17 August 2026
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOTICE OF STRIKE ACTION: FAWU MEMBERS RESUME STRIKE IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY

The Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) confirms that its members in the Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Industry resume strike action today, **Monday, 17 August 2026,** following the failure of wage negotiations to produce an acceptable settlement.

The strike is not simply about percentages. It is about the worsening conditions of the working class, the declining purchasing power of workers and an economic system that continues to protect profits while shifting the burden of the cost-of-living crisis onto workers.

Workers have reached a point where they can no longer be expected to finance the survival and profitability of the sugar industry through suppressed wages and inadequate benefits.

FAWU DEMANDS

FAWU has tabled the following demands:

- 13% across-the-board wage increase;
- R1 000 monthly transport allowance;
- R1 500 monthly housing allowance;
- 40% increase in the employer’s medical aid contribution;
- Standby allowance equivalent to 20 hours; and
- Implementation of the agreement from 1 April 2026.

These demands speak directly to the material conditions confronting workers.

Transport costs continue to consume workers' wages. Housing remains unaffordable for millions of working-class families. Medical aid costs continue to rise, while workers are expected to carry an increasing portion of the burden.

The demand for decent wages and improved conditions is therefore not unreasonable or excessive. It is a demand for workers to live with dignity from the wealth they themselves produce.

EMPLOYERS' OFFER

The Sugar Manufacturing and Refining Employers Association (SMREA) has offered:

- 5.4% across-the-board wage increase;
- Implementation from 1 April 2026; and
- A further 0.6% conditional upon the gazetting of the requested tariff increase.

FAWU rejects any attempt to present the conditional 0.6% as if it is already guaranteed to workers.

The concrete wage offer currently available to workers is 5.4%, while the additional 0.6% depends on a future regulatory decision outside workers' control.

Workers' wages cannot be made conditional on government processes, while their bills, transport costs, rent, food and medical expenses are payable every month without conditions.

WORKERS CANNOT CONTINUE TO CARRY THE CRISIS

FAWU recognises that the sugar industry faces serious economic pressures. However, workers did not create the structural crisis facing the industry and must not be continually forced to pay for it.

Whenever industries face difficulties, workers are told to exercise restraint, accept smaller increases, work harder and protect jobs.

When companies recover or make profits, workers are seldom invited to share proportionally in that prosperity.

This contradiction exposes the fundamental imbalance in our economy: profits remain private, while economic hardship is socialised onto workers and their families.

FAWU rejects an economic model that demands sacrifices from workers while corporate executives, shareholders and investors remain shielded from the same austerity.

GOVERNMENT MUST DEFEND LOCAL INDUSTRY AND WORKERS

FAWU further calls upon government to urgently address the broader structural challenges confronting the South African sugar industry.

The state has a responsibility to protect local production, decent employment and the country's industrial capacity from destructive import competition and policies that contribute to deindustrialisation.

However, protecting the sugar industry must never mean protecting employers at the expense of workers.

Any tariff protection, industrial support or government intervention provided to the sector must translate into job security, decent wages, improved working conditions and meaningful investment in workers and local communities.

Public policy cannot continue to socialise support to business while allowing employers to privatise the benefits.

FAWU's position is clear: industrial policy must serve workers and communities, not simply corporate balance sheets.

THE STRIKE IS A STRUGGLE FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

This strike must therefore be understood within the broader struggle for economic justice in South Africa.

Workers across sectors are confronting stagnant wages, retrenchments, casualisation, outsourcing and increasingly precarious employment while the cost of basic necessities continues to rise.

The working class cannot bargain itself out of poverty through wage restraint.

There can be no sustainable economy where the people who produce the country's wealth cannot afford housing, transport, healthcare, food and education for their families.

FAWU remains available for genuine and meaningful negotiations.

However, negotiations cannot become a process through which workers are repeatedly instructed to abandon legitimate demands while employers refuse to substantially improve their position.

The union therefore calls on SMREA and its member companies to return to the negotiating table with an improved mandate to resolve this dispute.

Until meaningful movement is achieved, workers will exercise their constitutional and labour rights through collective strike action.

FAWU calls on all its members in the sugar industry to remain united, disciplined and resolute.

We further call upon the broader trade union movement, progressive civil society and working-class formations to stand in solidarity with sugar workers in their struggle for

Issued by:
Edwin Mabowa, Deputy General Secretary, on behalf of the Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU)

For more information:
Wiseman Mbuyazi- FAWU National Sugar Sector Organiser-076 162 6368
Lebohang Phanyeko, FAWU Head of Campaigns and Recruitment – 076 387 8601
Dominique Martin, FAWU Media Officer – 082 498 5631