

3 July 2025.

Mr John Steenhuisen,  
Democratic Alliance Federal Leader,  
DA Federal Head Office,  
Cape Town.  
8000

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

**Re: Open Letter concerning the National Dialogue.**

While I was on a working visit to Sri Lanka, I received news that you had announced that the Democratic Alliance would no longer participate in the forthcoming National Dialogue.

As I understand it, this decision derived from the sacking from Government of Mr Andrew Whitfield, a DA member who was serving as Deputy Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition.

You objected to this decision by the Head of the GNU, President Cyril Ramaphosa, saying that the expulsion of Mr Whitfield from Government was "excessive" considering that *'President Ramaphosa had not acted against those implicated in wrong-doing by the Zondo Commission of Inquiry.'*

Later, you said that the *"DA calls on the President (Ramaphosa) to fire (Ministers) Simelane, Nkabane and Mahlobo, and other ANC Ministers implicated in corruption within 48 hours."*

When President Ramaphosa did not act as requested, you said, among others:

*"Frankly, the President cannot even dialogue meaningfully with his own Coalition Partners, so there is little point in pretending there is any substance to an ANC-run National Dialogue..."*

*"Effective immediately, the DA will therefore have no further part in this process. We will also actively mobilise against it...starting with a call on civil society to join us in demanding that the National Dialogue not proceed until*

*President Ramaphosa fires ANC corruption accused and other delinquents from the Executive...*

*"This Dialogue should not proceed until such time as those who are guilty of corruption and maladministration and those who have not lived up to the standards of the Ministerial Handbook are held accountable in the same way that Andrew Whitfield has been done."*

The DA Federal Chairperson, Ms Helen Zille, added to all this during an interview on *Newzroom Afrika*, saying:

*"I believe that (the National Dialogue) is just a cover for the ANC's 2026 Election campaign. So, I have been very opposed to it from the start. It was a very important thing for the DA to say we are not participating in it, and if the DA, as the second largest Party in the country, doesn't participate in it, the whole thing becomes a sham. The whole thing becomes a hollow exercise."*

I am certain that you will understand when I say, as I do, that I assume that you agree with what your Federal Chairperson has said about the National Dialogue.

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

From the foregoing:

- it is clear that you and the DA have serious problems with President Ramaphosa and the ANC concerning the functioning of the GNU, culminating in what you believe was an unjust and unfair removal from Government of Deputy Minister Andrew Whitfield;
- it is also obvious that, despite this, you and the DA decided that you will not withdraw from the GNU; and,
- it is established that *instead*, with the final straw being the sacking of Deputy Minister Whitfield, you and the DA have decided not to participate in the National Dialogue which begins on 15 August 2025.

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

- whether I would agree with such a decision or not, I would have found it logical if you and the DA had decided to withdraw from the GNU; and, to the contrary
- I consider the decision of the DA not to participate in the National Dialogue as both misplaced and very strange indeed, as well as even being against its own very direct interests.

Obviously, I owe you an explanation with regard to these observations.



I must therefore request your time and patience as I try to explain the National Dialogue.

Last year, as we approached the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our country's transition to democracy, many people at home and abroad, asked me to comment on this transition.

Responding to these many requests, I spoke on this matter in a public Address I delivered at *Freedom Park* in Tshwane on 30 April 2024.

During this Address, I said, among other things:

*"...I suggest that to respond to the enormous challenges created by the counter-revolution, our people should convene in **a new and truly inclusive National Dialogue** to answer the question – what is to be done?..."*

*"In this regard I must report that currently I am engaged in serious discussions with a number of our national Foundations because I am certain the country as a whole will benefit greatly from their collective voice on the matter of the National Dialogue I have mentioned."*

In this context, I must inform you that before I delivered this *Freedom Park* Address, and out of courtesy, I decided to alert the Head of State, President Ramaphosa, both that I would be speaking at *Freedom Park* and that I would be making a call for the convening of a National Dialogue.

Whereas I delivered my Address during the afternoon of 30 April 2024, President Ramaphosa addressed a Dinner Gala of the Black Business Council (BBC) during the evening of the same day.

During this BBC Address, President Ramaphosa made some ex-tempore remarks which do not appear in the published text of his remarks. He said, inter alia:

*"...This approach of working together was repeated earlier today by President Thabo Mbeki in a seminal speech which he delivered at Freedom Park where he was reflecting on 30 years of our democracy. He made a key proposal on how we should move our country forward..."*

*"He then said that...to respond to the enormous challenges created by those who intervened negatively, our people should convene a new and truly inclusive National Dialogue to answer the question, what is to be done?..."*

*"I would like to say that I support what President Thabo Mbeki has put forward as a proposal and look forward to working with him and others to engage in a serious discussion about the National Dialogue."*

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

You will recall that when I spoke at *Freedom Park*, I mentioned that I was engaging and would engage some national Foundations on the matter of the National Dialogue.

