

magazine

FREE TO PSA MEMBERS

PSA 2026 Congress / Annual General Meeting

Stronger together : Advancing PSA into NEW era

Against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving labour environment, the PSA 2026 Congress emerged as a landmark event in the Organisation's 106-year journey. Held at Birchwood Hotel in Gauteng from 14 to 17 September 2026, the Congress celebrated the enduring strength of the PSA whilst charting a bold course for the future as the Union of Choice for public servants across South Africa.

For more than 106 years, the PSA has remained steadfast in the mission to protect, promote, and advance the rights and interests of public-sector employees. The outcomes of the Congress reaffirm the PSA's commitment to the democratic principles of freedom of association and the rights of workers to determine the future of their organisation. These principles are firmly rooted in International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 87 and protected by section 23 of the Constitution of South Africa.

The resolutions adopted during Congress mark an important milestone in the evolution of the Union. Following the Labour Appeal Court judgement of 17 April 2026, delegates took the historic decision to separate the PSA's trade union and non-profit company structures. This decision demonstrates a commitment to good governance, legislative compliance, organisational sustainability, and the continued strengthening of the PSA as a modern, member-driven trade union.

Congress also provided an opportunity to celebrate the resilience of members and the enduring relevance of the PSA as the Union of Choice in the public sector. The robust discussions, constructive debates, and overwhelming spirit of unity displayed throughout the Congress confirmed that the Organisation remains strong, relevant, and ready to meet the challenges of a changing workplace environment.

On behalf of the PSA leadership, I extend my sincere gratitude to the Union's members, branches, office bearers, staff, and stakeholders whose unwavering support contributed to the success of Congress. The PSA also acknowledges the valuable support and messages received from the PSCBC, GPSSBC, PHSDSBC, Fed-usa, the Public Protector, the Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour, and Sadtu. Their support reaffirmed the important role the PSA continues to play in advancing the interests of workers across South Africa.

As the PSA embarks on this new chapter, we do so with confidence, purpose, and determination. The decisions taken at Congress have laid a solid foundation for future growth and success. Together, we will continue to defend workers' rights, champion social justice, and ensure that the PSA remains a powerful and respected voice for public servants. The future of the PSA is bright because it is built on the strength, unity, and dedication of its members.

In solidarity,

Reuben Maleka
GENERAL SECRETARY



In service of public-sector employees



DEPUTY MINISTER OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR



With South Africa confronting high unemployment, evolving workplaces, and mounting pressure on labour relations, Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour, Jomo Sibiya, called for renewed social dialogue, stronger labour institutions, and a shared commitment to decent work.

Addressing the PSA Congress on 15 September 2026, the Deputy Minister said current pressures should not be viewed as a failure of social dialogue, but rather as a call to strengthen institutions and relationships that enable government, workers, employers, and communities to manage disagreements and find common solutions. He noted that labour relations are rooted in section 23 of the *Constitution* and supported by ILO conventions on freedom of association, collective bargaining, and tripartite consultation. These rights also carry responsibilities, including the protection of institutions such as Nedlac, where government, labour, business, and communities address economic, social, and labour-market issues. Social dialogue, the Deputy Minister said, does not need to produce agreement on every issue. Its value lies in managing disagreement and pursuing practical solutions.

This is particularly urgent given South Africa's labour-market challenges. Statistics South Africa's second-quarter 2026 Quarterly Labour Force Survey recorded unemployment at 33.6%, with about 8.5 million people unemployed and broad labour underutilisation at 46.3%. With 2026 declared the *Year of Putting Young South Africans to Work*, the Minister stressed that youth unemployment requires coordinated action from employers, organised labour, and government.

The Department of Employment and Labour is strengthening programmes such as the Labour Activation Programme, which focuses on demand-led skills, workplace experience, and enterprise-led employment. The programme aims to reach 200 000 unemployed people in the current financial year, with 70% of opportunities directed to youth. Employment Services for South Africa is being strengthened to connect job seekers with opportunities and register more than one million job seekers in 2026/27. Whilst these efforts cannot replace economic growth, cooperation can strengthen pathways from unemployment to work.

The Deputy Minister also referred to evolving labour legislation. Amendments to the *Labour Relations Act*, *Basic Conditions of Employment Act*, *National Minimum Wage Act*, and *Employment Equity Act* are being advanced through Nedlac, whilst the *Employment Services Amendment Bill* is before Parliament. These reforms cover employee status, benefit funds, collective bargaining, dispute resolution, inspections and protections for vulnerable workers.

