

MEDIA RELEASE

Scholar transport tragedies: PSA calls for urgent multisector National Scholar Transport *Imbizo*

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EMBARGO

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ENQUIRIES

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) notes President Cyril Ramaphosa's recent call for immediate action to make scholar transport safe following a devastating wave of learner-transport tragedies across South Africa.

Whilst the PSA acknowledges and appreciates the President's sentiments, the Union is frustrated that such statements have become a recurring response in the aftermath of preventable incidents, whilst the underlying conditions that place children at risk persist. Over the past years, South Africa has witnessed many heartbreaking learner-transport accidents. These include the Mitchells Plain crash that left five children dead in 2023, the Fochville crash that killed 11 learners and the driver in 2024, and the Vanderbijlpark crash in January 2026, which claimed more than ten lives in a collision between a minibus and a truck. On 21 January 2026, traffic officers in Limpopo intercepted a seven-seater vehicle overloaded with 22 learners. Numerous incidents relating to non-regard of law by many scholar transport providers clearly demonstrate that the country is in a crisis.

Although government has managed to provide scholar transport to some 700 000 learners, there are problems with service providers who use vehicles that are not roadworthy and government failing to pay service providers on time. In 2025, hundreds of learners in North West were left stranded for days owing to non-payment of service providers. As a result, vehicle inspections were missed, buses were not serviced or roadworthy, thus compromising safety.

Government's reaction after every incident or accident was a mere call for transport reform without any action. In view of the ongoing loss of young lives and persistent system failures, the PSA calls for an urgent National Scholar Transport *Imbizo*, bringing together all critical stakeholders, including the Department of Basic Education, provincial Departments of Education, national and Provincial Departments of Transport, Treasury, budget oversight structures, law enforcement agencies, road safety authorities, unions, scholar transport associations, private operators, school governing bodies, parent organisation, civil society and child rights advocacy groups, road safety researchers, engineers, and policy experts.

The *Imbizo* must, amongst others, design and commit to an enforceable national action plan, close regulatory gaps, establish safety standards, strict vehicle enforcement, strengthen licensing and vetting for all scholar transport drivers, implement technology-enabled monitoring systems, secure interdepartmental accountability and ensure sustainable funding models to prevent provincial collapses.

The PSA believes that multisector action is the only way to break the cycle of reactive government messaging and deliver the systemic reform needed to safeguard learners. The PSA stands with the families who have lost children and with learners who risk their lives daily owing to unsafe and unreliable transport. The PSA urges government to demonstrate that the latest call for action is not another message of sympathy but the beginning of a national commitment to decisive, measurable reform. South Africa's cannot wait for another tragedy - the time for a multisector National Scholar Transport *Imbizo* is now.

END

