

Minister tackles discrimination at work

Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant says despite the fact that South Africa has come a long way in the past 20 years of democracy, more needs to be done to change attitudes to end discrimination in the workplace.



Labour Minister Mildred Oliphant wants to see greater transformation in the workplace with more opportunities for black people, women and those with disabilities. Image: GCIS

"In the year that we celebrate the second decade of our freedom, this freedom though rings hollow to many people, who find themselves still facing discrimination in the workplace," said Oliphant on Wednesday (9 April) at the second Employment Equity Indaba.

She said that workplace discrimination may be nuanced differently from the crude characterisation at the height of apartheid.

"It may be expressed in clever words like 'lack of experience' and other such terms, but in the end, those at the coalface feel the racism and exclusion they thought the country got rid of when the new dispensation was agreed to," she said.

Oliphant said it was a government priority to deal with inequalities left behind by the apartheid legacy in order to bring about socio-economic freedom.

The passing of the Employment Equity Act was introduced against a background of extreme disparities in the distribution of labour market opportunities.

"Unfair discrimination practices in the workplace have led to under-utilisation of the greater portion of the productive

population of the country," she said.

Transformation still too slow

"Twenty years into our democracy and 16 years since the enactment of the Employment Equity Act, the remnants of apartheid still persist. Many black people, women and people with disabilities are still relegated to lower level jobs in the name of a lack of skills, while there are many graduates from designated groups who are either sitting at home unemployed or under-employed," Oliphant said.

According to the minister, the pace of transformation in the labour market was still very slow and there was now a need for collaboration with all social partners and stakeholders to address the issue of transformation.

This year, the draft employment equity regulations were published for public comment. The regulations give effect to the Employment Equity Amendment Act.

"The regulations are in no way intended to disadvantage any of the designated groups. The regulations were introduced to enhance the implementation of the law given the high levels of non-compliance that the department has observed over the 16 years of the enactment of this act," Oliphant said.

The minister said that public comments received by her department were being considered and that the draft will be finalised through a consultative process.

There are also no plans for a sunset clause on employment equity.

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