The Deputy Minister pointed out that recent Constitutional Court judgements show how constitutional principles continue to shape the workplace. In *Werner van Wyk and Others v Minister of Employment and Labour*, the Court found maternity and parental-leave provisions constitutionally invalid for unfairly differentiating between parents. In *Mahlangu and Another v Minister of Labour and Others*, it extended occupational-injury protection to domestic workers. These cases show that labour rights must adapt to social change, but laws only matter if enforced. The Deputy Minister highlighted *Project 20 000*, which aims to expand labour inspection capacity and increase digital and hybrid inspections to better protect vulnerable workers.

On labour migration, the Deputy Minister said the state must enforce immigration and labour laws, protect employment standards, and prevent exploitation in a lawful, constitutional, and humane manner. The *Employment Services Amendment Bill*, the National Labour Migration Policy, and government's Five-Point Plan on Migration Management aim to strengthen border management, modernise systems, reform policy, and improve regional and international cooperation.

He warned that workers with uncertain immigration status are especially vulnerable to exploitation because fear of detection may prevent them from reporting abuse. Employers who exploit workers must be held accountable, whilst migration enforcement must remain the responsibility of lawful state institutions.

Referring to recent PSA and the Registrar of Labour Relations developments, the Deputy Minister refrained from commenting on ongoing proceedings but stressed that courts and democratic institutions are vital to resolving disputes involving public power and institutional decisions. South Africa's dispute-resolution mechanisms - including the CCMA, bargaining councils, the Labour Court, and the Labour Appeal Court - remain essential despite ongoing challenges. The Deputy Minister pointed out that present tensions offer an opportunity to renew social dialogue. It is not about winners and losers, but about negotiation, mutual respect, and recognising that no constituency can solve unemployment, inequality, skills shortages, workplace insecurity, and transformation on its own. This is especially important in the public service, where public servants translate constitutional rights, policies, and programmes into services for communities. Constructive bargaining must protect workers' voices whilst enabling government to govern and institutions to deliver.

The Deputy Minister concluded by stating: "The question is whether disagreement weakens our common institutions or strengthens them through lawful engagement, honest negotiation and reform. Let us therefore use this Congress to reaffirm our commitment to social dialogue and collective bargaining. Let us strengthen the enforcement of labour standards, protect workers whilst responding to new forms of employment, address migration through law rather than prejudice, and create stronger pathways for young South Africans to enter decent work. Above all, let us ensure that our labour institutions remain accessible, credible and responsive to the people they serve. If we do that, the present period of tension will not define our social dialogue. What will define it is how we respond to the challenge before us and whether we have the courage to renew the social compact underpinning our democratic labour-relations system."

PSA 2026 CONGRESS / ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

PSA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



In his Presidential Address to the 2026 Annual General Meeting, PSA President **Justice Shiburi**, conveyed a strong message that for more than 106 years, the PSA has been built on resilience, courage, unity and an unwavering commitment to public servants.

Generations of public-sector employees have entrusted the Union with their interests and livelihoods, creating a responsibility for today's leadership to serve members while protecting and strengthening the PSA for future generations.

President Shiburi pointed out that the PSA's history demonstrated the Union's ability to navigate uncertainty and adversity without losing sight of purpose. As a democratic organisation, different views and disagreements are natural and should be respected. Unity of purpose remains essential. Individual interests and divisions must not overshadow the broader interests of the more than 250 000 members who rely on the PSA to protect their rights, advance their interests, and provide a strong collective voice.

Recent challenges, including continued attempts to cancel the PSA's registration, have highlighted the importance of protecting the Union's independence and future. The PSA's achievements in collective bargaining, legal victories, member campaigns, and membership growth have been the result of collective commitment and shared purpose.

Looking towards the PSA's 110th anniversary in 2030, the President stated that the Union must become stronger, more united, and increasingly relevant to a changing public-sector workforce. New workplace pressures, technology, and the expectations of younger employees require the Union to adapt whilst remaining true to its identity and values.

Loyalty, transparency, respect, ethical conduct, consistency, and service excellence must remain central to this process. Strengthening the PSA will require sound governance, financial accountability, investment in democratic structures and future leaders, as well as improved member services and communication.

The President concluded by stating that the challenges facing the PSA provide an opportunity to reflect, regroup, and confront complacency. The PSA's future depends on responsible leadership, active membership, strong structures and unity of purpose. The task is not simply to overcome today's difficulties, but to use these to build a stronger PSA for tomorrow, one that continues to serve, represent and protect public servants and remains a respected South African institution.

