

BEHIND EVERY INSPECTION: HOW STRATEGIC PLANNING STRENGTHENS LABOUR-LAW ENFORCEMENT

Effective labour inspections begin long before an inspector sets foot in a workplace.

Behind every national campaign or sector-focused inspection lies a process of planning, research, risk assessment and consultation. That process was on full display on 28 July 2026, when Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour, Honourable Jomo Sibiya, met the leadership of the Inspection and Enforcement Services (IES) Branch at Laboria House in Pretoria.

The Branch briefed the Deputy Minister on first-quarter performance, occupational health and safety, advocacy and statutory services, targeted inspection projects, sector-focused interventions, research-based inspections, and cooperation through national law-enforcement structures, the meeting offered a insightful overview into the groundwork behind inspectors' work.

Inspectors commended for national blitz operations

Deputy Minister Sibiya opened by commending the work done by inspectors for protecting workers and enforcing compliance, singling out the recent high-level blitz inspections conducted nationally, the first coordinated operation of its scale, bringing together Departmental inspectors, the South African Police Service, the Department of Home Affairs and other authorities across the country.



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Inspections built on evidence and risk

The discussions showed that IES uses evidence and risk analysis to determine where inspection interventions are most needed. Its programmes draw on incident reports, complaints, research, compliance history, emerging risks, and information from workers, employers and partner institutions.

Where an industry involves specialised equipment or processes, inspectors work alongside qualified technical experts but the statutory authority stays with the inspector. Experts contribute specialised knowledge; inspectors assess compliance, investigate, and decide on enforcement action. That division keeps inspections both technically sound and legally defensible.

Inspection and enforcement aren't just about issuing notices or shutting workplaces down. Enforcement remains necessary where employers won't comply or workers face serious, immediate risk but the wider goal is compliance that sticks.

Deputy Minister Sibiya emphasised helping employers understand the risks inspectors identify and what's needed to fix them particularly for emerging or complex risks employers may not fully grasp. Where it makes sense, IES works with employers on corrective plans, prioritises urgent issues, and monitors progress, rather than treating enforcement as the end point.

Advocacy as a strategic tool

Compliance isn't built through enforcement alone. Sector-focused advocacy lets inspectors explain labour legislation in plain, practical language — particularly valuable in sectors where employers and workers have limited access to specialised labour-law information.

Advocacy and training can help employers understand their obligations before non-compliance turns into an incident, a dispute, or an enforcement action, closing knowledge gaps and encouraging voluntary compliance while keeping enforcement in reserve where it's needed.

This commitment to proactive engagement will continue on Wednesday, 29 July 2026, when Deputy Minister Sibiya delivers the keynote address at the IES Employer Breakfast Session at Birchwood Hotel in the City of Ekurhuleni.



Planning for greater impact

The agenda demonstrated the breadth of matters requiring coordination within the inspectorate, including targeted projects, agricultural interventions, occupational health and safety operations, hospitality-sector advocacy, informal-economy research and national law-enforcement coordination.

Meetings like this one give IES leadership the room to step back, review past interventions, spot gaps, and prioritise before resources are deployed.

The visible inspection is the end of a longer chain research, planning, technical assessment, advocacy, intergovernmental cooperation and follow-up that runs well before any inspector arrives on site.

INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT SERVICES

EMPLOYER BREAKFAST SESSION

Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour, Mr Jomo Sibiya, MP will deliver a keynote address at the IES Employer Breakfast Session to be held in the City of Ekurhuleni, Gauteng Province.

The session will provide platform for engagement and knowledge sharing on different Labour Legislations such as OHSA, BCEA, NMWA, UIF and COIDA.

The session brings together Organised Labour & Business, OHS Practitioners, Rand Mutual Assurance as a collaborative effort to prevent workplace injuries and occupational diseases.

Event Details

Date: Wednesday, 29 July 2026

Time: 08:00–13:00 | Venue: Birchwood Hotel



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Balancing enforcement, advocacy and economic sustainability

In his closing remarks, Deputy Minister Sibiya encouraged IES to remain responsive to changes in the economy and the world of work. He cautioned against continuing to use the same approaches merely because they had been followed for many years, emphasising the need to identify new and effective ways of achieving the Department's mandate.

“Our work shouldn't be a stumbling block to business,” said Deputy Minister Sibiya.

He stressed that inspection and enforcement must protect workers while also recognising the importance of sustaining viable businesses and preserving employment. Inspectors must therefore carefully balance firm enforcement with advocacy, guidance and constructive engagement.

Where an employer demonstrates a genuine willingness to correct non-compliance, the Department should, where legally and practically appropriate, work with the employer to develop a credible path towards compliance. This may involve identifying priority risks, agreeing on corrective measures and monitoring progress within reasonable timeframes.

This approach does not mean overlooking deliberate, persistent or serious violations. Immediate and decisive enforcement remains necessary where workers face imminent danger, employers refuse to cooperate or non-compliance is severe. However, where challenges can be corrected through structured intervention, advocacy should be used alongside enforcement to secure sustainable results.

His remarks reinforced the principle that government, employers and workers are not opposing forces. They are partners in building productive and stable workplaces where businesses can operate sustainably, jobs can be protected and the rights of workers are respected.

The meeting concluded with a call for IES to continue adapting, strengthening its advocacy work and applying enforcement in a manner that is firm, fair and responsive to the realities of South Africa's labour market.



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