



**NUMSA Freedom Day statement
27 April 2025
Press statement**

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) is marking the 31st anniversary of “Freedom day”. This is the day we reflect on that momentous day on the 27th of April 1994 when South Africa held its very first democratic elections. This was the first time that the Black and African working class was able to legally vote and participate in democratic elections, following decades of struggle against Apartheid.

We can never underestimate the horrors and the suffering which were imposed on Black people by the racist Apartheid regime. To this day, there are millions of people who still bear the physical and emotional scars of that terrible period in our history. We are a population of the ‘Walking wounded’ and sadly, the democratic breakthrough in 1994, did not do enough to make up for the pain, and the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives which were sacrificed during the struggle to overthrow the brutal Apartheid system.

It is important for us as a nation never to forget this part of our history. We must never forget what apartheid was and how it stripped the majority of people of dignity, and left them permanently dispossessed of land and opportunity. It was a system designed to ensure that Black people remain “*hewers of wood and drawers of water*”, to quote former Apartheid Education minister Hendrik Verwoerd. Apartheid used race as a barrier to prevent the majority of people from being treated as full human beings, and relegate them to a permanent status of inferiority. It was used to justify poor quality education and healthcare for the masses. If you were born black or African, your fate was sealed. You were destined to die poor and uneducated. Apartheid meant that being black, meant that you were born a slave and would die a slave with no means of escaping this outcome.

As NUMSA we feel it is crucial to remember what life under apartheid was like because we never want to repeat it. They say if you do not learn from history, you are doomed to repeat it. This is particularly important because we are surrounded by forces which are trying to mislead the public, about South Africa and its history.

On this day we feel it is important to condemn racist, right-wing organisations like Afriforum and any like-minded formations that seek to peddle disinformation about the journey we have travelled to transform our society. We must remain vigilant and guard against the lies spread by organisations like Afriforum who seem determined to promote misinformation, in order to drive a regime change agenda, to benefit the racist fringe minority that never supported any kind of transformation. They have managed to gain support from a right-wing reactionary American government, led by Donald Trump. They hope that their alliance with Trump will enable them to seize power directly or indirectly, because they know they will never be democratically elected by the masses, into power. So they are hoping that they can use Trump to bully us into submission, and bully us into reversing some of the progress we have made since 1994.

Having said this, it is important to state up front that as a union which played an integral part in the liberation movement and in the fight against Apartheid, that whilst we are grateful that Apartheid is over, the democratic breakthrough has not done enough to transform the lives of the majority of people. In 2025 we have crippling levels of poverty, the economy still remains controlled by a tiny wealthy minority, and we are the most unequal society on earth. The Black and African majority are still languishing in appalling conditions, such as the shanty towns and informal settlements, which were a hallmark of Apartheid. At the same time, the majority of people remain locked out of quality education and healthcare. Wealth has replaced race as a barrier to a decent life.

This is because the ANC which has been in power since 1994 has implemented liberal democracy and liberalism, is not a system designed to improve the lives of the majority of people. Liberalism is designed to empower and enrich those who are already wealthy. It cannot transform the lives of the majority of people. Liberalism has failed all over the world and this is why fascism is on the rise. Socialism teaches us that the rise of fascists like Trump is as a result of the failure of capitalism to transform the lives of the majority of people.

But despite the major weaknesses of this system, we will not sit back and allow fascist organisations like Afriforum to take charge of our country and drive us back to the bad old days of Apartheid. This is why the unity of the working class is more important now, than it has ever been. There is a very real attempt to reverse the gains we have made over the last 30 years, and we must do everything possible to resist this.

The working class is powerful when it is united. For example there is an attempt to attack the progressive labour laws which we secured after decades of struggle. Amendments have been proposed to undermine the right to strike and also to water down the power of trade unions and collective bargaining. This is a very real threat and it is being done under this so-called democratic dispensation. The working class which helped to overthrow the Apartheid regime, is under attack through proposed legislation.

The working class was united during the dark days of Apartheid to bring about change, and it must unite again. This time, we must unite not only to defend the gains we have made, but also to finish the job done by previous generations. We must drive an agenda to benefit the majority and this is why Socialism is the only real solution to the crisis facing the masses. Only Socialism can decisively transform the lives of the majority of people for the better, by using the wealth of the nation to improve the lives of all of us, not just to enrich a minority of people.

NUMSA is inspired by the words of comrade Chris Hani, who was a revolutionary and a hero of the struggle. He said,

Socialism is not about big concepts and heavy theory. Socialism is about decent shelter for those who are homeless. It is about water for those who have no safe drinking water. It is about health care, it is about a life of dignity for the old. It is about overcoming the huge divide between urban and rural areas. It is about a decent education for all our people. Socialism is about rolling back the tyranny of the market. As long as the economy is dominated by an unelected, privileged few, the case for socialism will exist."

NUMSA remains committed to fighting against the tyranny of the markets so that the creators of wealth, the working class, can reap the rewards of their sweat and labour, and live a better life.

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Issued on behalf NUMSA.
For more information please contact:
Phakamile Hlubi-Majola
NUMSA National Spokesperson
0833767725
phakamileh@numsa.org.za

NUMSA Head Office number: 0116891700
NUMSA Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/NumsaSocial>
NUMSA Twitter account: [@Numsa_Media](https://twitter.com/Numsa_Media)
NUMSA Website: <https://numsa.org.za/>