

DWS to oppose court application on deployment of Cuban engineers

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) says it will oppose a court application brought by trade union Solidarity, as a way to force it to reverse its decision to second Cuban engineers in the country.



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In a statement, the department confirmed that it has received the court papers brought forward to the Gauteng High Court by the trade union, and will work within the confines of the law regarding the deployment of the Cuban engineers.

The department said it has met with Solidarity during a frank and robust virtual meeting on 10 May 2021, where a number of clarity seeking questions were raised by the trade union and eloquently addressed by the department.

“One of the key questions raised related to the registration provisions of the Engineering Profession Act (EPA). In this instance, the department can state that it is aware of the registration provisions of the EPA and notes that the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) has not yet made it compulsory for engineering professionals to register with the Council. Therefore, there was no need to ensure compliance with the Act in so far as it relates to the secondment of the Cuban engineers in South Africa.

“Moreover, the department is aware that Cuba is not presently a member of the International Engineering Alliance (IEA). However, the IEA was not meant to discredit the academic qualifications of institutions in countries that are not members of the IEA. Cuban engineering qualifications are not deemed to be inferior and irrelevant,” department spokesperson, Sputnik Ratau said.

Adding to this, Ratau confirmed that the department has consulted with ECSA and was advised on the process that can be followed, and the support that can be given to the department regarding the submission of applications for professional registration by the Cuban engineers.



The Cuban engineer conundrum

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“ECSA was actually invited to join the department to travel to Havana to recruit the current cohort (which is not the first) of the Cuban engineers. The department can also confirm that the qualifications of the engineers were translated into English and submitted to South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which approved and certified the qualifications as equivalent to engineering qualifications in South Africa,” Ratau said.

Subsequent to this, Ratau added that a submission and approval of the engineers’ qualifications was completed prior to their arrival in South Africa and their appointment in the department.

Cuban engineers’ work is very minimal

The department has reiterated that the input of the Cuban engineers in the work of the department is very minimal, and only a fraction of the technical engineering work implemented by the department.

“Their presence is meant to support and complement the technical engineering work in the department. Therefore, the provisions of the EPA and ECSA do not prohibit the use of foreign engineers by entities and government departments in South Africa.”

The department also confirmed that it will continue to work within the confines of the law to ensure that issues raised relating to the matter are addressed and resolved amicably.

Ratau noted that such exchanges with foreign countries are not unique to the relation between South Africa and Cuba, but form part of the broad foreign policy of the government that guides the country’s actions and activities on the global stage.

“South Africa is a member of the international community and has relations with a whole host of countries including international/government-to-government agreements. Such agreements would also include similar exchanges not just in the field of water but in many other fields within government,” Ratau said.

As an interested party, he said Solidarity does have the right to seek the kind of recourse they deem fit, but “as a department, we believe that we have addressed the matters raised adequately”.