

Jobs? What jobs?

Letter to the editor

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Many were baffled by President Jacob Zuma's sketchy State of the Nation address, which asserted that the government had been able to create 480 000 jobs out of the 500 000 that he promised to deliver within six months last year. It is understandable if people react hysterically, because it is common knowledge that almost one million people across the country lost their jobs because of the recession in the same year that he said 480 000 jobs were created.

Only this year did he explain that he was referring to those jobs that were created through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), which were mainly temporary and unsustainable and did very little to move any significant number of people out of poverty and the unemployment trap. As a result, many who found themselves jobless and hungry took the initiative and joined the already swollen informal trading sector.

The latest report of Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey, released last year, reflected an increase in retrenchment compared with previous seasons. The report also showed an increase in the discouraged unemployed those who have given up hope of finding work. A few weeks after the release of this report, the president made an appeal for government to be afforded sufficient time to deliver, while at the same time admitting that it may not be feasible to create 500 000 jobs as promised. Therefore, the affirmation that 97% of job creation was achieved in the EPWP needs to be backed by substantial evidence as a way of demonstrating sound governance and accountability to citizens.

The president also seemed to have used "quiet diplomacy" regarding the acts of Cabinet ministers and departments who spent taxpayers' money on luxury vehicles. Instilling a sense of conscientiousness in government cannot be equated with splashing out R42.6-million on luxury vehicles alone in a recession, no gal!