

UMSEBENZI ONLINE

BUILD A LEFT POPULAR FRONT FOR SOCIALISM!



- Conference of the Left
- People's Red caravan
- May Day 2026

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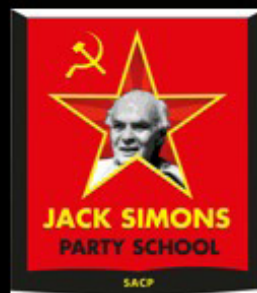


**BUILDING PEOPLE'S POWER, SELF-RELIANCE AND
PEOPLE'S ECONOMY**

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EDITORIAL

Building power while the world burns

On 1 May 2026 — International Workers’ Day — Donald Trump signed an executive order escalating economic warfare against Cuba. On the same day, thousands of workers gathered in Polokwane for Cosatu’s May Day celebration, the federation’s 41st year, its national rally deliberately anchored in Limpopo — a province of high unemployment, struggling municipalities and an economy heavily dependent on mining and agriculture. From 5 to 7 May, the Constitutional Court heard arguments aimed at killing the National Health Insurance Act. From 12 to 17 May, SACP leaders and activists will move into Gladstone Village in the Free State to live and work alongside 296 households for seven days. And at the end of May, the Conference of the Left will convene — more than 300 people from across the progressive spectrum — to build the organisational unity the working class has long needed and too long lacked.

This edition of Umsebenzi Online is published inside that sequence of events. It does not stand back from them. It is part of them.

Workers’ Day in Polokwane deserves to be read as more than a report. Cde Thulile Kumalo documents a federation that has not forgotten the workers at the periphery. Hosting the flagship rally in Limpopo was a deliberate political statement: the struggles of rural workers, of communities far from the Gauteng economic corridor, of miners and farm workers and municipal employees in provinces that are too often treated as afterthoughts — these are not secondary to the working-class agenda. They are its heart. Cosatu’s demands from the rally floor — NHI implementation, early pension access, a halt to austerity, non-trading status for Workers’ Day and Freedom Day — are not the demands of an exhausted movement. They are the demands of an organised class that has not forgotten how these rights were won or what it will take to defend and extend them.

The NHI battle at the Constitutional Court is the most urgent fight in this edition. Cde Tebogo Phadu strips the legal contest to its class skeleton: private hospital chains, medical aid schemes, AfriForum, and the DA-led Western Cape government are not defending rights in that court. They are defending profits. Their argument — that Parliament failed to consult properly — is, as Cde Phadu writes plainly, a lie. The NHI was debated for fifteen years. Hundreds of thousands of South Africans made submissions. The overwhelming majority supported it. What the Constitutional Court is being asked to do is allow a minority of the wealthy to use legal procedure to overrule the democratic will of the majority. If they succeed, the message will be unmistakable: the courts belong to capital. The people belong to the queue. The SACP’s position is equally unmistakable: defend human dignity, redirect the R38 billion in medical aid tax subsidies to the NHI Fund, and implement the Act without delay.

The Conference of the Left, reported by Cde Mabuse Mpe, is the structural answer the working class is building to that challenge and every other. For too long, the progressive movement has fought its battles in silos — separate unions, separate communities, separate campaigns — while the right has consolidated power with discipline and coordination. The Conference of the Left is designed to shatter those silos. It is not a new political party. It is a united front, moving from protest toward proposition, from fragmentation toward front-building. Land reform. Public ownership of strategic sectors. Debt cancellation for poor households. Financial sector transformation that serves people before profit. These are not abstract demands. They are the material conditions of a dignified life. And the Conference is the structure that will fight for them.

Three Freedom Day assessments reach the same conclusion from three different directions. Cde Aviwe Mohapi's class analysis is rigorous and unsparing: 1994 was a negotiated compromise. Political power changed hands. The commanding heights of the economy did not. The RDP was replaced by GEAR. Nationalisation was abandoned. BEE created a comprador elite without transforming ownership.

South Africa remains the world's most unequal society. Cde Lebogang Pule locates the gap in the youth experience — the vote arrived, economic liberation did not — and draws lessons from China's targeted poverty alleviation to argue for what the People's Red Caravan is already beginning to build. But it is Cde Nigel Branken's essay that demands the widest reading. He was in Durban on 27 April 1994. He remembers the dancing. He also remembers KwaMashu, Inanda, Ndwedwe — the funerals, the third force, communities torn by violence. And he names what followed with uncomfortable precision: the apartheid debt repaid by the new democratic state; the Reserve Bank insulated from democratic pressure; property rights written into Section 25 in ways that made land justice far harder than the struggle had promised. He is not cynical. He is clear. "What changed in 1994 was possibility." And then he names what is now being offered in its place — fascism with functioning traffic lights, racism with clean audits, xenophobia with repaired roads — and asks who exactly the delivery is for.

Internationally, the picture is unsparing on every front. The Communist Party of Swaziland's International Secretary, Cde Pius Vilakati, documents what Mswati III's 40-year celebration actually represents: nearly 70% of the population below the poverty line, political parties banned, a hundred pro-democracy protesters shot dead in 2021 with no accountability, and a government now banning same-sex relationships and expelling students. President Ramaphosa attended that celebration on 24 April — the same weekend South Africa marked 32 years of democracy. The juxtaposition does not require commentary. It requires a response.

On Cuba: Trump's May Day executive order introduces secondary sanctions extending to the entire international financial system. Any bank, anywhere in the world, doing business with designated Cuban entities risks having US assets frozen. No list of targets has been published — the vagueness is deliberate, designed to maximise intimidation globally. Cuba is already in acute crisis: no fuel since early 2026, power cuts of up to 20 hours a day, surgeries suspended, cancer treatments disrupted.

The ALNEF Africa-Cuba solidarity meeting, reported by Cde Kyle Haselsteiner, shows the response the left is building: practical solidarity, not rhetoric. Convoys of food, medicines and solar equipment. China signing 29 new bilateral agreements. Campaigns across South Africa, Europe and the Americas shipping surgical supplies. The blockade is collective punishment of a sovereign people whose principal offence is their refusal to submit. South Africa, which owes Cuba a debt written in the blood of Cuito Cuanavale, cannot afford silence. The ALNEF declaration, signed by organisations across the continent, ensures it is not silent.

On Palestine: the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor report documented in this edition is among the most detailed indictments of state violence to emerge from the genocide in Gaza. Rape. Deliberate genital mutilation. Medical torture. Military doctors certifying detainees as fit for interrogation while concealing abuse. Soldiers who gang-raped a Palestinian detainee at Sde Teiman publicly defended as heroes by government ministers. Over 18 months of genocide: three criminal indictments against Israeli soldiers. Three. The report's title comes from a Palestinian woman held at Sde Teiman, known to her torturers not by her name but by the number 101 assigned in place of it. She wished for death. She lost count of time. That is what impunity, systematised and state-sanctioned, looks like. Solidarity with Palestine is not a sentiment. It is a political obligation inseparable from every other struggle in this edition.

In Gladstone Village, the People's Red Caravan will arrive in May with no bags of money and no

speeches that end in departure. Just seven days of living alongside, planting alongside, building alongside. A communal vegetable garden. A poultry house. A cooperative store in an unused hall. Boreholes repaired. A clinic water tank that has been leaking for more than a year — finally fixed. Four hectares of land identified and put to work. Production as the anchor. Solidarity as the multiplier.

The NHI in the courts. The Conference of the Left convening. Workers' Day in Limpopo. Gladstone in the Free State. Africa standing with Cuba. The continent watching Palestine. This is what the working class looks like when it refuses to be passive — fighting on every front, building on every front, simultaneously, without contradiction.

Forward to the Conference of the Left! Defend the NHI! Solidarity with Cuba, Palestine and Swaziland! Amandla Awethu!



PEOPLE'S RED CARAVAN

Building grassroots power in Gladstone



**ACTIVATION OF THE
PEOPLE'S**

RED CARAVAN

DATE: 12 - 17 MAY 2026

TIME: 09H00

**VENUE: GLADSTONE COMMUNITY (WARD 43)
MANGAUNG METRO MUNICIPALITY, CALEB
MOTSHABI DISTRICT - FREE STATE PROVINCE**



**THE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT FOR
SELF-RELIANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY!**

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The PRC in Gladstone includes social and political dimensions – beyond physical construction work – to include literacy sessions, labour discussions, youth engagement, cultural activities and community safety initiatives.

Key points

- The SACP’s People’s Red Caravan deploys activists to live and work alongside rural communities.
- Gladstone Village faces high unemployment, crumbling infrastructure, and dependence on distant public services.
- Practical projects include a communal vegetable garden, poultry house, and community cooperative store.
- Infrastructure repair — boreholes, clinics, schools and roads — forms a core part of the activation.
- The Caravan links political organisation to production, solidarity and working-class community rebuilding.

Yet the village also has important strengths. Families already engage in small-scale farming, poultry keeping and livestock production. There are active youth and community organisations, local patrollers, women’s committees and cultural groups. Four hectares of land have been identified for agricultural production, and several boreholes are in place, though some are currently non-functional. The People’s Red Caravan hopes to build on these existing community resources rather than imposing solutions from outside.