Celebrating PSA 2026 Top Performers

The PSA congratulates the Union's Top Ten Recruiters and Representatives on outstanding achievements over the past year. Their dedication, professionalism, and commitment to strengthen the PSA made a meaningful difference to members.

The PSA also extends appreciation to the following business partners whose generous support made the 2026 Congress and Annual General Meeting a memorable celebration of achievement and excellence: *Dignity, The Best Funeral Society, Old Mutual, Law for All, Metropolitan, Echo Tech, Fundi, and Business Engineering.*

PSA Top Ten Recruiters

- (1) Mushiyeni Montja - Gauteng: Pretoria
- (2) Benedict Mdluli - Mpumalanga
- (3) Freddy Luke - Gauteng: Pretoria
- (4) Joseph Walters - Western Cape
- (5) Mpho Lentswe - North West
- (6) Morulaganyi Sebuseng - North West
- (7) Poni Rakgalakane - Gauteng: Johannesburg
- (8) Sinenhlanhla Mchunu - Gauteng: Johannesburg
- (9) Phikolomzi Sikade - Eastern Cape: Mthatha
- (10) Alfred Langa - Gauteng: Pretoria

PSA Top Ten Representatives

- (1) Johan Pretorius - North West
- (2) Brian van Niekerk - Eastern Cape: Gqeberha
- (3) Regardo Abercrombie - Northern Cape: Kimberley
- (4) Jacques Botha - Western Cape
- (5) Mushiyeni Montja - Gauteng: Pretoria
- (6) Emmanuel Mahesu - Gauteng: Johannesburg
- (7) Buyisile Mkendlana - Eastern Cape: Mthatha
- (8) Zakhele Mdhuli - Mpumalanga
- (9) Sicelo Gcabashe - KwaZulu-Natal: Pietermaritzburg
- (10) Winnie Ross - Free State



PUBLIC SERVICE COORDINATING BARGAINING COUNCIL (PSCBC)



The General Secretary of the PSCBC, Frikkie de Bruin, delivered the following message:

As delegates gather for the PSA's Annual General Meeting, they do so at a defining moment for organised labour, the public service, and South Africa. More than a constitutional or administrative gathering, Congress is the highest expression of union democracy. It provides members with an opportunity to reflect on achievements, debate challenges, hold leadership accountable, and determine the organisation's future direction.

The PSCBC extends its solidarity and support to the PSA, recognising its significant contribution to advancing workers' rights, strengthening collective bargaining, and promoting sound labour relations in the public sector. As one of South Africa's largest and most established trade unions, the PSA continues to play an important role in ensuring that public servants' voices are heard and respected.

The timing of this Congress is particularly significant. Public servants are navigating rising living costs, increasing debt burdens, workplace pressures, restructuring, rapid technological advancement, and uncertainty about the future of work. At the same time, expectations for a capable, professional, and responsive public service continue to grow. Workers are therefore at the heart of both the challenges facing the nation and the solutions required to address them.

Central to the PSCBC's message is a principle that cannot be compromised: trade unionism is a constitutional right. Trade unions do not exist because they are permitted by employers, administrators, or political office bearers. They exist because workers have a constitutional right to organise, associate freely, and act collectively in defence of their interests.

The Constitution protects workers' rights to form and join trade unions, participate in union activities, and engage in collective bargaining. These are fundamental democratic freedoms, not privileges that can be withdrawn at individual discretion.

The Labour Relations Act provides the framework through which these rights are exercised, but regulation must give effect to constitutional protections rather than undermine them. No individual should determine whether workers may organise, who may represent them, or whether a legitimate trade union may exercise its lawful rights. Administrative authority cannot supersede constitutional rights. The independence, integrity, and democratic character of trade unions must therefore remain protected. Workers must be free to choose their representatives, while unions must remain free from undue interference in their internal affairs.

The labour movement has always been built on a simple but powerful truth: workers are stronger together. Individually, workers may struggle to raise concerns or challenge unfair treatment. Collectively, they have a stronger voice and a more effective platform to advance their interests.

Freedom of association must have practical meaning in every workplace. Workers should be free to join a union, participate in its activities, elect representatives, and contribute to collective efforts aimed at improving working conditions and protecting rights. Equally important, workers must never be victimised or disadvantaged for exercising these lawful rights.

