



MINISTRY
PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**MINISTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION
HON. INKOSI MZAMO BUTHELEZI, MP**

**REMARKS
LAUNCH OF ETHICS WEEK 9 - 12 SEPTEMBER 2024**

3rd Floor Auditorium, Batho Pele House, Pretoria: 9 September 2024

Thank you, Programme Director.

Deputy Minister, Hon. Ms Pinky Kekana.

Dr Salomon Hoogenraad-Vermaak, Head of the Public Administration Ethics, Integrity and Disciplinary Technical Assistance Unit (PAEIDTAU).

Colleagues, distinguished guests and all public servants. A special welcome to our Ethics Officers, media representatives and those joining us virtually.

It is my great honour to welcome you as we officially launch Ethics Week within the broader context of Integrated Public Service Month (IPSM). This is a very special moment as we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that the highest ethical standards, integrity and accountability remain the heart of Public Service.

I would also like to extend a warm South African welcome to our international partners - the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the German Agency for International Co-operation (GIZ), and our colleagues from the Strengthening Ethics and Integrity Programme - a bilateral initiative with Canada.

We are also privileged to have Ms Tiny Keseabetswe, who is a Director-General from Botswana's Ethics and Integrity Directorate.

Your visit Director gives us an opportunity for a mutual learning as we strengthen our respective public service frameworks.

Like the delegation we received last year from Malawi, I am sure this visit will also be mutually beneficial.

Your presence signifies the importance of international cooperation in strengthening ethics and integrity across public service. We also deeply value your contributions in shaping the activities of Ethics Week and we are grateful for your support.

Ethics Week offers us the opportunity to focus on the role of Ethics Officers, whose work is essential in promoting good governance, combating corruption, and supporting the professionalization agenda of our government.

Colleagues, the alignment of Ethics Week with Integrated Public Service Month – themed, “**A Government That Works For You**”, is significant. While Public Service Month celebrates the importance of a responsive and people centred governance – Ethics Week focuses on ensuring that the principles underpinning this service – which are honesty, fairness, and transparency, are upheld.

Section 195 (1) of our Constitution enshrines these values and it is our duty as public service to live by them. Colleagues, these are not a mere suggestion but a constitutional requirement.

The public we serve expects and deserves a government that acts ethical and with integrity, because ethics is the foundation upon which trust is built – And without trust, it means we undermine the very institution we are meant to uphold.

Let us take this opportunity to recommit ourselves to the standards of excellence and integrity that South Africans rightfully expect from us.

By doing so, we will not only strengthen our public service but also contribute to the broader vision of a capable, ethical, and developmental state – as articulated by our President, His Excellency, Cyril Ramaphosa.

These commitments, reiterated by the president, are not just about meeting expectations but about surpassing them and ensuring that our public service operates at the highest level of integrity.

The truth colleagues is that our public service is at a critical juncture. We are faced with numerous challenges that require our immediate attention. If we do not address these issues with the seriousness they deserve, we risk not only undermining public trust but also damaging the integrity of our institutions permanently.

With the institutionalization of Ethics Officers well on its way, and a *Directive on the Institutionalization of the Ethics Officer Function in the Public Service* being implemented in the Public Service, the focus for this and the next financial years will be on institutionalizing Ethics Committees in national and provincial departments.

These committees play a critical role in overseeing ethics management in departments and to provide strategic direction regarding ethics management in departments.

That is why there are activities planned this week, ranging from the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention Awareness Workshop – aimed at equipping us with the knowledge and tools we need to enhance accountability and ethical culture.

One of the first items then is the launch of the Ethics Committee Procedure and tools to promote the guidelines, procedures, and tools to assist departments in establishing ethics committees, designating committee members and managing overall committee operations.

This will be followed by Lifestyle Audit Training for departmental investigators - where the team from the Public Administration Ethics, Integrity and Disciplinary Technical Assistance Team (TAU) - will be supported by the Strengthening Ethics and Integrity Program.

Last year during the Ethics Week, several investigators were trained. As a result of this, 147 out of 160 national and provincial departments conducted lifestyle audits at the end of January 2024.

This is an improvement of the 137 departments that did so in January 2023. I want to commend the dedication of our departmental investigators to make sure that lifestyle investigations are conducted in their departments.