I would like to explain why I said this.

In April 2016, a number of Foundations in our country met and established what they called the National Foundations Dialogue Initiative (NFDI). In its founding Statement, the NFDI said:

*"The NFDI, drawing on the negotiation experience from our constitutional dispensation was born, came out of extensive consultations among the following Foundations: Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, FW de Klerk, Thabo Mbeki, Helen Suzman, Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy, Umlambo, Chief Albert Luthuli, Kgalema Motlanthe and Jakes Gerwel. The NFDI was officially launched in April 2016 at Constitution Hill."*

It said some of its Objectives were to:

- *"make a call to the nation to enter into a conversation to find lasting solutions to our national problems, and to use such solutions to inform our structures of governance, and the texture of our political, economic and social interactions and operations; and,*
- *"invite organisations of civil society to add their voice in support of the initiative to help mobilise all citizens to participate in the process to determine their destiny."*

It was exactly because I knew of the reality of NFDI that I thought that it would be appropriate to engage our National Foundations on the important matter of the National Dialogue.

And, indeed, I then convened a virtual meeting of the National Foundations and requested that they take over the matter of the National Dialogue, consistent with the objectives set by the NFDI when it was established in 2016.

In this regard, I must explain that the collective of the Foundations had grown since 2016, with the addition of such Foundations as the Steve Biko, Ahmed Kathrada, Kagiso Trust, Dumisani Makhaye, Baleka Mbete, and the Andrew Mlangeni.

Unfortunately, the Helen Suzman Foundation elected to withdraw from this collective of Foundations. It is best placed to explain this decision.

Happily, the National Foundations agreed to take on the task to mobilise for and organise the National Dialogue.



They announced this in a Press Conference they convened on 27 June 2024. In their Statement they said, among others:

*"We, the Foundations that are signatories hereto...call upon the people of South Africa to join in a National Dialogue to reorientate the direction of our nation..."*

*"We, the Foundations as leading social institutions, believe that an urgent, inclusive, citizen-led, national intervention is required to restore the legitimacy, credibility and enhancement of the South African democratic project..."*

*"It is time for every South African to take part in paving a new way forward. We call on all citizens to engage in defining a clear vision and to establish a unifying programme that inspires new national hope. Out of this reflection must arise a renewed commitment to constitutional democracy and the urgency to improve the material conditions of those left behind."*

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

Sometime after the Foundations had held their June 2024 Press Conference, the ANC held one of its regular National Executive Committee (NEC) meetings. One of the items on its Agenda was the National Dialogue.

Of course, the ANC had accepted the idea of a National Dialogue. A proposal tabled at the NEC meeting was that a 'Secretariat' should be established in the State President's Office to organise the National Dialogue.

I attended this ANC NEC meeting.

By this time the Foundations had had fairly extensive contact with the broad spectrum of civil society organisations.

It was therefore possible to advise the ANC NEC that the larger part of civil society would not attend a National Dialogue organised either by the ANC or the GNU.

In this regard, you might have noticed that in their 27 June Statement, the Foundations had spoken of "*an urgent, inclusive, citizen-led, national intervention*".

Precisely because of this, we advised the ANC NEC against any attempt by itself, or the GNU, to try to take over the National Dialogue, and proposed, instead, that if it had any suggestions about any matter related to the National Dialogue, it should engage the Foundations.

Fortunately, the ANC NEC accepted this suggestion.

President Ramaphosa constituted a group of 4/5 persons to engage the Foundations.

I hope that you have seen the Statement issued by the National Dialogue Preparatory Task Team (PTT) last month on 13 June 2025.

Before quoting what the PTT said, I must assure you that later I will explain all relevant matters about this PTT.