Politics linked to practical work

The central idea behind the People’s Red Caravan is that political work must be connected to practical work. Instead of leaders arriving for speeches and then disappearing, activists and organisers will spend seven days living and working alongside residents. The programme is built around the principle that issues are raised, discussed, implemented and evaluated by the people themselves.

Several practical projects are planned during the week. One major focus is food production and livelihoods. Organisers aim to establish a communal vegetable garden and construct a poultry house on the identified agricultural land. The project also seeks to formalise local farming activity into a Village Agricultural Co-operative that can create sustainable local production and reduce dependence on expensive travel to town for basic goods.

“The local clinic is cracked and dilapidated, residents travel nearly 30 kilometres to access police services, roads are difficult to navigate during rain, youth unemployment is high, and many households survive mainly on social grants.”



TINYIKO NTINI

From 12–17 May 2026, SACP leaders and activists will live and work alongside residents of Gladstone

Village in a week of hands-on community development

The forthcoming People’s Red Caravan Gladstone Activation is an attempt to rebuild grassroots organisation, practical solidarity and local production in one of the many rural communities facing deep poverty, unemployment and failing public services in South Africa. Taking place in Gladstone Village, near Thaba Nchu, in the Free State, from 12-17 May, the initiative is being led by the South African Communist Party as part of its broader People’s Red Caravan programme.

A village facing deep challenges

Gladstone is a small rural village of about 296 households under Ward 43 of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. Like many working-class and rural communities, it faces a combination of economic hardship and collapsing infrastructure. The local clinic is cracked and dilapidated. Residents travel nearly 30 kilometres to access police services in Thaba Nchu. Roads become difficult to navigate during rain, youth unemployment is high, and many households survive mainly on social grants.

Building local economic power

There are also plans for a community-owned cooperative store in an unused hall building. The goal is to provide local access to groceries and basic necessities while keeping money circulating within the community itself. For residents who currently travel long distances to shop, such a project could significantly reduce transportation costs and improve access to food.

Infrastructure repair is another major component of the activation. Planned work includes fixing leaking water systems, restoring boreholes, repairing school toilets, painting classrooms and community halls, improving roads and repairing sports grounds. The village school has reportedly struggled with damaged doors, bee infestations and deteriorating facilities, while the clinic's water tank has leaked for more than a year.

“The broader political goal is to revive collective action and working-class organisation in neglected communities.”

Social development and community participation

The project also includes social and political dimensions beyond physical construction. Organisers plan literacy sessions, labour discussions, youth engagement, cultural activities and community safety initiatives. The Caravan framework argues that development cannot succeed if communities remain politically disorganised or excluded from decision-making. The broader political goal is to revive collective action and working-class organisation in neglected communities.

The Gladstone activation highlights realities shared by countless communities across the country, including broken clinics, collapsing infrastructure, long distances to services, youth unemployment and the daily struggle for dignity. It also reflects growing efforts to build community-based alternatives rooted in cooperation, local production and popular participation. Thus, production is the anchor, standardisation is the backbone and solidarity at local, national and international levels is the multiplier.

Cde Ntini is a member of the Central Committee and PRC Chief of Staff



Building a people's movement for self-reliance and sustainability. Tuesday, 12 May, was the first day of the People's Red Caravan activation in Gladstone village, Free State. SACP General Secretary, Cde Solly Mapaila, led the morning and evening briefings for Party and community members. The PRC aims to achieve food security and sustainable livelihoods, revamp community infrastructure, and boost health, education, and social services.

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE PEOPLE’S RED CARAVAN

NHI belongs to the people – we must defend it



SACP CC member Cde PJ Mnguni speaking to SABC outside the Constitutional Court where hearings on NHI were held 5-7 May.

- Private hospital groups and the DA are challenging the NHI Act in the Constitutional Court.
- South Africa’s two-tier health system entrenches privilege for the wealthy and suffering for the poor.
- Corporate opponents claim procedural grounds, but their real goal is protecting healthcare profits.
- The SACP demands full NHI implementation and redirection of R38 billion in medical aid tax subsidies.
- Defending the NHI means defending working-class power against corporate capture of democratic legislation.



TEBOGO PHADU

Private healthcare interests are trying to block the NHI in court while working class communities continue the struggle for universal healthcare and human dignity.

Powerful forces are gathered at the Constitutional Court trying to kill the National Health Insurance Act. From 5 to 7 May 2026, judges listened to arguments from private hospital groups, medical aid schemes, the DA-led Western Cape government, and organisations such as AfriForum. Their goal is to stop the NHI from ever being implemented.

But this fight is not about legal technicalities. It is about whether healthcare in South Africa will remain a privilege for the rich or become a right for all.

What is the NHI and why does it matter?

The National Health Insurance is a law that would give every South African access to quality healthcare regardless of income, employment or medical aid. Under the NHI, you would not need to pay at the point of care. The government would fund healthcare through a single public fund, ensuring everyone is covered.

“Millions of our people experience a reality of long queues, medicine shortages, overworked nurses and patients dying while waiting to be seen.”

For more than 30 years since democracy, our healthcare system has been split in two. On one side, private hospitals and medical schemes serve a small minority who can afford them. On the other side, underfunded public clinics and hospitals serve the majority.

Millions of our people experience a reality of long queues, medicine shortages, overworked nurses and patients dying while waiting to be seen. Women bear the heaviest burden, often caring for sick family members while struggling to access maternal healthcare. Young people face a future in which a health emergency can lead to lifelong debt. For many, death is an inevitability as they cannot afford to pay for terminal illnesses. The NHI was designed to end this injustice.

Who is fighting against it and why?

The groups challenging the NHI in court are not fighting for your rights. They are fighting to protect their profits.

Private hospital chains like Netcare, Mediclinic and Life Healthcare dominate a system where healthcare is a commodity to be bought and sold. Medical aid schemes, led by the Board of Healthcare Funders, design benefits that often run out halfway through the year, leaving even those with cover unprotected. These are the same forces that boycotted the Presidential Health Compact in 2024 because it committed to implementing the NHI.

Their legal arguments claim that Parliament did not consult the public properly before passing the NHI Bill. But this is a lie. The NHI has been debated for over 15 years. Hundreds of thousands of South Africans made submissions. The overwhelming majority supported it. The will of the people was clear.

What these forces really want is to delay the NHI forever and keep the private hospitals exclusive.

The SACP stands with the people

The SACP has been at the forefront of this struggle for universal access to healthcare. As the SACP stated on 5 May 2026: “To defend the NHI is to defend human dignity and to take forward the hu-

“Medical aid schemes, led by the Board of Healthcare Funders, design benefits that often run out halfway through the year”

man rights enshrined in the constitution.”

The Party has called for the immediate implementation of the NHI Act and for the R38 billion that the government currently allocates through medical aid tax subsidies to be redirected to the NHI Fund. That public money currently props up a private system that serves a minority. It should be used to build a healthcare system that serves everyone.

The SACP has also exposed the class character of

this struggle. The forces opposing the NHI are the same forces that benefit from inequality. They include right-wing political parties, wealthy corporations, and those who have always feared a government that acts in the interests of the working class. Their use of the courts to block a democratically passed law is, as the SACP statement puts it, “the ultimate definition of a political oxymoron.”

“The NHI was won through decades of working-class struggle.”

A call to action

This is not a moment for silence. The NHI was won through decades of working-class struggle. It was not handed down by benevolent leaders but demanded by the people. And now it must be defended by the people.

Every worker who has ever been turned away from a clinic. Every woman who has given birth in an overcrowded ward or on a chair. Every young person who has watched a parent suffer because they could not afford treatment. This law is for you.

“If we allow the NHI to be struck down, we are telling the rich that they can use the courts to overrule the will of the majority.”

The Constitutional Court hearings are not just a legal matter. They are a battleground for the soul of our democracy. If we allow the NHI to be struck down, we are telling the rich that they can use the courts to overrule the will of the majority. We are telling the poor that their lives do not matter. We cannot allow this.

Rise in defence of the NHI. Defend human dignity. Take forward the human rights enshrined in our Constitution. The struggle for healthcare is a struggle for justice. And that struggle belongs to all of us.

Cde Tebogo Phadu is a member of the Central Committee and Politburo

CONFERENCE OF THE LEFT

**Forging a better future through
united action**



Key points

- The SACP will host the Conference of the Left in late May 2026, uniting 300+ participants.
- Trade unionists, activists, academics, faith leaders and international solidarity campaigners will forge a united front.
- The conference responds directly to deepening inequality, mass unemployment, and failing neoliberal policies.
- Key demands include land reform, public ownership of industries, household debt cancellation, and financial sector transformation.
- The goal is organisational unity — shifting the left from fragmentation and protest towards a coordinated programme for change.

representatives from political parties, academics, researchers, faith leaders and international solidarity campaigners will come together for the conference. Participants, whether attending in person or joining online, will share strategies, forge alliances and develop practical paths towards genuine economic transformation.

“For too long, the progressive movement has been fragmented.”

For too long, the progressive movement has been fragmented. We have watched the right consolidate power while the left has remained stuck in silos, often fighting separate battles against the same enemy. The Conference of the Left is designed to shatter those silos. It is a direct response to the deep crises of de-industrialisation, collapsing public services, mass unemployment and extreme poverty that define our current reality.

