Civil Society, Financial Sector and the Growth and Development Summits.

### **Key future issues are:**

An engagement on investment promotion and employment creation; Black Economic Empowerment and the deracialising of the economy; putting marginalized groups such as youth, women and people with disabilities at the centre of economic activity; Nedlac should drive discussions on the "Taylor Report" on the transformation of the social security system; the restructuring of Higher Education and the implementation of the National Skill Development Strategy; rising food prices, food security and land reform, that are key areas in the fight against poverty.