This is what it said three weeks ago:

*"The National Dialogue Preparatory Task Team and Working Committees, consisting of over 50 organisations representing Foundations, Non-Governmental Organisations, Community Based Organisations and the Presidency welcome the announcement by the Head of State, President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa on Tuesday, June 10th setting the path forward for the National Dialogue. For the past 9 months, the Foundations and civil society formations have engaged extensively with the Presidency. This was necessary because, whilst we are determined that this should be a citizen-led process, we also recognise that it is only the Head of State who has the mandate in terms of the S.83 of the Constitution to "promote the unity of the nation and do that which will advance the Republic." As Head of State, President Ramaphosa has the responsibility to convene the National Dialogue."*

This Statement includes a number of important points of which you should be aware. Some of these are that:

- the National Dialogue has a Preparatory Task Team (PTT), with a number of Working Committees;
- the PTT has been working with over 50 organisations of civil society;
- the PTT has been engaged in negotiations with President Ramaphosa's envoys for 9 months;
- the PTT believes that sufficient preparatory work has been and will be done to ensure that the National Dialogue begins on 15 August 2025; and,
- the PTT believes that the National Dialogue should have constitutional legitimacy by virtue of its launch by the Head of State, not the Head of Government, relying on Section 83c of the Constitution which says the Head of State "*promotes the unity of the nation and that which will advance the Republic.*"

With regard to these points, I would like to explain that:

I. the National Dialogue PTT is made up of:

- the National Foundations;
- the NEDLAC Executive and Secretariat; and,



- four (4) Presidency officials.

This is the body responsible for all the Preparations for the National Dialogue. It will cease to exist after it has reported to and handed over to the National Convention on 15 August 2025. At that moment, to give expression to the principle and practice of a "**citizen-led**" process, the National Convention will elect a Steering Committee which will lead the National Dialogue from then onwards. Accordingly, what the PTT will table at the National Convention would only have the status of recommendations, which the National Convention will be at liberty to accept or reject.

II. After the 27 June 2024 Press Conference of the Foundations, many civil society organisations approached the Foundations, offering to work with them to organise the National Dialogue. This is why the PTT referred to "*Working Committees, consisting of over 50 organisations...*"

III. During the 9 months in which they engaged in negotiations, the PTT and the President's envoys agreed on everything relating to the National Dialogue. That agreement includes that:

- the PTT, and neither the ANC nor the GNU, will be responsible for the preparations for the National Dialogue;
- at the first meeting of the National Convention, an instrument of the National Dialogue, it will elect a Steering Committee from among its members to lead the National Dialogue; and,
- the Ministry of Finance should provide the funds necessary to hold the National Dialogue, over and above the contributions both cash and in-kind expected from various participants and *constituencies* of this national endeavour.

In fact, the costs of the preparations to date have been borne by the Foundations themselves, while the day-to-day work relating to the National Dialogue has been carried out by volunteers who are committed to building a better South Africa. These are men and women who are ready to lead the way in ensuring that citizens claim their agency.

IV. The Head of State will use his constitutional authority to proclaim the preparations and launching of the National Dialogue. He will otherwise play no executive role in any part of the proceedings of the National Dialogue.

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

I hope that the preceding will have helped you to gain a better understanding of the National Dialogue as it has been conceived and pursued.

Further to help in this regard, I will now provide some additional details about the National Dialogue, based on my briefing by the PTT.

The PTT has decided that participation in the National Dialogue, though the National Convention, will be by 'constituency'. It is likely that there will be at least twenty (20) of these 'constituencies'.

Each 'constituency' will be allocated a number of 'Delegates to the National Convention', which it will select on its own, without any interference by anybody, including the PTT. However, the PTT will demand of each 'constituency' that its delegation must be truly inclusive.

Here are some examples of the 'constituencies' I have mentioned:

- ◆ women;
- ◆ youth;
- ◆ organised labour;
- ◆ business;
- ◆ each Political Party in the National Assembly;
- ◆ other Political Parties;
- ◆ the legislature;
- ◆ the judiciary;
- ◆ the Foundations;
- ◆ faith communities;
- ◆ traditional leaders;
- ◆ traditional healers;
- ◆ academia;
- ◆ the professions;
- ◆ the creative arts;
- ◆ sports;
- ◆ special organisations like the Solidarity Movement; and,
- ◆ specially invited individuals.

As I understand it, the PTT has sent out or will immediately be sending out the requests to the 'constituencies' to choose their delegations, inform the PTT when these will be constituted, and contribute to the Agenda of the National Dialogue.

It is only after the conclusion of this particular process that it will be possible for the PTT to give a definite number of the number of delegates which will attend the National Convention.

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

The PTT will forward to these 'constituencies' the Draft Agenda for the 3-day National Convention which starts on 15 August 2025.

The PTT will also forward *Discussion Papers* to these 'constituencies' to help them prepare for the discussions which will start on 15 August 2025.



All the Official Languages will serve as the languages of the National Dialogue. The necessary translation facilities will therefore be provided.

