MEDIA STATEMENT
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R30 A LITRE PROVES THAT WORKERS' WAGE DEMANDS ARE JUSTIFIED

The Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) joins SAFTU in condemning the massive fuel-price increases, which will take effect on 7 October 2026.

Petrol rising beyond R30 per litre, together with steep increases in diesel and illuminating paraffin, represents another direct attack on the living standards of workers and poor communities.

For FAWU members, this is not an abstract economic debate. Our members must travel to factories, bakeries, farms, hotels, food-processing plants and distribution centres every day. They must buy food, electricity, pay rent, school costs and support extended families.

When fuel rises, everything rises.

Food becomes more expensive. Taxi fares increase. Distribution costs rise. Electricity and household energy costs remain unaffordable. Yet employers continue demanding that workers accept wage increases that do not match the real cost of survival.

OUR WAGE STRUGGLES ARE COST-OF-LIVING STRUGGLES

The present crisis confirms why FAWU members are fighting employers across different workplaces.

At Crown National, FAWU members have embarked on protected strike action demanding, amongst other improvements, a 10% annual increase, a R10,000 minimum monthly wage and employer-paid medical aid.

At Sasko Bakery, the wage dispute has reached deadlock and a certificate of non-resolution has been issued. FAWU is demanding a 7% wage increase, together with improvements in allowances and other conditions of employment.

Across other recent FAWU struggles, including Heineken Beverages and the sugar industry, workers have repeatedly demanded improved wages, housing, transport, medical aid and other benefits because wages are being swallowed by the rising cost of basic necessities.

EMPLOYERS CANNOT USE "INFLATION" AGAINST WORKERS

FAWU rejects attempts by employers to plead poverty when bargaining with workers while workers themselves carry the full burden of rising fuel, food, electricity and transport costs.

A wage increase that is immediately consumed by taxi fares, food inflation, electricity and debt is not a meaningful wage increase.

Employers must understand that transport is a workplace issue. Food prices are a workplace issue. Housing is a workplace issue. Medical aid is a workplace issue.

Workers cannot leave the cost-of-living crisis at the factory gate.

It is politically and economically unacceptable that workers who produce food and beverages can struggle to afford food themselves.

Workers who manufacture and distribute essential goods should not be pushed into debt simply to reach the workplaces where profits are generated. Workers did not create rising international oil prices, and it should be further noted that workers did not create South Africa's extreme inequality.

Yet whenever the economy experiences a crisis, workers are told to accept wage restraint while corporations protect profits and executives protect their salaries.

FAWU rejects an economic system in which profits are protected while wages are suppressed.

The wealth produced in our factories, farms, bakeries, hotels, warehouses and food-processing plants is created by workers. Workers are therefore entitled to wages that enable them and their families to live with dignity.

FAWU DEMANDS ACTION

FAWU supports the call for urgent government intervention to reduce the burden of fuel prices on working-class households.

We demand:

- Immediate relief from excessive fuel and transport costs.
- Affordable and reliable public transport for workers.
- Measures to stop profiteering in food and other essential commodities.
- Relief for poor households facing escalating electricity and paraffin costs.
- Employers to negotiate real wage increases based on the actual cost of living, not poverty wages disguised as responsible bargaining.
- Respect for workers exercising their constitutional right to strike for decent wages and conditions.

The R30-a-litre fuel price strengthens the case for workers demanding higher wages; it does not weaken it.

Workers cannot be continually told to tighten their belts while food, transport, electricity and housing consume their salaries.

FAWU will therefore continue to organise and mobilise workers in defence of decent wages, decent conditions and a dignified standard of living.

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