The broader trade union movement also has a responsibility to defend these freedoms. Unions may differ on policies, strategies, and constituencies, but they share a common interest in protecting the constitutional foundations upon which organised labour depends. Unity does not require uniformity; it requires a shared commitment to defending workers' rights wherever they come under threat.

A strong and independent union must also be accountable to its members. Effective leadership is rooted in democratic mandates, transparency, and responsible governance. Trade unions cannot demand accountability from employers and the state while neglecting these principles within their own structures. Strong leaders welcome debate, and strong organisations create space for meaningful participation. Congresses are therefore essential platforms through which members can evaluate leadership, test ideas, and ensure that the organisation remains responsive to changing realities.

Ultimately, a union belongs to its members, and its strength lies in the trust they place in it. Economic challenges and fiscal pressures should never become justification for weakening workers' rights. Indeed, difficult circumstances make collective bargaining even more important. Collective bargaining is not simply about wages; it is a democratic process through which organised labour and employers engage on matters affecting workers and the workplace, manage competing interests constructively, and seek solutions through dialogue rather than conflict.

The PSCBC remains committed to protecting and strengthening collective bargaining across the public service. However, the effectiveness of the system depends not only on negotiation but also on implementation. Agreements concluded in good faith must be honoured and implemented. Failure to do so erodes trust and undermines confidence in collective bargaining.

Organised labour should also not be viewed as an obstacle to reform or modernisation. A responsible and constructive labour movement is an important partner in building a capable and sustainable public service. Public servants are not merely a cost to the state. They are educators shaping future generations, healthcare professionals caring for communities, law enforcement officials protecting citizens, social workers supporting vulnerable families, and administrators keeping public institutions functioning. Behind every effective public institution are workers who give practical meaning to South Africa's constitutional promise of a better life for all.

The world of work is also undergoing profound transformation. Digitalisation, automation, and artificial intelligence are changing workplaces and how public services are delivered. These developments offer opportunities to improve efficiency and productivity, but they also raise important questions about job security, skills development, privacy, and fairness. Workers and their representatives must have a meaningful voice in shaping these changes.

Technology should not simply be used to reduce jobs or exclude workers from decisions affecting their future. Unions must continue investing in research, education, skills, and leadership development so that they remain effective advocates in an increasingly complex environment. The future of work cannot simply happen to workers; it must be shaped with workers.

The message to the PSA is therefore clear: continue to organise, represent, and defend the rights, interests, and dignity of public servants. Protect organisational independence. Strengthen unity. Uphold democratic values. Above all, remain steadfast in ensuring that no worker faces workplace challenges alone. The right to organise, associate, and bargain collectively is not merely a labour-relations concern. It is a cornerstone of democracy itself. For the PSA and the broader labour movement, solidarity, unity, and collective action remain essential tools for protecting workers, advancing social justice, and building a better future.

As the PSA moves forward from Congress, the challenge is not merely to respond to today's realities, but to shape tomorrow's opportunities. With unity as its strength, members as its foundation, and democracy as its guiding principle, the PSA can continue its important role in serving public servants across South Africa.

PSA 2026 CONGRESS / ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

GENERAL PUBLIC SERVICE SECTORAL BARGAINING COUNCIL (GPSSBC)

The General Secretary of the GPSSBC, **Sharlaine Oodit**, addressed delegates and pointed out that the PSA Congress arrived at a defining moment for organised labour in South Africa's public service - a time to reflect on a proud history of representing public servants and an opportunity to renew the PSA's commitment to the workers the Union serves.

Ms Oodit stated that the PSA is about the Union's members, the administrators who keep essential processes moving, correctional officials who work under demanding conditions, professionals who bring scarce skills into the state, and thousands of public servants who ensure government continues to function. Whilst these employees serve the public, the PSA exists to ensure that someone is standing up for them.

Ms Oodit said that as GPSSBC General Secretary, she has the privilege of engaging with the PSA from the other side of the bargaining table.

Whether in Council, chambers or dispute-management processes, PSA representatives consistently bring a strong labour voice to the GPSSBC. They arrive with mandates, interrogate proposals, challenge the employer and, when necessary, challenge the Council itself.

This is regarded as one of collective bargaining's greatest strengths. A bargaining council should not seek parties that merely agree and leave. The value of collective bargaining lies in robust engagement between parties with different interests and a shared commitment to workable solutions.

Ms Oodit further stated that in the GPSSBC, the PSA plays a significant role, holding majority representation in 39 of the Council's 54 chambers, a presence that reflects the Union's reach and service to members across departments and provinces.