The PTT will also give some procedural guidelines to help the '*constituencies*' to prepare for the Steering Committee they will have to elect during the sitting of the first National Convention which meets on 15 August 2025.

The PTT will propose to the National Convention that after its 3-day-sitting, it should adjourn to consult the people at the grassroots level, up to the Voting Districts. After this grassroots consultation, the National Convention should reconvene to discuss and adopt its Final Decisions and Recommendations.

Please also understand that the '*Eminent People's Group*', announced earlier by President Ramaphosa, will play the vital role of serving as '*Ambassadors*' of the National Dialogue, acting on the basis of the processes and outcomes of the National Dialogue.

The PTT believes that various matters will arise during the Dialogue which will require action by the Government, without having to wait until the conclusion of the National Dialogue.

For this reason, it requested the establishment of the necessary governmental structure to address this need.

For this reason, the President has constituted an *Inter-Ministerial Committee* (IMC) which will be on stand-by to act on such matters as may be forwarded to it by the National Dialogue.

The PTT has decided that the National Convention will be held at the NASREC Expo Centre in Johannesburg. It has acted to book the Centre for the specified three days, or so, next month in August.

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

I hope that you have by now understood that the National Dialogue, which will start with the National Convention on 15 August 2025, will be a true '*Parliament of the People*', controlled by the people themselves.

This will be the very first time in our country that the people will engage one another in a detailed and comprehensive conversation in exercise of their right to self-determination.

As you can see, the National Dialogue will have absolutely nothing to do with Ms Helen Zille's fertile imagination of an "*ANC's 2026 Election campaign*", or what you called "*an ANC-run National Dialogue...*"

And as you know, Ms Helen Zille's, and therefore presumably the DA's view, is that the absence of the latter from the '*Parliament of the People*' will make the *Parliament* "a sham" and "a hollow exercise".

It is very good that, at last, Ms Helen Zille has openly expressed her eminently arrogant and contemptuous view of the masses of the people, that these cannot think and plan their future correctly, without the DA!

That, presumably, is also the view of the Federal Leader of the DA who must have felt very proud when he announced that "*Effective immediately, the DA will therefore have no further part in this (National Dialogue) process. We will also actively mobilise against it...*"

I hope that in time the DA will explain to the people why it signed up to the commitment in the *Statement of Intent* of the Parties in the GNU that, "*Parties commit to an all-inclusive National Dialogue process...*", whereas, as Ms Helen Zille said, she had "*been very opposed to it (the National Dialogue) from the start.*"

Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

I would like to assure you, without hesitation, that representative delegations of the people of South Africa will convene on 15 August 2025 in a National Convention to begin the long-awaited National Dialogue.

I am also confident that through the instrumentality of the National Convention, including its grassroots consultation, the National Dialogue will make an historic and seminal contribution to the sacred effort to chart the way forward for our country as it strives to extricate itself from a destructive and deeply entrenched general crisis.

Thus, the people will strive to answer in detail, the strategic questions:

- ***what is the South Africa we want: and,***
- ***what is the South Africa we do not want?***

I sincerely hope that all our political leaders and the Parties they lead will recognise the inalienable reality that the people are our country's sovereign authority. This is exactly why our Constitution begins with the words, "*We, the people of South Africa...*"

The ancients were not mistaken when they said – *Vox Populi, vox Dei!*

As I have said, I have no doubt that the DA acts against its own direct interests when it decides to isolate itself from this sovereign authority when the latter decides to engage in a National Dialogue to determine our country's future.



Honourable Mr Steenhuisen,

In 1953 the workers in East Germany, the GDR, engaged in a virtual uprising, demanding various changes in terms of their life conditions, in opposition to certain programmes that had been imposed by the then Government.

Reflecting on this, the eminent playwright and poet, Bertolt Brecht, composed a satirical poem which he entitled '*The Solution*'. The short poem reads:

After the uprising of the 17th June  
The Secretary of the Writers Union  
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee  
Stating that the people  
Had forfeited the confidence of the government  
And could win it back only  
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier  
In that case for the government  
To dissolve the people  
And elect another?

It would seem to me that the DA is also saying that '*the people have forfeited the confidence of the DA*'.

Perhaps the DA's equivalent of the '*Secretary of the Writers Union*' should distribute leaflets along the Nelson Mandela Boulevard in Cape Town, telling the people that they should redouble their efforts to win back the confidence of the DA, or face dissolution!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Thabo Mbeki', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Thabo Mbeki.  
Patron.