The goal is simple yet revolutionary: to build a powerful, united front of the working class and the poor. This means moving beyond the stale debates of the past and focusing on a concrete, shared programme. We are talking about the fundamental transformation of our economy. This includes the fight for land reform, the call for public ownership of key industries, the urgent need for debt cancellation for poor households, and the transformation of our financial sector to serve people, not just profit.

We have seen the devastation caused by austerity-driven fiscal consolidation. We have felt the pain of a state that often seems to listen more to bookish economists removed from lived reality than to the struggles of the working class. This conference is our chance to say “enough is enough”.

“The goal is simple yet revolutionary: to build a powerful, united front of the working class and the poor.”



MABUSE MPE

Across every corner of our towns and cities, from the taxi rank to the factory floor, the reality that the economy is not working for us is eating away at our communities.

While the cost of a basic food basket climbs beyond the reach of a minimum wage, and young people stare down futures with no jobs, the old political certainties have crumbled. It is clear that no single party, union or community group can break this cycle alone. That is why the news emerging from the left is very exciting.

As South Africa grapples with deepening inequality, unemployment and the failures of neoliberal policies, a powerful gathering is on the horizon. On 29 May, the South African Communist Party (SACP) will host the Conference of the Left in a hybrid format. This landmark event promises to unite over 300 participants from across the progressive political spectrum, sparking real momentum for change.

A united front against neoliberalism

Trade unionists, community activists,

Embracing people-driven power for fundamental change

Bilateral engagements between different progressive organisations have already laid important foundations through joint working groups and steering structures. A practical minimum programme is taking shape, one that balances the protection of existing gains with bolder steps towards transformation. Open discussion of differences among progressives is expected, yet the shared determination to move beyond past divisions towards tangible outcomes reflects growing maturity and focus.

“The working class has the numbers, the energy and the moral clarity. What we need is the organisational unity to bring our power to bear.”

Already, there are those who wish to portray the gathering as divisive or impractical. Others will raise alarms about instability and lost investment, calling for continued fiscal restraint, wage moderation, and further privatisation. Yet experience shows that path has reached a dead end.

We can no longer place profits above people. True progress requires reclaiming public control to meet the needs of the majority. The Conference of the Left firmly rejects the notion that there are no alternatives and instead commits to creating one through unified, people-driven power.

What makes this event truly exciting is that it belongs to all of us. It is a “hybrid” gathering, meaning that whether you are in the bustling hall in Johannesburg or joining from a community centre computer in a rural village, your voice will be heard.

Everyone who longs for a South Africa where decent work, adequate housing, quality education, accessible healthcare and human dignity are fundamental rights, not distant privileges, should engage with this process. Support the conference. Share its outcomes. Add to the growing momentum.

The working class has the numbers, the energy and the moral clarity. What we need is the organisational unity to bring our power to bear. The Conference of the Left is not about forming a new political party. It presents a timely shift from protest towards proposition, from fragmentation towards front-building. It will create a powerful bloc capable of forcing real change, whether in parliament or on the street. Attendees will depart not only inspired but also equipped with new connections and coordinated plans for sustained action.

For ordinary South Africans weary of unfulfilled promises, the conference offers the prospect of real alternatives emerging at the local level and growing nationally.

Cde Mabuse Mpe is a member of the SACP Central Committee.

WORKERS' DAY

Workers unite in Polokwane: Cosatu brings its 2026 May Day celebration to Limpopo



SACP CC member Cde Alex Mashilo delivering the Party's message to the May Day rally in Polokwane.

Key points

- Cosatu’s 2026 May Day rally in Limpopo highlights persistent unemployment and rural workers’ struggles.
- Projected 1.6% economic growth and neoliberal austerity threaten meaningful job creation.
- The cost-of-living crisis continues to erode real wages across the working class.
- Cosatu demands NHI, early pension access, and stabilisation of key state-owned enterprises.
- Democratic labour rights were won through struggle — May Day renews the commitment to defend them.



THULILE KUMALO

As the federation marks 41 years of its founding, hosting the Workers’ Day rally in Polokwane marked a symbolic gesture that speaks to unfinished struggles around jobs, wages, and the cost of living.

Polokwane, the bustling capital of Limpopo Province, was this year’s host city for the Workers’ Day celebrations. United under the banner of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), thousands of workers, union leaders, and Alliance partners gathered for a day of reflection, solidarity, and demands for economic justice.



“Cosatu demands that Workers’ Day, Freedom Day, and Election Day be declared non-trading public holidays so that all workers can take part in these hard-won occasions.”

A tradition of mass mobilisation

International Workers’ Day is observed globally on 1 May each year. Its roots trace back to 1886, when US workers marched in Chicago demanding an eight-hour working day, a protest that ended in bloodshed but eventually reshaped labour rights across the world. In South Africa, the day carries its own profound weight: it is a public holiday that workers and trade unions regard as a hard-won symbol of democratic freedom and collective power.

Cosatu, founded on 1 December 1985 at the height of the anti-apartheid struggle, has long treated May Day not merely as a celebration but as a mobilisation opportunity. Each year, the federation convenes rallies across all nine provinces simultaneously, with a flagship national event rotating between provinces to ensure every corner of the country shares in the commemoration. Workers fought long and hard for this day. We must celebrate our victories and continue fighting for the rights of workers.

By anchoring the national event in Limpopo – a province grappling with high unemployment, struggling municipalities, and an economy heavily dependent on mining and agriculture – Cosatu placed its spotlight directly on a region whose workers embody the challenges the federation has long campaigned to resolve. Workers who could not travel to the main venue had access to provincial gatherings closer to their communities, ensuring the spirit of Workers’ Day radiated across the entire country.

In 2025, the national event was held in Mpumalanga, where the federation marked four decades of existence. This year, the baton passed to Limpopo.

Limpopo as the setting: why it matters

Limpopo is no stranger to Cosatu’s presence. The federation has an active provincial structure in the region and has repeatedly taken up battles on behalf of workers across sectors – from forestry and mining to public services and broadcasting. The province has seen Cosatu-led pickets at the SABC offices in Polokwane, campaigns around unfair labour practices at private companies, and vocal advocacy on the collapse of municipal services that have pushed rural businesses to the brink.

Hosting the national rally in Limpopo was a recognition of those struggles. With unemployment running alarmingly high nationally, with Limpopo’s rural communities among the most affected, the choice of venue sent a deliberate message: the federation has not forgotten the workers who labour in the country’s peripheries, away from the economic corridors of Gauteng and the Western Cape.

Key issues

Workers received speeches from Cosatu leaders, Alliance partners from the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the South African National Civic Organisation, as well as affiliated union representatives.

Cosatu’s recent Central Executive Committee

“Each year, the federation convenes rallies across all nine provinces simultaneously, with a flagship national event rotating between provinces to ensure every corner of the country shares in the commemoration.”

statement and broader campaigning had pointed to a set of burning issues that dominated this year’s discourse. Chief among them was the persistently high unemployment rate and anaemic economic growth, projected at just 1.6% for 2026 – far below the 3% Cosatu argues was necessary for meaningful job creation. The federation was been sharply critical of the government’s adherence to a neoliberal austerity path that constrained public spending on teachers, nurses, doctors, and police. Cosatu called for decisive fiscal policy reform and expanded public sector employment.



Celebrating May Day in Gauteng.

The cost-of-living crisis was another prominent issue. Electricity prices, food costs, fuel, and municipal rates continue to erode the real wages

of working-class South Africans. Cosatu has also renewed its demand that Workers' Day, Freedom Day, and Election Day be declared non-trading public holidays so that all workers, not just those in formal employment, can truly observe these hard-won occasions.

The federation has also championed the National Health Insurance, early pension fund access, and ongoing campaigns against retrenchments at key state-owned enterprises. The fight to stabilise Eskom, return Transnet to full operational capacity, and rebuild the Post Office and SABC remained live issues.

Building towards the 15th National Congress

The 2026 May Day rally takes place against the backdrop of Cosatu's own internal milestones. Having celebrated its 40th anniversary in December, the federation now looks ahead to its 15th National Congress, where it will consider various key issues, including the local government elections.

The unity of the working class is our key weapon. Workers cannot afford to be divided when they are under siege.

A day for all workers

Cosatu has consistently argued that South Africa's democratic gains – the right to form a trade union, to strike, to collective bargaining, to safe working conditions, and to maternity and parental leave – were not gifts handed down from above but victories forged through decades of organised struggle. May Day is the annual reckoning with that history, and this year is no different.

Cde Thulile Kumalo is the National Gender Coordinator for the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union. She writes in her personal capacity.

ASSESSING FREEDOM DAY

A class analysis of South Africa's bourgeois democracy



Following the democratic breakthrough of 1994, capitalism restructured itself to secure its profits, while life for the majority remained materially unaltered. Blikkiesdorp temporary relocation area in Delft, Cape Town. Archive photo: Ashraf Hendricks / GroundUp

Key points

- 1994 was a negotiated compromise — apartheid ended, but the capitalist order was preserved.
- Property rights were entrenched, nationalisation abandoned, and GEAR replaced the working-class RDP.
- BEE created a comprador black elite without transforming underlying ownership structures.
- South Africa remains the world's most unequal society, with structural unemployment and stagnating productive forces.
- The SACP must lead the working class to complete the NDR and build socialism.