It was further pointed out by Ms Oodit that disagreement will always be part of this environment. At times, the PSA and the employer will differ. At times, the PSA and other labour formations will differ. There will also be moments when the PSA and the Secretariat do not see matters in the same way. But disagreement does not mean collective bargaining has failed. In many ways, it is the reason collective bargaining exists. She said that the PSA has shown that the Union can be firm in defending members' interests whilst remaining constructive in broader bargaining processes. This is equally evident in dispute management, one of the GPSSBC's most important responsibilities.

Behind every case number, referral, or award are real people - an employee, an employer, a strained workplace relationship and, often, a livelihood at stake.

Ms Oodit acknowledged that the PSA assists members in understanding and exercising their rights and holds the Council accountable when the Union believes processes can improve. She stated that credible institutions must be prepared to be challenged by stakeholders as this encourages a review of work, identifies gaps, and grows a stronger Council.

She further stated that the 2026 Congress also invited the PSA to look beyond the immediate moment and ask a larger question: What kind of organisation must it become for the next generation of public servants?

The workplace is changing rapidly. Artificial intelligence, automation, and digitalisation are reshaping how services are delivered. Hybrid working has altered expectations, whilst younger employees are entering the public service with new views on leadership, development, technology, and organisational culture. Employees are also increasingly concerned about mental wellness, workplace harassment, family responsibilities, and work-life integration. Women continue to face barriers in many workplaces, whilst the cost of living places serious pressure on working families. Government must also confront questions about fiscal sustainability, skills retention, institutional capacity, and the quality of public services.

Ms Oodit pointed out that these challenges cannot be addressed through a bargaining system trapped in yesterday's debates. The trade union of the future must still fight for wages, defend conditions of service, and protect workers from unfairness. But it must also help shape the future of work by promoting mature social dialogue, identifying shared interests, and building solutions that improve workplaces. She stated that strong engagement does not mean becoming less robust - it means becoming more effective. The true test of collective bargaining is not how loudly parties argue across the table, but what changes for workers because they sat around that table.

She further indicated that the GPSSBC is asking similar questions about the bargaining council of the future. The Council is working to modernise dispute resolution, strengthen collective bargaining, invest in interest-based bargaining and problem-solving approaches, build sector capacity, and ensure that collective agreements have greater impact at workplace level. She indicated that the Secretariat cannot do this alone and needs the PSA and all Council parties to walk this journey with the GPSSBC, bringing not only criticism, but ideas and solutions.



Ms Oodit advised that when Congress concluded, the real work continues. Public servants are worried about household costs, employees feel unsafe at work, workers face harassment or bullying, and young professionals ask whether union membership offers real value. She stated that these are the people who must benefit from the decisions taken by the PSA.

Ms Oodit went on to warn that the strength of a trade union cannot be measured only by membership numbers. It must also be measured by its impact on members' lives. She stated that when the PSA fights for decent working conditions, safer workplaces, proper staffing, adequate resources, ethical leadership, and accountability, the Union contributes to the wellbeing of public servants, better service delivery, and renewed public confidence in the state.

Ms Oodit stated that the PSA has been part of South Africa's public-service labour-relations landscape for generations, adding that institutions endure when they adapt, learn from difficult periods, and lead through new opportunities. On behalf of the GPSSBC, she congratulated the PSA on convening the 2026 Congress and thanked the Union for the continued contribution to Council structures, chambers, and dispute resolution.

"May your deliberations at this Congress be robust. May your decisions be courageous. And may the PSA emerge even stronger. May this Congress therefore mark not simply another chapter in the history of the PSA. May it mark the beginning of your next journey, and as the GPSSBC we look forward to continuing that journey with you," concluded Ms Oodit.





The General Secretary of the PHSDSBC, Mpu-melelo Sibiya, reminded delegates that strong institutions can turn disagreement into dialogue, negotiation and solutions, whilst keeping public services and workers' rights at the center.

Collective bargaining is not about eliminating disagreement. It is about ensuring that disagreement does not destroy the employment relationship. Workers and employers will not always agree, and they are not supposed to. The real test is whether we have institutions strong enough to give disagreement structure, balance power, and turn conflict into negotiated solutions.

This is why the PHSDSBC stands in solidarity with the PSA. The PSA has a long and proud history of representing public servants and contributing to organised labour in South Africa.

