

SA, Zambia sign MoU to safeguard migrant workers' rights

Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant says the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will help South Africa and Zambia to ensure that migrant workers' rights are protected in the two countries.



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The Minister said this when she, along with her Zambian counterpart, signed a MoU across several areas of cooperation in Cape Town, on Tuesday, 19 July 2016.

Minister Oliphant said the memorandum will also pave the way for officials from both countries to work together to ensure that migrant workers are assisted to claim from the respective unemployment insurance funds that are due to them without hassles, should they find themselves out of work.

“I am happy that within your delegation, you have representatives of the [Zambian] National Pension Scheme Authority, who I believe should foster collaboration with our Unemployment Insurance Fund and Compensation Fund... Let us work together so workers [can] benefit from what belongs to them.

“We have to share some ideas on how to deal with these challenges, particularly for migrant workers, whether you are here legally or illegally. We have to work together on these issues so... workers know they are protected by the legislation that

we have as a country. In most cases, you will find that those workers are afraid to come forward and say 'we have rights as workers that are here in South Africa', even if they are coming from Zambia," Minister Oliphant said.

The MoU will seek to safeguard the rights of workers by ensuring that South African companies operating in Zambia, and vice versa, treat their workers equally and with dignity.

The Minister said legislation also applies to businesspeople who own companies in either country. "We want businesspeople, who [have investments in either Zambia or South Africa] to comply with legislation... They have to treat workers the same (sic)," she said.

The signing of the MoU will pave way for cooperation in several areas, including collective bargaining, dispute resolution systems, labour inspections, social dialogue, labour market information, occupational health and safety, HIV and Aids and wellness in the workplace, international labour cooperation issues, social security issues relating to unemployment insurance and compensation, and productivity issues.

Zambia's Minister of Labour and Social Security, Fackson Shamenda, said the fact that a lot of South Africans are currently working in Zambia, and South Africa also hosts a lot of Zambian migrant workers, shows that there is mutual interest for the two countries to tackle these challenges.

"We have recently seen the emergence of a number of common challenges... transitioning from the informal to the formal economy and labour migration. These challenges have received international and regional attention as they affect us all in one way or another.

"These challenges can only be overcome through strengthening cooperation, collaboration and team work and through initiatives such as the MoU," he said.

Minister Shamenda said there was a need to do a lot more in sectors such as agriculture, mining, commerce and trade because the sectors are interrelated.

"Our policies must mutually complement each other through the various sectors," he said.

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