AVIWE RAPELANG MOHAPI

The commemoration of Freedom Day on 27 April marks the 1994 democratic breakthrough that ended white minority rule. For the South African working class and its vanguard, the SACP, this is no occasion for liberal self-congratulation. It demands rigorous analysis.

The transition was neither a miracle nor a complete victory. It was a negotiated compromise between the forces of national liberation and monopoly capital. What was won advanced, somewhat, the National Democratic Revolution (NDR); what was conceded preserved the capitalist order. Under formal democracy, cap-

ital restructured itself with ruthless efficiency, co-opting a black elite while intensifying exploitation of the black working class.

The concessions made

Yet the class content of the transition reveals stark concessions. The negotiated settlement, including sunset clauses, protected the apartheid-era civil service and military, shielding the old state apparatus. Most decisively, section 25 of the constitution entrenched private property rights, safeguarding the concentrated wealth accumulated through centuries of dispossession. Expropriation without compensation was never considered.

The RDP, born from working-class demands, was quickly replaced by the 1996 Gear strategy - a structural adjustment programme shaped by the IMF, World Bank, and do-

mestic monopoly capital. Nationalisation, a core Freedom Charter demand, was abandoned. The commanding heights of the economy (mining, finance, and manufacturing) remained under white monopoly capital, now rebranded as “investors”.

How capital restructured itself

Capital restructured itself precisely within the framework of formal democracy. Apartheid-era monopoly capital, highly concentrated and protected by tariffs and state contracts, faced a deep crisis in the 1990s due to sanctions, resistance, and global neoliberalism. The transition provided an exit. Major conglomerates unbundled, listed on the London Stock Exchange, and integrated into

The Marxist solution of the problem of democracy is for the proletariat to utilise all democratic institutions and aspirations in its class struggle against the bourgeoisie in order to prepare for its overthrow and assure its own victory.



Vladimir Lenin, “Reply to P. Kievsky (Y. Pyatakov)”

What was won?

The racist apartheid state was dismantled. Universal suffrage replaced the colour bar. The 1996 constitution enshrined non-racialism, non-sexism and a bill of rights that includes socio-economic entitlements. The Freedom Charter’s demand that “the people shall govern” became reality in form. The revolutionary Alliance (ANC, SACP and Cosatu) drove this advance through mass struggle, armed resistance and international solidarity. The democratic breakthrough opened space for the working class to organise openly and contest power. It was a historic defeat for settler colonialism and its imperialist backers.

global financial circuits while retaining control of South African assets.

Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and later Broad-Based BEE offered the perfect mechanism: a small layer of politically connected black capitalists was co-opted into boardrooms. This secured legitimacy for the new order without changing ownership structures. It was not the deracialisation of capital, but the creation of a comprador bourgeoisie dependent on old monopolies and state tenders.

“The democratic breakthrough opened space for the working class to organise openly and contest power.”

Persistent structural crisis

The results are visible in the persistent structural crisis. South Africa remains the most unequal society on earth. Unemployment is over 30 per cent, with youth joblessness far higher. The black working class, still the overwhelming majority of the proletariat, bears the brunt: casualisation, labour broking, and the erosion of bargaining power.

Social grants have, to an extent, mitigated absolute poverty but cannot substitute for decent work. Load-shedding, collapsing infrastructure and state capture scandals are not exceptions; they are symptoms of a capitalist state whose primary function remains the reproduction of exploitation. Monopoly capital, now cosmopolitan, extracts super-profits while the productive forces stagnate.

This is the classic Marxist picture of formal democracy masking class dictatorship. Political equality coexists with economic dictatorship. The NDR remains incomplete precisely because the national question - land, minerals, wealth redistribution - has not been resolved in favour of the people.

“The commanding heights of the economy remained under white monopoly capital, now rebranded as “investors”.”

Completing the National Democratic Revolution

The SACP has consistently argued that the working class must lead the second phase of the NDR - radical economic transformation, expropriation of land without compensation where it serves the people, nationalisation of strategic sectors, and the building of a developmental state that serves the majority.

On Freedom Day we do not mourn a lost revolution. We celebrate the terrain won through struggle and recommit to completing it. The working class, organised through Cosatu and led politically by the SACP, must intensify the battle of ideas, rebuild the mass movement and drive the transition to socialism.

“Only a socialist South Africa can realise the Freedom Charter’s vision of a society in which “the people shall share in the country’s wealth.”

Only a socialist South Africa can realise the Freedom Charter’s vision of a society in which “the people shall share in the country’s wealth”. Anything less leaves capital free to rule under the mask of democracy.

The struggle continues. Build Socialism now.

Aviwe Rapelang Mohapi is the National Education Officer at Nehawu, he is also a political activist and writes in his personal capacity.

ASSESSING FREEDOM DAY

Freedom Day was not completed in 1994: it was made possible



People queue to cast their votes in Soweto, 27 April 27 1994, in our first democratic elections. Photo: Denis Farrell

Key points

- 1994 brought vital democratic gains, but the NDR remains incomplete.
- Apartheid’s legacy persists in land, infrastructure, and workplace racial inequality.
- Imperialist forces still undermine South Africa through NGOs, media, and academia.
- Progress requires militant, non-collaborationist organised labour.
- Building a broad progressive bloc and strong ideological leadership is essential.



NIGEL BRANKEN

On 27 April, we recalled not only the dancing but also the funerals, the compromises and the unfinished work of liberation.

Freedom Day should make us beware of selective memory, the stories that are told too softly, the speeches that turn struggle into sentiment and the version of our history that makes it sound as if freedom arrived because everyone suddenly agreed to hold hands, forgive one another, sing together

and build a rainbow nation. That was never the whole truth. It is a comforting story, but it is not an honest one.

I remember 27 April 1994: celebration, people dancing in the streets in Cator Manor, Durban, even police joining in. It was beautiful, sacred. Something had shifted in the air. Nelson Mandela elected president. Previously spoken about with fear, suspicion and contempt, not as the admired figure he would become.

And yet, even in that moment of joy, we were not suddenly free.

“1994 mattered. It mattered profoundly. It still matters. But it did not magically remake South Africa.”

Death, grief, fear and hope

In the build-up to the election, I remember KwaMashu, Inanda and Ndwedwe; the funerals; and communities torn apart by violence. I remember the rumours and allegations of a third force and how hard it was to know who to trust. As a social work student, we were working in places of deep conflict, where the promise of democracy was arriving alongside death, grief and fear.

So yes, 1994 mattered – profoundly and enduringly. But it did not magically remake South Africa nor undo landlessness, poverty, or the long distances Black workers still travel to reach their work. Taxis remained the primary transport for those pushed far from economic centres. The suburbs, inherited wealth, white homes, private schools and the quiet confidence of beneficiaries of dispossession persisted.

What changed in 1994 was possibility. A door opened. A vision was declared. A constitution was eventually adopted that, at least on paper, stated that South Africa belongs to all who live in it and that dignity and equality matter; and that government should advance people’s rights, not manage poverty politely while protecting private wealth.

But possibility is not the same as liberation.

That is why I struggle with how Freedom Day is remembered. Too often, we treat 1994, as though the election was the destination rather than part of a much harder journey. We teach children that Mandela emphasised reconciliation, but overlook Steve Biko’s lessons of dignity, Black consciousness and psychological liberation.

We speak of peace while failing to share the sacrifices of Solomon Mahlangu, the consequences of Ruth First’s truth-telling, Griffiths and Victoria Mxenge’s courage in the face of state violence, Dulcie September’s lessons about exile and international solidarity, and Chris Hani’s insistence that political freedom must include economic liberation.

Redressing class, race and gender imbalances

Every political victory is in danger of being sanitised after the fact. The dead are honoured once they can no longer disturb us. Revolutionaries are celebrated once their demands are diluted. The people once called terrorists are placed on posters by the same kind of power that would have condemned them while they were alive and dangerous.

“Cde Hani taught us that the vote without bread, land, work, dignity and shared ownership would leave the deepest structures of apartheid alive under a new flag.”

But we must be painfully honest. Freedom Day emerged from compromise. Some compromise was necessary to prevent civil war, but others proved destructive. They shaped the foundations of the democracy that followed. They provided political rights without dismantling the economic architecture of apartheid. Voting was granted while land, wealth, capital and ownership largely remained unchanged. Apartheid-era debt was repaid, the Reserve Bank was insulated from



South Africa may have attained political freedom, but economically the chains of oppression largely remain intact.

democratic pressure, IMF conditions narrowed policy choices, and retaining the old finance minister and Reserve Bank governor sent a clear message that economic management will remain reassuringly familiar to capital.

“Civil society, social movements, public interest lawyers, communities and ordinary people who have had to fight for the Bill of Rights.”

How neoliberal policy choices weaken democracy

South Africa’s post-apartheid economic choices exposed local industries to global competition, weakened labour protections, lowered corporate

taxes, relaxed exchange controls, and wealth was allowed to leave the country more easily.

The Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy replaced the Reconstruction and Development Programme with a market-friendly path, shifting the centre of gravity from reconstruction for the poor to reassurance for investors. And perhaps most painfully, property rights were written into the Constitution in a way that made land justice far more difficult than the struggle had promised.

And so, the great contradiction of South Africa was born. We became a constitutional democracy with one of the most beautiful rights-based visions in the world while leaving largely intact the economic structure that had produced the need for liberation in the first place.