Support for the Union must also include honest reflection on the institution of collective bargaining itself, because strong unions and strong bargaining institutions are inseparable. A bargaining council should not be merely the place where disputes arrive after relationships have broken down. It should help parties anticipate pressure, negotiate effectively, and prevent conflict before it becomes destructive. Workplace stability matters because citizens who depend on public services are the final beneficiaries.

From resolving disputes to preventing them, the PSA's experience in the PHSDSBC provides a valuable diagnostic picture. Over the past three financial years, the Union referred 491 matters to the Council. Approximately 66% concerned unfair labour practices. Unfair conduct relating to benefits was the largest category (181 matters or about 37% of all referrals). These are not mere statistics. Recurring disputes about benefits, disciplinary action, promotions and the interpretation or implementation of collective agreements reveal where the employment relationship is under strain.

The dispute-resolution system is therefore more than an adjudicative mechanism - it is a source of institutional intelligence.

Of the 491 matters, 88 resulted in identifiable arbitration awards: 59 in favour of the employer and 29 in favour of employees. A further 110 cases were withdrawn and 87 fell outside the Council's jurisdiction. Together, those two categories represent 197 cases, or 40% of the PSA's referrals. Even these figures do not tell the full story. Some matters are settled, some resolved at conciliation and others prevented from entering the formal system. A settlement is not necessarily a defeat, just as withdrawal following satisfactory resolution is not necessarily a failure. A dispute prevented through effective bargaining may be a greater institutional success than an award issued after the employment relationship has deteriorated.

Collective bargaining and dispute management must be treated as one labour-relations continuum: Negotiate, agree, implement, monitor, resolve, learn, and improve. The matters involving Child and Youth Care Workers, Forensic Pathology Managers, and Community Health Workers show how concerns affecting people or thousands of workers can be elevated into collective processes rather than multiplied into individual disputes.

Public-sector collective bargaining cannot ignore fiscal reality. Government must contend with national debt, declining revenue, and competing priorities. Responsible trade unionism must understand the environment in which it bargains. There is an important difference between fiscal discipline and fiscal determinism. The danger arises when budgets are prepared, medium-term priorities settled, and departmental allocations fixed before substantive bargaining begins. If little or no fiscal provision remains for foreseeable outcomes, are parties genuinely bargaining, or negotiating over what is left after the real decisions have already been made?

Collective bargaining cannot be reduced to workers placing demands on the table only to hear that there is no money. If that becomes the default response, collective bargaining risks becoming collective begging. The answer is not to disregard fiscal constraints, but to align bargaining with fiscal and budget planning. Earlier engagement, better information-sharing, and joint planning are essential. Foreseeable bargaining issues should be identified, costed, and considered during the budgeting process. Budget planning must not be blind to collective bargaining, and collective bargaining must not be blind to the budget.

Artificial intelligence, digital service delivery, demographic change and remote work are reshaping employment. Younger workers are entering the labour market with different expectations.

If organising and bargaining models do not evolve at the same pace, collective bargaining risks speaking to yesterday's worker rather than tomorrow's. The task is not only to defend existing rights, but to keep collective protection relevant. Unions and employers must bargain over skills, technological change, job security, career progression, equality, and occupational health and safety. Workers should not lose collective protection because the nature of their work has changed. A strong union is therefore not only one that can mobilise during a dispute. It can organise, research, negotiate, educate, anticipate, and mobilise strategically. Bargaining institutions need the same depth of capacity from negotiators, union representatives, employers and commissioners to the Council, which must interpret and act on patterns emerging from dispute-resolution data.

For the PSA, strength lies not only in the number of workers represented, but in the ability to convert their collective voice into negotiated outcomes, enforceable rights, credible agreements, and sustainable institutional change. This requires evidence, research, costing, strategy and sound judgement about when to mobilise, negotiate, consult, facilitate, conciliate or arbitrate. Responsibility does not lie with labour alone. The state must invest in labour-relations institutions, equip employer representatives with coherent and sustainable mandates, and recognise that collective agreements are commitments to be implemented, not merely documents to be signed. The bargaining council, too, must improve the quality, accessibility and credibility of its processes. It must use data to identify recurring problems, strengthen facilitation and conciliation, improve referrals and preparation, learn from arbitration outcomes, and create stronger feedback loops between dispute resolution and bargaining. When the same dispute keeps returning, the answer cannot simply be to become better at resolving it. We must become better at preventing it. That is the difference between a dispute-resolution institution and a learning institution.

