

# Jobless youth a 'time bomb'

Saturday Star 22/5/15

BY MICHAEL SCHMIDT

Organised labour and the private sector agree on one thing: South Africa's biggest national security threat is the "time bomb" of social conflict driven by a permanent underclass of educated but unemployed youth who face a bleak future.

That was the main point of convergence at the National Security Conference in Pretoria this week hosted by the National Intelligence Co-ordinating Committee and attended by intelligence agencies, the military, the government, big business and civil society.

The conference was designed to help fashion Cabinet's national security policy.

The spectre of deepening social unrest was raised by Cosatu's chief economist, Dr Neva Makgetla, who told the conference that 60% of adult South Africans under the age of 30 had never had a job. Even among the

employed, life has been hard for many: between 1995 and 2004 two-fifths of them earned less than R1 000 a month.

Such poverty made the underclass "more likely to organise politically, especially if they are urban," Makgetla warned, because "most unemployed [people] are highly educated" and "if the average unemployed black person has four years of higher education you are sitting on a time bomb".

Makgetla warned that many among South Africa's education youth faced a future of long-term unemployment in which their only source of income was "their grandmother's pension".

Makgetla said government must use its expanded public works programme and other "community service opportunities" to draw alienated youth back into the fold.

She questioned why "the government seems to view workers' concerns as insignificant" and of no im-

port for broader social stability, when unemployment clearly created "alienation, anger and escalating violence".

Standard Bank's director of credit policy and governance, Desmond Golding, agreed, identifying the "key risk" to national security as "the failure to deliver economic benefits to all".

Golding blamed a lack of access to capital and credit as "a big threat because it marginalises the bulk of the people" and urged the Reserve Bank to ensure price stability so as to ensure that the purchasing power of the poor remained roughly even.

"What is needed is a broad-based economic empowerment, an expansion of the economic base, whether via black economic empowerment or land redistribution," Golding said.

But Makgetla said: "To say there is a [united] national interest overlooks the issue of class as well as gender and race differences".