Constitutional democracy and activism’s role

South Africa is a constitutional democracy. The Constitution is meant to discipline power, bind government and direct the country. It emphasises that the poor are not a problem to be managed, migrants are not scapegoats, workers are not disposable, and land is not only for those with title deeds.

And yet, again and again, it has been civil society, social movements and ordinary people who have had to fight for the implementation of the Bill of Rights. The poor have had to litigate for dignity; migrants for recognition; and communities for housing, healthcare, education, sanitation, safety and land. This reveals that our freedom is unfinished.

This is why Freedom Day cannot be reduced to nostalgia. It must become a day of reckoning.

Because the deepest corruption in South Africa is not only the brown envelope, the inflated tender, the politician’s cousin getting a contract, or the councillor who steals from the poor. Those matter. But beneath them is a much older and deeper corruption: a political settlement that protected capital while asking the poor to be patient. An economy that values profit over people. A democracy where the majority votes, but a minority owns the land, controls the wealth, shapes the economy and benefits from the labour of those who remain trapped in poverty.

Continuing the fight against systemic inequality

As local government elections approach, dangerous political forces use the language of delivery. They say they can fix the potholes, restore water and bring order. They will point to failing municipalities and say, “Give us power, and we will make things work again.”

But we must ask: work for whom?

We need roads, water, electricity and housing for all. But fixing potholes won’t solve apartheid spatial planning. Workers will still travel unsafe distances in overcrowded taxis. Repairing water infrastructure through tenders enrich company owners while workers earn poverty wages. Restoring electricity through the same exploitative economy might improve efficiency but will continue to create and entrench injustice.

This is the contradiction of the false promise now being offered to us: fascism with functioning traffic lights. Racism with clean audits. Xenophobia with repaired roads. White supremacy with efficient billing systems. A politics that promises to fix the city while leaving inequality untouched.

So, when parties promise delivery without justice, we must listen very carefully. Delivery, efficiency and order can be violent. Infrastructure can be built in ways that deepen inequality. Governments can fix a road, yet betray the people walking alongside it. A municipality can repair a pipe but preserve the systems deciding whose neighbourhoods deserve dignity first.

Freedom Day must teach us to ask better questions. Not only who can deliver, but also deliver what, for whom, through whom, at whose expense, and into what kind of society?

True freedom cannot exist while poverty, racial inequality, migrant scapegoating, exploitation, and exclusion remain normalised. Freedom only has meaning if it stands with those who are still unfree – in South Africa, across Africa, and in places like Gaza, where human suffering continues under systems of power and profit.

Struggle for total emancipation for all

So today, I do not want a Freedom Day that simply tells us to be grateful. I want a Freedom Day that tells the truth.

I want us to remember the miracle, the dancing in the streets and the courage of those who stood in queues for hours to vote for the first time. But I also want us to remember the funerals, fear, compromises, deals, dreams deferred and promises not yet fulfilled.

“Civil society, social movements, public interest lawyers, communities and ordinary people who have had to fight for the Bill of Rights.”

Freedom was not completed in 1994. Freedom was made possible. There can be no true Freedom Day until all are free. Until then, Freedom Day is a reminder of the work still waiting for us.

Cde Nigel Branken is a Johannesburg-based social worker, pastor and activist, and is a member of the SACP.

ASSESSING FREEDOM DAY

Fighting poverty – lessons from China

jīng zhǔn fú pín

精 准 扶 贫

TARGETED POVERTY ALLEVIATION

CGTN

Targeted poverty alleviation, first put forth in 2013, refers to a complete set of system designs to pull every household and individual out of extreme poverty. China's wisdom and approach in poverty reduction have also contributed to global poverty reduction.

Key points

- China’s success in fighting poverty offers practical lessons for South Africa.
- The SACP’s People’s Red Caravan mobilises communities around food sovereignty and self-reliance.
- Political freedom in 1994 has not translated into economic liberation, especially for youth.
- State failures and corruption have eroded public trust in democratic institutions.
- The annual Freedom Day must become a call to action for real liberation.

activation programme during which SACP leaders and organisers move into specific villages or wards (Motlhabe in North West, Matibidi in Mpumalanga, and Ixopo in KwaZulu-Natal) to work directly with residents on local challenges.

The PRC’s core focus area is to deepen ties with the working class, rebuild local organisation, and mobilise people into long-term collective projects rather than one-off events.

While the PRC is inspired by China’s experience in building productive forces and advancing socialism, it draws on the experiences of the South African liberation struggle.

The SACP draws lessons from China concerning poverty alleviation, particularly in identifying rural areas and teaching community members the importance of farming and providing support and thus turning poor and rural communities into sites of local food production, self-organisation and agro-ecological practice.

This approach supports the principle of food sovereignty, as communities are empowered on what food is produced, how it is produced and who benefits, rather than being dependent on markets and hand-outs.

“The PRC is inspired by China’s experience in building productive forces and advancing socialism, but it draws on the experiences of the South African liberation struggle.”

What needs to be done?

For Lenin, the question “What is to be done?” was not about choosing a path but about the practical, systematic steps needed to organise and educate the working class to take power.

This approach requires constant vigilance against



LEBOGANG PULE

China has achieved one of the largest and fastest poverty reduction episodes in modern history, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of extreme poverty over roughly four decades.

By the end of 2020, the Chinese government declared it had eradicated absolute rural poverty.

In 2013, China adopted its Targeted Poverty Alleviation strategy to identify each poor household and assign officials to track and support them through tailored measures. Mass investments were made in rural infrastructure, including over 1 million kilometres of rural roads, home renovation or relocation for tens of millions, and improved access to electricity, water, and internet in remote villages.

China reached the UN 2030 Agenda for poverty reduction, roughly 10 years ahead of schedule, lifting an average of more than 10 million people out of poverty per year in the 2012–2020 period.

SACP and the People’s Red Caravan

The People’s Red Caravan (PRC) is a nationwide, community-based mobilisation and development campaign launched by the Party in 2025 as part of its “People’s Movement for SelfReliance and Sustainability” programme. It is a mobile, weeklong

“economism” and opportunism – tendencies that prioritise short-term reform at the expense of long-term revolutionary goals. Programmes such as the People’s Red Caravan bring people together to fight against poverty and build stronger communities while fighting against the capitalist system.

The government’s struggle to provide reliable essential services such as electricity and water has severely eroded confidence in the state’s ability to meet basic needs.



Persistent structural issues continue to undermine the “better life” promised by the democratic transition and the rosy image of a united ‘rainbow nation’.

Freedom Day

Freedom Day serves as an annual renewal of common loyalty to the country and a commitment to its democratic future, regardless of geographic location. Many South Africans use the day to reflect on persistent issues such as high unemployment, poverty, crime and economic inequality, which continue to disproportionately affect the majority of the population.

“The right to vote has not translated into meaningful economic liberation for the youth of South Africa.”

South African democracy is currently facing significant pressure due to socio-economic stagnation and declining institutional trust. Persistent structural issues continue to undermine the “better life” promised by the democratic transition. High-profile corruption scandals have drained public resources and weakened democratic institutions, leading to a profound loss of public trust.

For young people, the post-apartheid era has opened doors to education and career paths that were systematically barred to our parents. But the right to vote has not translated into meaningful economic liberation for the youth of South Africa.

Many young people feel that the “missing piece” of the democratic puzzle is “economic freedom”, and we need to draw lessons from the youth of China, as they are able to position themselves for success.

As the youth of South Africa, we need to comprehend that Freedom Day is not the final destination but a call to stand up for ourselves and take action towards total emancipation.

Lebogang Pule is a National Committee member of YCLSA and Popcru International Relations officer. She writes in her own capacity.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The people of Swaziland are still struggling against an absolute monarchy



Protests in Swaziland in 2022. The people have had enough, but state repression and support for the Mawati regime from South Africa and other SADC countries enable the autocracy to continue.

- Under the autocracy of Swaziland’s Mswati III almost 70% of the population exists below the poverty line. The royal elite live in luxury.
- The tinkhundla regime represses anyone who disagrees with it. There is no freedom of the media or political association.
- Oppression is rife. In 2021, security forces murdered around 100 protesters.
- The government has also intensified the persecution of LGBTQI+ people.
- Neither the African Union (AU) nor the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has taken action to hold Mswati accountable.
- Governments must act to isolate the regime and enable the Swazi people to win their freedom.



PIUS VILAKATI

Swaziland’s despotic ruler parties while the people suffer repression and deep poverty.

As South Africans celebrated 32 years since holding their first democratic elections, reflecting on the gains of freedom and the work that still needs to be done, Swaziland’s absolute monarch, Mswati III, was splashing millions of rands to celebrate 40 years of his iron-fist rule and his life of unbridled luxury at the back of the poor people of Swaziland.

Among those who joined in celebration on 24 April was President Cyril Ramaphosa, who, after joining hands to endorse the autocracy, swiftly flew back home to celebrate the joys of democracy.

The people of Swaziland continue to languish under absolute monarchic rule, which has done nothing but impoverish them while the ruling royal family swims in extravagance.

“The people of Swaziland continue to languish under absolute monarchic rule, while the ruling royal family swims in extravagance.”