The future of collective bargaining belongs to institutions that can organise, negotiate, prevent conflict, and adapt to change. Collective bargaining gives workers a voice, employers predictability, agreements meaning, and disputes a structured pathway. At its best, it converts conflict into negotiated solutions. The PSA needs a strong bargaining council. The bargaining council needs strong, responsible, and strategically capable trade unions. The employer needs both. Workplace stability is not the absence of disagreement - it is the presence of institutions strong enough to manage disagreement without allowing it to destroy the employment relationship.

Collective bargaining is not the opposite of workplace stability. It is one of the foundations on which workplace stability is built.

At the PSA 2026 Congress, Fedusa called for a stronger, more conscious labour movement to defend dignity today whilst building security for generations to come. Fedusa's General Secretary, Riefdah Ajam, addressed delegates as follows:

South Africa's public servants are carrying an immense responsibility. They keep institutions functioning, sustain essential services, and serve communities under increasingly difficult conditions. Yet they are expected to do more with less whilst rising living costs, economic pressure, and uncertainty erode the security of working families. Against this backdrop, the PSA's 2026 Congress is more than an electoral gathering. It is a moment to take stock, renew democratic mandates, and decide how organised labour will shape the future.

The relationship between the PSA and Fedusa is central to that task. The PSA is not merely an affiliate listed on an organisational chart - it is part of Fedusa's story. Its representatives contribute across the Federation's executive, management, education, social justice, provincial development, and public-sector structures. This is an institutional partnership built through participation, ideas, struggle, and a shared commitment to workers. When one organisation advances, the broader movement gains strength. When workers face injustice, the responsibility is collective.

From responding to crises to building power

Workers cannot pay bills with assurances about fiscal constraints, feed families with promises of future relief or build dignified lives on recognition alone. They need results. That is why trade unionism matters - but the challenge is larger than responding to one dispute after another. The labour movement must organise strongly enough to change the conditions that repeatedly produce insecurity. It must move from managing crises to building lasting worker power.

Fedusa's call to "reclaim and organise the future" captures this shift. Conscious unionism means more than growing membership figures. It means educating workers, developing capable shop stewards, strengthening confident leadership, and taking union knowledge into workplaces and communities.

An informed worker understands rights, institutions and decision-making - but also understands how to organise colleagues and turn solidarity into strategy. Education and capacity building therefore remain amongst the most important foundations of the PSA-Fedusa partnership.

This organising project must include a new generation. Young professionals are entering public service amidst digital platforms, new technologies, changing employment models, and institutions struggling to keep pace. Unions cannot assume that young workers will inherit organisations simply because earlier generations built them. They must create unions in which young workers can see themselves: Organisations that engage meaningfully with unemployment, skills, inequality, poverty, and the just transition. The future of labour will not be secured by nostalgia, but by deliberate recruitment, representation, education, and leadership development.

Dignity at work and in retirement

The defence of dignity also extends beyond the workplace. The PSA, Fedusa's Public Sector Committee, and the wider Federation have played a sustained role in debates on retirement reform, preservation and the Two-Pot Retirement System. Fedusa's support for preservation was not always popular. As far back as 2012, it argued that protecting retirement savings was not an attack on workers, but one of organised labour's most important safeguards. That position required leaders to withstand criticism and act in workers' long-term interests even when the benefits were not immediately visible.

The two-pot system reflects a national effort to balance urgent financial needs with future security. Workers face debt and serious pressure on household finances, and those realities cannot be dismissed. But access to retirement savings must not leave people facing poverty, dependency, and indignity after a lifetime of work. Leadership sometimes requires an uncomfortable truth: Short-term relief cannot come at the cost of long-term security. Defending workers means protecting their dignity in the office, classroom, hospital or government department, and long after they have left the workplace.

Shared programme for renewal

The next chapter of the PSA-Fedusa relationship must be practical. It must deepen cooperation, strengthen organising, invest in education, develop young leaders, defend collective bargaining, and insist that public servants are treated as people whose labour sustains society - not merely as numbers on a payroll. It must also confront austerity, underfunded critical vacancies, and the erosion of public services with evidence, strategy, and coordinated action.

Fragmented responses are inadequate to the challenges ahead. No government, employer or political party can substitute for strong, independent trade union organisation. The responsibility belongs to organised workers themselves.



The movement inherited from previous generations must be handed on stronger: More organised, more conscious, more courageous, more inclusive, and more capable of delivering tangible improvements in workers' lives.