This year alone, 191 Senior Management Services (SMS) officials (97 in national departments and 94 in provincial departments) were referred for investigation by their departments. These officials, together with 1180 non-Senior Management Services officials are from 27 departments. Seven of these are from national and 20, from provincial departments.

Progress reports submitted to Technical Assistance Team reveals that the investigations are investigating conflicts of interest; incomplete disclosures; non-disclosure of assets, directorships, companies, immovable assets; the stated value of assets; allegations of conducting business with the State; performing other remunerative work without permission; and alleged unexplained wealth.

The 27 departments are currently investigating their cases and report their progress quarterly to the Technical Assistance Team. With the training to be provided this week to departmental investigators, I am confident that the detection of corruption and unethical conduct will strengthen the lifestyle audit process.

Colleagues, the statistics above prove that these activities are not just for show but are a part of a comprehensive strategy to build a more accountable public service.

Our goal therefore is to create an environment where ethical behaviour is the norm and where there are clear consequences for failing to meet our standards.

I wish to thank those departments that embraced the lifestyle audit process and to warn those who did not do so to use the training opportunities provided this week, and start conducting lifestyle audits, as I have made lifestyle audits my number one priority to address corruption in the Public Service.

Ladies and gentlemen,

An ethics week is nothing without the customary National Ethics Officer Forum. Over the span of one day, the focus will be on the area of work of Ethics Officers.

To address ethics risks in departments, the Technical Assistance Team with the support of the National School of Government is developing a self-assessment tool for the Heads of Departments, to guide them to manage ethics in their departments. These institutions are going to use the National Ethics Officer Forum to consult on this tool before it is implemented in the public service.

I consider this to be a critical instrument to support HODs with the ethics management process. The tool will be made available to all departments, enabling HODs to determine whether all ethics risks are being adequately addressed.

To independently assess the ethical culture of the Public Service, The Ethics Institute launched on 3 September another iteration of the three yearly Public Service Ethics Survey.

This will not only provide us with an overview of the state of ethics management and the ethics culture in the Public Service, but it will assist departments by identifying the prevalent ethics risks in need of mitigation.

In order to properly address ethics risks and effectively manage ethics in the public administration, I urge all public service employees and municipal employees to participate in this online survey.

Allow me also, to also provide you with another short overview of the other planned activities for this week.

They include:

- **The National Ethics Officer Forum**, planned for the 11th of September 2024. This is aimed to allow Ethics Officers to exchange ideas and best practises for preventing corruption. This year's focus will be on managing other enumerative work and consulting on the Ethics Management Assessment Tool, developed with the National School of Government.
- On the 12th of September we will be **Celebrating Ethics** – which is a special event featuring the unveiling of a new ethics poster, discussions on key ethical issues and recognition of Ethics Officers for their significant contributions to promoting ethics in public service.
- Then on the 13th of September there will be a **Leadership Dialogue**, which is an online discussion led by the Director General of DPSA, Ms Yoliswa Makhasi, focussing on the role of Ethics Officers and the support provided by leadership. In that dialogue, Heads of Departments will also participate to further highlight the importance of ethics in public service leadership.

Distinguished guests, as we close the launch of **Ethics Week 2024**, I urge everyone to reflect on the role ethics play in our public service.

This week is not just for Ethics Officers to enhance their skills but serves as a reminder to all public servants of the importance of ethical conduct in our daily roles.

Our professionalism is meaningless without integrity, and building a capable public service requires all of us to act ethically, especially those in leadership.

Let us seize this moment for self-reflection, recommit to doing what is right, and contribute to creating a public service that operates with integrity and fairness.

The fight against corruption is not just the government's responsibility but a collective effort. Together, we can foster a culture of public integrity, ensuring a better future for all.

Let us remember that the effectiveness of our public service is directly tied to our ability to maintain high ethical standards. We want our public service to be a model of integrity and excellence, not a cautionary tale of what happens when accountability is lacking.

I want to reiterate that this is a call to action. We must recommit ourselves to a higher standard of ethics and accountability.

This Week should be an opportunity for us to reflect on our practices, learn from one another, and strengthen our resolve to uphold the values enshrined in our Constitution.

I am confident that, by working together and remaining steadfast in our commitment to ethics, we can build a public administration that not only meets but exceeds the expectations set out for us.

As we move forward with renewed determination and a clear focus on integrity and service to our fellow citizens, let this be a turning point in our journey towards a more ethical and accountable public service.

Thank you.