Mswati’s weekend-long celebrations occurred at the back of deepening misery for the people, with close to 70% living below the poverty line amid a crisis in the health sector that has gone on for decades.



While the people of Swaziland suffer poverty and degradation, ‘King’ Mswati III features in ads as a proud owner of Grand Baguette Diamond 18k white gold wrist watches.

Political parties and activities banned

Prior to his celebrations, 12 April marked 53 years of absolute monarchy rule since Mswati’s father,

Sobhuza II, banned political parties and undertook to rule by decree. All executive, legislative and judicial powers remain concentrated in the monarch. The 2005 constitution reinforced the monarch’s powers and further banned political parties.

Over the years, the regime has passed further laws to crush all forms of dissent. All elements of free media have been crushed. The education system has been further weakened with backward education by a regime intending to deepen its ideology.

A product of colonialism and apartheid

Some mistakenly treat the absolute monarchy rule in Swaziland as a welcome return to Africa’s old ways of life, yet the system is a product of colonialism and apartheid. It has its roots in British colonialism. The colonialists, in their quest to pick their own winners, supported the Dlamini dynasty against all others, and by independence in 1968, Sobhuza and his family had amassed unprecedented political and economic power to rule unopposed.

The regime’s rule was fortified by apartheid South Africa. Apartheid South Africa provided counsel to Sobhuza, leading to the banning of political parties in 1973, and gave him further economic and political support. The apartheid regime’s interest was the circumvention of sanctions imposed by the United Nations against the racist regime and the combating of the South African liberation movement. Sobhuza was a perfect willing partner.

The partnership led to the signing of a secret security pact, known as the Pretoria Accord, in 1982, meant to squeeze out anti-apartheid fighters.

Thus, the struggle against imperialism must never be abandoned, for imperialism continues to strengthen the autocracy.

Impact on the economy

As a sanctions buster, Swaziland enjoyed apartheid South Africa’s support and protection since the banning of political parties. Consequently, from the late 1970s, the Swaziland economy grew exponentially, the highest being 5.5% growth in the late 1980s. Economic growth was mirrored by the growth of authoritarianism, however.

“The ruling Mswati autocracy is one of the most corrupt regimes in the world.”

The structural weaknesses of the tinkhundla regime, being nothing but a puppet of imperialism, showed up following South Africa’s 1994 democratic breakthrough when most capital began flowing out of Swaziland.

Concentration of power

Mswati has over the years concentrated more power in the institution of the monarch. For this reason, it is impossible to speak of the tinkhundla system without at the same time speaking of the role of the monarch in the oppression of the people – and its overthrow.

He has also amassed power for himself – personally. He has forced private businesses to pay tribute to him by donating for his festivities. To afford political protection, businesses such as MTN have granted him shares as an “esteemed shareholder”, while he has used public funds to build luxurious homes and purchased luxurious vehicles and escorts for himself and his mother, his 16 wives and dozens of children.

Corruption, repression, and impunity

The ruling Mswati autocracy is one of the most corrupt regimes in the world, with most of its crimes escaping public scrutiny. Within two days from the night of 29 June 2021, Mswati’s security forces brutalised pro-democracy protesters, leading to the shooting and killing of about 100 people. Dozens more were injured, with hundreds detained without trial.

Even after the protests had subsided, the killings continued. On 21 January 2023, Mswati’s mercenaries assassinated human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko in cold blood. His government has not done anything to investigate the murder.

Under the guise of religious and cultural traditions, the autocracy has also increased its repression of minority groups, not least the LGBTQI+ community. During his Easter sermon this year, Mswati went for the jugular and banned same-sex relationships.

This was no mere rhetoric. In March, one of the schools had already expelled six students for allegations of same-sex relationships. The expulsions had the full endorsement of the education minister, who had previously made a public statement that the government would not allow same-sex relationships.

International action

The tinkhundla system continues to receive international support from powerful role players, not least Taiwan, which has, over the years, become aggressive in supporting the regime as it lost more international friends.

Despite the obvious human rights violations committed by the regime over the years, neither the African Union nor SADC has had the appetite to call the Swazi regime to account.

“The autocracy has increased its repression of minority groups, not least the LGBTQI+ community.”

Accordingly, a regime such as the Mswati autocracy that enjoys such a level of direct and indirect international support cannot be defeated without international solidarity. Progressive forces in other countries must call upon their governments to hold Mswati to account and isolate his regime. Other forms of practical solidarity are imperative to defeat the regime.

Pius Vilakati is the International Secretary of the Communist Party of Swaziland.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Cuba: Trump's new executive order deepens the crisis



Trump has said he'll take Cuba. The threat of US invasion or military attack is real. Solidarity and practical action are imperative.

Key points

- On International Workers' Day, 1 May 2026, Trump's signed a new 'executive order' escalates economic warfare against Cuba.
- The new element: secondary sanctions — any foreign bank or financial institution doing business with designated Cuban entities can lose access to US accounts or have assets frozen.

- The scope is deliberately vague: no list of designated targets has been published, maximising intimidation.
- Cuba is already in acute crisis — no fuel since early 2026, power cuts up to 20 hours a day, surgeries suspended, and cancer treatments disrupted.
- International solidarity continues to grow, but must increase.

UMSEBENZI ONLINE

On 1 May 2026 — International Workers’ Day — the Trump administration signed a new executive order to ramp up economic warfare against Cuba.

The timing was deliberate. While everyone else around the world was celebrating international solidarity, Washington was intensifying pressure on an island that has already been under a blockade for six decades.

Trump has said he’ll take Cuba. The threat of US invasion or military attack is real. Solidarity and practical action are imperative.

“The threat of US invasion or military attack is real. Solidarity and practical action are imperative.”

Granma, the Communist Party of Cuba’s newspaper, reports, 5 May, that experts are calling the order a new blockade, on top of the existing one, the biggest ever.

The order, officially called “Imposing Sanctions on Those Responsible for Repression in Cuba and for Threats to United States National Security and Foreign Policy”, is based on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and adds to the national emergency Trump declared on 29 January 2026.

Secondary sanctions - a new weapon

The order’s new element is the extension of secondary sanctions to the international financial system. Any foreign bank or financial institution that does a lot of business with designated Cuban people or companies could have its access to US accounts blocked or its US-held assets frozen.

Granma reports that Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla said at an international solidarity meeting on 2 May that this is “an extremely aggressive and unprecedented step in the use of the blockade outside of Cuba.”

He noted that for the first time, sanctions can be applied against anyone, anywhere in the world, just for being involved in activities related to Cuba. This even applies to people who have no connection to the US economy.

Broad reach

The order targets key sectors of the Cuban economy — energy, defence, metals and mining, financial services, and security — but its scope is deliberately open-ended. The Secretary of the Treasury retains authority to add further sectors at will.

Critically, no list of designated individuals or entities has been published. Rodríguez Parrilla was explicit about the intent: Washington does not feel obliged to name those targeted, precisely to maximise the effect of intimidation on everyone else. The vagueness is deliberate.

The practical consequence is that the order threatens to prevent not only large-scale investment but individual humanitarian assistance — including, as the paper puts it, “the medicine urgently needed by a sick child.”

Collective punishment

The order also bars entry into the US for any foreign national linked to the Cuban government, extending the ban for the first time to the adult relatives of designated individuals. The logic of collective punishment — targeting family members for the political associations of their relatives — is obvious.

“The sanctions can be applied against anyone, anywhere in the world, just for being involved in activities related to Cuba.”

Washington frames all of this in the language of ‘human rights’ and ‘national security’. It accuses Cuba of links to “malign actors,” of hosting foreign intelligence operations, and of driving migration toward the United States.

Granma notes the particular cynicism of that last claim: it is precisely the blockade and the closure of legal emigration channels that produce the migration flows Washington then deploys as justification for further pressure.

The threat beyond Cuba

Rodríguez Parrilla was emphatic that the order's implications extend far beyond Cuba itself. No state, he argued, will be able to act sovereignly or independently if it fails to take a stand against this extraterritorial overreach.

“China has signed 29 new bilateral cooperation agreements with Cuba and is scaling up solar infrastructure.”

“It will not be able to consider that the only sphere of application within its territory is its national laws; it will not be able to defend the concept that only its national courts or tribunals will have jurisdiction over its own affairs.”

Crisis conditions

The new order lands on a Cuba already in acute crisis. Since early 2026, following the US attack on Venezuela, no fuel has entered the island. Power cuts of up to 20 hours a day are routine. Schools are closed. Surgeries have been suspended. Cancer treatments have been disrupted. Millions lack reliable access to drinking water.