**The promise is clear.
The PSA and Fedusa will
organise for decent work,
fair wages, quality public services,
workers' dignity, social justice, and equality.
Above all, they will organise for the collective
power of workers to shape the decisions
affecting their workplaces, families,
and future.
The future will not organise itself.
It belongs to those prepared
to build it, together.**

PSA 2026 CONGRESS / ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

PUBLIC PROTECTOR OF SOUTH AFRICA (PPSA)



The Public Protector of South Africa, Adv Kholeka Gcaleka, in her message of support to Congress delegates, acknowledged with pride the PSA as the only Union represented at the Public Protector South Africa (PPSA).

Adv Gcaleka described this relationship as being characterised by constructive engagement, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to strengthening the public service.

She pointed out that for the second consecutive year, the PPSA has achieved a 100% performance rating and a clean audit. This achievement was realised under difficult circumstances, and she commended the PSA and the Union's members for their support and contribution.

"I thank you and your members for the work completed under these challenging conditions. Together, we understand how far our partnership has come. Since I began serving as acting Public Protector in 2022, the PSA has consistently demonstrated that organised labour can be a constructive partner in strengthening an institution and improving its performance."

Adv Gcaleka described the PSA's commitment to the professionalisation of the state as particularly important.

"At the heart of our work as public servants is a simple but profound responsibility: We serve the people of South Africa."

"The Constitution reminds us of our collective duty to heal the divisions of the past, advance social justice and human rights, improve the quality of life of all citizens, and build a united and democratic South Africa. To quote the Constitution: 'We, the people of South Africa, recognise the injustices of our past; honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity. We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to heal the divisions of the past.'"

Adv Gcaleka stated that the constitutional promise remains unfinished. "Continuing service-delivery protests, inequality, unemployment, and poverty remind us that much more must be done. Public servants must therefore ask themselves whether they are delivering value for the investment that the people have made in them. Leadership in the public service requires courage. We must refuse to become enablers of corruption, maladministration, and the erosion of good governance. Those entrusted with authority, financial controls, procurement, and administrative responsibilities have enormous power either to protect or to undermine the public interest. We must use that power responsibly. If we look back on 2025 alone, we have had some 250 service-delivery protests across the Country. This says to us when we say we want to address the imbalances of the past, it must not merely be a preamble of the Constitution, but it must become a slogan of each and every one of us in this room and those whom we represent. In fact, when we deliberate we must say as public servants, we want to reduce the number of service delivery protests in our country."

"Poor public service must offend us. When a member of the public arrives at a government office seeking assistance, the attitude and conduct of the public servant must be appropriate. Protecting members' rights must never come at the expense of service delivery or the people who pay our salaries. We must also confront the consequences of corruption beyond our institutions. When public servants abuse their positions for personal gain, they undermine the economy, weaken confidence in the state, and contribute to conditions that affect future generations. Every act of corruption carries a cost far greater than the immediate benefit to the person."

"The power to change the tide in our Country lies with us. It lies in our decisions, our conduct, and our willingness to speak out when we see corruption, maladministration, or systems that fail the people. We must have the courage to be whistle-blowers and to stand for what is right."

Adv Gcaleka further stated: "If you look at the State Capture Commission and even currently the Madlanga Commission, at the end of the day, who remains accountable because of decision-making. It is you as public servants. The ratio versus politicians and you who are being prosecuted, who are being disciplined for malfeasance in State affairs cannot even be equated. 90% or more, it is you who take accountability."

"The PSA can play a critical role in this regard. Audit outcomes, reports by the Public Protector and other Chapter-9 institutions, and concerns about corruption and maladministration must form part of the Organisation's agenda. The PSA has historically distinguished itself through intellectual, factual and legally grounded engagement. Employers should respect and take seriously a Union that is prepared to challenge wrongdoing through facts, evidence and the law. That is how you maintain and grow your membership."

"At the same time, organised labour and employers share a responsibility to develop willing, ethical and capable public servants. Skills and capacity can be developed, but willingness and commitment must come from within. When public servants are intentional about serving their communities, we can improve service delivery and reduce the frustrations that fuel protests. If we do not ensure that the state machinery is well oiled to ignite growth, there will be no measurable changes in the Country."

Adv Gcaleka concluded by saying: "Our responsibility is greater than any one of us. We are building the South Africa that our children and grandchildren will inherit. Let us therefore ensure that our work honours the aspirations of our Constitution and contributes to a public service that is ethical, professional, accountable, and worthy of the people it serves. The future begins with what we choose to do today."