

STATEMENT BY THE NATIONAL LEGACY FOUNDATIONS ON OUR WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PREPARATORY TASK TEAM OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE OF SOUTH AFRICA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

08 August 2025

It is with deep regret, but with unwavering conviction, that we have resolved to withdraw our participation from the structures of the Preparatory Task Team and the First National Convention of the National Dialogue scheduled for 15 August 2025. This is due to our belief that core principles meant to underpin the whole National Dialogue have been violated in the rush to host a gathering on 15 August.

We do so not out of apathy or disengagement, but because we remain committed to the belief that all aspects of the National Dialogue must be credible, principled, and anchored in public trust.

We, the undersigned Foundations – representing the legacies of Steve Biko, Chief Albert Luthuli, Thabo Mbeki, Oliver and Adelaide Tambo, FW de Klerk, and Archbishop Desmond and Leah Tutu – have been honoured to serve as custodians of the emerging National Dialogue process. Over the past year, we have committed ourselves to convening a citizen-led, inclusive, and accountable platform to help South Africans confront the deep systemic crises our country faces.

We have committed to this work, keeping at the centre of our contribution the following principles:

- **The National Dialogue must be citizen-led.** It must be a vehicle for all South Africans to engage each other, and to engage across sectors and communities, to build a collective vision and compact for South Africa. It cannot be a government-led process, as this will undermine any credibility.
- **The National Dialogue, and all its various gatherings, must be exemplars of meaningful engagement.** The National Dialogue is *not* a government or public consultation process. It is a collectively owned process of deep engagement with the state of our Nation, and a bringing forth of a collective vision for our future. It must be qualitatively different to any previous attempts at social compacting.
- **The National Dialogue must be inclusive.** At the heart of the planned Dialogue are 13 664 community and sectoral dialogues, 50 000 citizen-led dialogues, mass media engagement, and the opportunity for everyone – every child, adult, young person, and elder – to participate meaningfully.
- **The National Dialogue must be transparent and accountable,** with no space for corruption or mismanagement of funds in its processes.

Prior to making this public announcement we have laid out our principled position with the President and the Eminent Persons Group.

Why We Are Withdrawing from the First National Convention

1. The Erosion of Citizen Leadership

What began as a citizen-led initiative has unfortunately in practice shifted towards government control. In pushing forward for a Convention on 15 August at the will of government officials and against the advice of the Sub-Committee Chairs, we believe that a critical moment in which citizens should be leading will be undermined. The principles and important nature of being a citizen-led process are being sacrificed for the sake of expediency.

2. Loss of a Meaningful Platform for Dialogue

The rushed timeline, constrained logistics, and limited interactive design mean that the proposed Convention no longer offers a meaningful platform for engagement. The structure risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive – more performance than participation. We cannot lend our names to a gathering that does not allow for genuine dialogue.

Furthermore, the National Convention was envisaged as a kick-off event for the real heart of the National Dialogue – community, sectoral, and citizen-led engagement. As yet, there is *no agreed plan* for the roll out of the real Dialogue, and as such the National Convention is premature.

3. Lack of Financial and Operational infrastructure

The continued absence of a confirmed, approved budget allocation, and a last-minute commitment of initial funds has made sound preparation impossible. This raises real risks of a poorly organised and unaccountable process. The push to proceed has created pressure to engage in emergency procurement, which may violate the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA).

The lack of resourcing has affected the logistical readiness for the Convention, but even more so the possibility of it being a substantive and meaningful engagement. Without programmatic, operations, communications and other critical capacity the event will not be a credible launchpad for a truly transformative process for South Africans. We are unwilling to participate in a process that undermines the very principles, governance and accountability values that the Dialogue is meant to strengthen.

4. Strategic Misalignment Within the PTT

There are deep disagreements within the Preparatory Task Team over the nature of the Dialogue, readiness, governance, and risk. Without shared clarity and alignment at the core of the process, moving ahead would be destabilising to the national effort. Unfortunately, this

strategic misalignment revolves around the move away from a citizen-led National Dialogue to a government-led process.

5. Integrity Before Timelines

Fixation on the 15 August date risks turning the Convention into a performative milestone, rather than a meaningful launch of a national process. Deadlines cannot override substance. Dialogue cannot be built on haste.

Our Ongoing Commitment

This decision to withdraw from participating in the Preparatory Task Team and the 15th August First National Convention does not represent a withdrawal from the National Dialogue project itself. We remain committed to the principles under which we have been working –to its vision and its urgent necessity.

To that end:

- We propose the Convention be rescheduled to after 15 October 2025, allowing for adequate preparation, coherence, and participatory integrity.
- We will continue to champion the core principles at the heart of the National Dialogue: that it is citizen-led, and is committed to the fundamental transformation of South Africa for the benefit of all its people. To the extent that the National Dialogue meets these principles, we will continue to be supporters and participants.

Conclusion

The National Dialogue is a generational opportunity to reconnect the people of South Africa to each other and to the democratic project. But we cannot pursue that goal by cutting corners, centralising power, or rushing the process.

We, therefore, withdraw from the Preparatory Task Team and current Convention plans as they currently stand in order to protect the long-term credibility and integrity of the Dialogue. Our commitment to this country and its people remains undiminished and unwavering.

We will be hosting a press conference to share further information.

Issued on behalf of:

- The Steve Biko Foundation
- The Thabo Mbeki Foundation
- The Chief Albert Luthuli Foundation
- The Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation
- The FW de Klerk Foundation

- The Oliver and Adelaide Tambo Foundation
- The Strategic Dialogue Group

*****ENDS*****

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