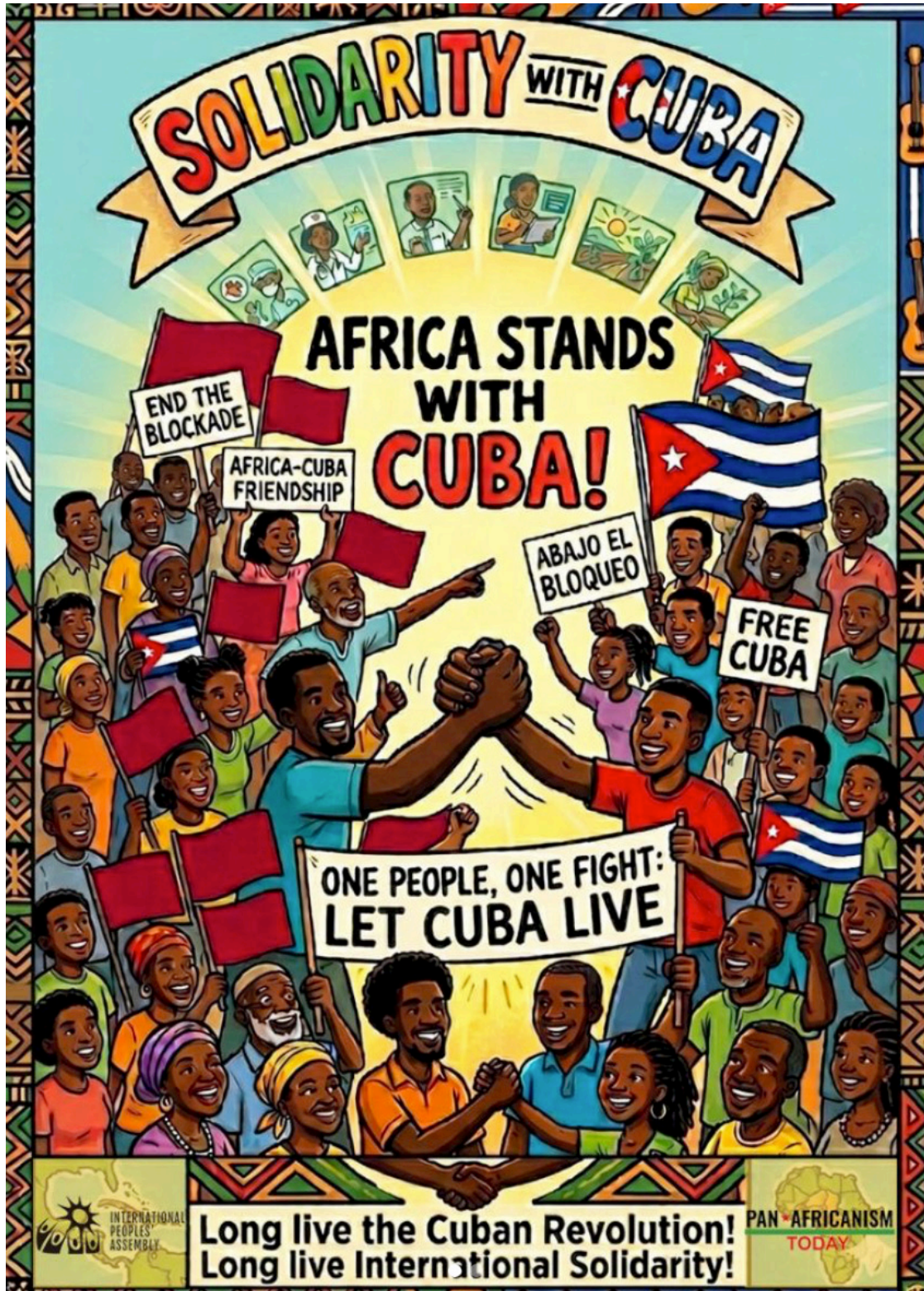
Solidarity holds

What the executive order cannot easily reach is the growing wave of international solidarity. Convoys of food, medicines, and solar equipment continue to arrive from Europe, Latin America, and beyond. China has signed 29 new bilateral cooperation agreements with Cuba and is scaling up solar infrastructure. Solidarity campaigns in South Africa, Spain, Britain, Canada, and the US are shipping surgical supplies and nutritional aid.

The 1 May executive order is the latest escalation in a six-decade project to reverse the Cuban revolution by making ordinary Cuban life unsustainable. That project has consistently failed in its ultimate objective. What it reliably produces — as it is producing now — is the suffering of a people whose principal offence, in Washington's imperial eyes, remains their refusal to submit.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Africa-Cuba organisations call to redouble practical solidarity



The ALNEF Africa-Cuba Solidarity Meeting reaffirmed the enduring bonds between the peoples of Africa and Cuba and pledged continued solidarity with the Cuban people.



KYLE HASELSTEINER

On 28 April, the SACP convened the African Left Networking Forum (ALNEF): Africa-Cuba Solidarity Meeting, co-organised with the Cuban Embassy in South Africa.

The event was attended by more than 90 political parties and organisations from 24 countries to reaffirm international solidarity with the Cuban Revolution during a period of intensified US imperialist aggression.

The meeting was addressed by representatives from the Communist Party of Cuba, Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front, South West Africa People’s Organisation (Namibia), People’s Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (Gambia), the SACP, Mozambique Liberation Front, Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, All Progressives Congress (Nigeria), Party of Progress and Socialism (Morocco), as well as the Prosperity Party of Ethiopia.

Escalating aggression

The solidarity meeting took place against the backdrop of escalating hostility from the US administration towards Cuba. In recent months, US President Donald Trump has intensified threats against the Cuban Revolution and openly declared that “Cuba is next” while boasting about US military actions in Iran, and further claimed that he would have the “honour” of “taking Cuba”.

These threats have been accompanied by the expansion of unilateral sanctions and coercive measures against Cuba. The US administration recently signed new executive orders intensifying sanctions targeting key sectors of the Cuban economy, further worsening the economic hardships imposed by the decades-long blockade against the Cuban people.

Speakers condemned the historic US embargo against Cuba, describing it as a criminal policy aimed at suffocating the Cuban people and undermining Cuba’s sovereignty and revolutionary project. Participants reiterated that the embargo, which has persisted for more than six decades despite overwhelming international condemnation, remains one of the clearest expressions of imperialist aggression in the modern era.

Cuba’s internationalism

Further, speakers highlighted Cuba’s proud tradition of anti-imperialism and international solidarity, particularly its historic support for African national liberation struggles. Reference was made to Cuba’s contribution to the struggles against colonialism, apartheid and white minority rule across the African continent, and its decisive role in supporting liberation movements and

progressive governments during some of Africa’s most difficult periods.

The meeting reaffirmed that Cuba’s solidarity with Africa was neither an act of charity or a transaction, but a principled commitment rooted in international solidarity and the shared struggle against imperialism,

colonial domination and capitalist exploitation. In this regard, participants stressed that solidarity with Cuba today must similarly not be viewed as an act of kindness or charity, but as an obligation and an expression of principled working-class internationalism.

Several speakers noted that despite the enormous economic pressures imposed by the blockade, Cuba has continued to demonstrate solidarity with people across the world through its Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Disasters and Serious Epidemics, educational programmes and support for developing nations.

The participating organisations collectively reaffirmed their commitment to heightening international working class solidarity with Cuba

“Solidarity with Cuba today must not be viewed as an act of kindness or charity, but as an obligation and an expression of principled working-class internationalism.”

and called on political parties, organisations, movements and people across the world to intensify campaigns against the US blockade and imperialist aggression on Cuba.

The meeting also emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation and coordination among left and progressive formations across the African continent against imperialism and in defence of independence and sovereignty. Participants stressed that the struggle in defence of Cuba is inseparable from the global struggle against imperialism and neo-colonial domination.

In closing, the ALNEF Africa-Cuba Solidarity Meeting reaffirmed the enduring bonds between the peoples of Africa and Cuba and pledged continued solidarity with the Cuban people during this critical period. Participants declared that the Cuban people are not alone and that progressive movements across Africa remain committed to defending Cuba's sovereignty and independence.

Cde Kyle Haselsteiner has been seconded by Nehawu to support the SACP Head Office International Relations Unit.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

From the Nakba to the Cleans0cide* in West Asia



Key points

- Israel’s nuclear capability, secured through secret French cooperation in 1956–57, underpins its regional dominance.
- The 1967 Naksa tripled Israeli-controlled territory, completing the colonial occupation of all Palestine.
- Decades of military expansion — Lebanon, Syria, Gaza — reflect a deliberate long-term Zionist colonial strategy.
- Since October 2023, Israel’s “Cleans0cide” has inflicted mass ethnic cleansing across Gaza, Lebanon, and beyond.
- Western governments enable Israeli settler-colonialism while global popular opinion overwhelmingly condemns it.



MAKRAM KHOURY-MACHOOL

The Israeli regime, which is a persisting military occupation, possesses nuclear capability. It occupied Western Palestine – Acre, Haifa, Jaffa and the rest – in the Nakba (catastrophe) between the partition plan of Palestine in November 1947 and the Armistice agreements in autumn 1949.

Early expansion and nuclear foundations –1950s

Already in the mid-fifties, during the 1956 Suez Crisis, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion pushed for the long-term occupation of Southern

Palestine – the Gaza Strip – intending to annex it and separate it from Egypt, but was forced to withdraw by immense international pressure. While Ben-Gurion was famously dismissive of the UN, he was simultaneously building an incredibly close, secret relationship with France. At the same time, the foundations for nuclear cooperation were laid in June 1956 between Israel and the colonial powers.

“It is widely believed that Israel crossed the nuclear threshold and assembled its first weapons in late 1966 or early 1967.”

During the secret Sèvres Conference in October 1956 (where Israel, France, and Britain planned the Suez invasion), the nuclear deal was approved at the highest political levels as a “sweetener” for Israel’s participation in the war of aggression against Egypt. Following the war, France and Israel formalised the deal (the Dimona Agreement (1957) in October 1957. France agreed to provide a 24-megawatt reactor (later expanded), natural uranium fuel, and critical plutonium reprocessing technology—essentially everything needed to build a bomb.

Nuclear capability and the 1967 occupation

It is widely believed that Israel crossed the nuclear threshold and assembled its first weapons in late 1966 or early 1967. It was then that the Israeli regime decided to seize the second part of Palestine – Eastern Palestine – in June 1967. Whilst it imposed an extra military rule on the 220,000 Nakba Survivors (Palestinians who miraculously managed to remain in their homeland despite the Nakba – unlike the nearly 800,000 who were expelled to neighbouring states), these Nakba saviours (“Israeli Citizens”) had to live under additional strict military rule (martial law) for nearly two decades until 1 December 1966 so that Israel could move to its second plan now that it became a regional superpower who can strengthen its grip on Palestine in full and the region.

To this end, it needed to stifle, weaken, occupy

and target any regional power in west Asia that wished to restore justice and liberate Palestine. The expansionist policy of a permanent colonial power became Israel’s strategy. Hence, any state or non-state actors who wished to work towards the liberation of colonised Palestine became a target, and this has not stopped for nearly eight decades now. Israel had occupied in 1967 and 1973, from Syria, Egypt and Jordan.

The 1967 “Naksa” and regional occupations

In the wars of 1967 and 1973 the Israeli regime had significantly altered the map of the region – not only Palestine but also to hermetically control Palestine – leading to the Israeli occupation of large territories belonging to Syria, Jordan, and Egypt.

In what the Palestinians and the Arabs call the Naksa (setback/relapse) of June 1967, Israel launched a strike and occupied several key regions, tripling the size of its controlled territory. From Egypt, Israel occupied the entire Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. From Jordan: Israel captured the West Bank (of the river Jordan), including East Jerusalem. From Syria, Israel seized most of the Golan Heights. Palestine in its totality had “fallen”!

The 1973 War and further territorial changes

The October (Ramadan/Kipur)1973 the war, with the help of the US, resulted in temporary new occupations in Egypt. By the ceasefire, Israeli forces had crossed the Suez Canal and held approximately 1,600 km² on the western bank of the canal (mainland Egypt), while Egyptian forces held a strip on the eastern bank.

Israel pushed past the 1967 ceasefire line, occupying an additional 500 km² of the El-Bathaniyeh / Bashan region further toward Damascus.

Lebanon and continued military expansion

To eliminate the Palestinian resistance operating from Lebanon, it occupied large parts of Lebanon between 1982 and 2000. Beirut was the first and remains the only sovereign Arab capital to be occupied by the Israeli colonial aggressor.

Recent escalation and regional CleansOcide (2023–2026)

In the last 31 months since October 2023 of perpetrating its CleansOcide in Palestine (mainly in the Gaza Strip) the Israeli Military criminal actions (attacks/strikes) in West Asia from 2023–mid-2026 has conducted tens of thousands of recorded military aggressions across Gaza/West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Iran, and to a limited extent others, such as Qatar. The exact totals vary by source and definition (single events can involve multiple strikes/bombs).

“Any state or non-state actors who wished to work towards the liberation of colonised Palestine became a target.”

Since the plot to destroy the nationalist state in Syria, which was perpetrated on 8 December 2024, the Israeli occupation has controlled/occupied additional vital territory in Syria of roughly 1,850 km)

Since the beginning of 2026, the Israeli occupation has perpetrated the CleansOcide in Lebanon, ethnically cleansing nearly a million inhabitants from Southern Lebanon and erasing tens of villages from that area. The population of the world (to distinguish it from most of the Nato/EU leaders) is largely appalled by their crimes but failed to stop them.

Symbolism, International Institutions, and Political Doctrine

There was nothing new in his action when on 10 May 2024, Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan, used a miniature portable paper shredder to destroy a copy of the UN Charter while standing at the General Assembly podium. Already on 29 March 1955, David Ben-Gurion coined the term “Um-Shmum” (a dismissive play on the Hebrew acronym for the UN, Oom is nothing: Shmama is desert and Shum is garlic).

“The Israeli regime, as the forefront of the Zionist Movement, works according to a long-term colonial hegemonic plan.”

The Israeli regime, as the forefront of the Zionist Movement, works according to a long-term colonial hegemonic plan: at times it’s a full-scale aggression – the CleansOcide in the Gaza Strip – and at times it’s a “Salami Tactics”. Whichever is the pace, the plan is known.

* The process of combining genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Gaza Strip and Palestinian territories.

Dr Makram Khoury-Machool is the Director for the Cambridge Centre for Palestine Studies.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Palestine: Sexual violence in Israeli detention and the logic of colonial terror



The agony of Zionist state terror: Palestinians — men, women, and children — were subjected to rape, assault with objects and trained dogs, deliberate genital mutilation, forced nudity, prolonged shackling, starvation and medical torture.

Key points

- A new investigation says that Palestinian detainees – men, women and children – have been systematically sexually abused and tortured.
- These weren't just random crimes either – the abuses are part of standard operating procedure.
- Sexual violence is used as a deliberate colonial weapon — it targets people and the well-being of Palestinian society.
- The collusion is widespread: military doctors certified detainees as fit for interrogation while concealing torture evidence.

UMSEBENZI ONLINE

The Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor's report Another Genocide Behind Walls documents the systematic sexual violence and torture in Israeli prisons and detention centres from October 2023 to October 2025.

The report is among the most detailed indictments of settler-colonial state violence to emerge from the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Its findings demand to be understood not just as a catalogue of atrocities, but as a political and structural analysis of what capitalism in its most extreme, militarised form does to a colonised people.

The report documents, through first-hand testimony and cross-referenced evidence, a system of detention that functions as organised state terror. Palestinians — men, women, and children — were subjected to rape, assault with objects and trained dogs, deliberate genital mutilation, forced nudity, prolonged shackling, starvation and medical torture.

These were not the spontaneous crimes of rogue soldiers. The UN Commission of Inquiry, cited extensively in the report, confirms that they constituted a systematic practice — effectively standard operating procedure — supported by

political leadership, military command, judicial cover and medical complicity.

Colonial project

This must be seen within the broader structure of Zionist settler colonialism as a form of racialised capitalist dispossession.

The dehumanising rhetoric deployed by Israeli officials — describing Palestinians as “human animals” and invoking the Biblical injunction to exterminate Amalek — is not simply inflammatory language. It is the ideological superstructure of a material project: the permanent displacement and suppression of a people to secure land, resources, and regional dominance in the service of imperial capital.

Sexual violence is a weapon in this project. As the report makes clear, it targets not only individuals but the collective, destroying family cohesion, weaponising social stigma, silencing witnesses, and attacking the reproductive capacity of the Palestinian people.

The report explicitly frames deliberate assaults on reproductive organs and the documented deaths under torture as meeting the material elements of the Genocide Convention, and it is correct to do so.

Complicity

Particularly significant is the report's documentation of institutional collusion. The Israeli judicial system, the medical establishment, and regulatory bodies did not merely fail to prevent these crimes — they actively facilitated them. Military doctors issued “fit for interrogation” certificates while concealing evidence of torture.

“The report explicitly frames deliberate assaults on reproductive organs and the documented deaths under torture as meeting the material elements of the Genocide Convention.”

Surgeons performed amputations on conscious, unanaesthetised detainees. The Israeli Medical Association lobbied against international ceasefire demands.

“Soldiers who gang-raped a Palestinian detainee at Sde Teiman were publicly defended as “heroes” by government ministers.”

Soldiers who gang-raped a Palestinian detainee at Sde Teiman were publicly defended as “heroes” by government ministers; the indictment against them was ultimately dropped. Across 18 months of genocide, only three criminal indictments were filed against Israeli soldiers — a rate of accountability so negligible as to expose the entire domestic legal architecture as simply a mechanism of impunity.

Class demands

The working class and progressive movements internationally must be clear about what this means. The Israeli state is not an aberration within a rules-based international order — it is its product and its beneficiary. The US and other Western regimes that arm, fund, and diplomatically shield Israel bear direct material responsibility for these crimes.

The call for an immediate arms embargo, targeted sanctions, and ICC prosecution of political and military leadership is not only a legal demand but a class demand: it is a demand that imperialist powers be held accountable for the violence they sustain.

The report’s title comes from the testimony of a Palestinian woman detained and repeatedly raped at Sde Teiman. She wished for death. She lost count of time in prison, known only by the number 101 her torturers assigned her in place of a name.

Her words — “another genocide behind walls” — capture both the continuity of Palestinian suffering and the deliberate erasure of identity that accompanies colonial domination.

Solidarity with Palestine is not about sentiment. It is a political obligation. The struggle for Palestinian liberation is inseparable from the broader struggle against imperialism, settler colonialism, and the capitalist order that produces and protects both.

The report’s findings must be amplified, and the perpetrators — at every level of the chain of command — must be exposed and brought to

“The call for an immediate arms embargo, targeted sanctions, and ICC prosecution of political and military leadership is not only a legal demand but a class demand.”

account.

Source: Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, *“Another Genocide Behind Walls”: Sexual violence in Israeli prisons and detention centres and engineered impunity (October 2023 – October 2025)*, published 13 April 2026, <https://www.euromedmonitor.org/en/article/7023/>

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