



## **Input and Opening Remarks by President NUMSA President, Andrew Chirwa at the Global ITF Conference**

**13 March 2023**

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) joins other ITF affiliates in South Africa in celebrating what we regard as a milestone and a watershed conference of our international transport workers' federation. Indeed, we welcome all of you, our comrades and friends all over the globe as delegates. We are very delighted to have been accepted as a new member of this important organisation, the International Transport Federation.

It is important to state upfront that the working class in our country and the working class across the world is under siege from stubborn imperialism and colonialism driven by the greedy capitalist system which, quite frankly, is a system that has demonstrated that it has no solutions for problems that confront humanity. This is why we have no choice but to fight.

In our deep reflection about the strategic importance of this conference, we regard it as a momentary platform in the history of the struggle of the working class where history once more, has imposed a huge responsibility and task on all of us, as affiliates of the ITF, not to be overwhelmed by the devastating attacks both from the capitalist class and their representatives in the bourgeois states. We must use our coming together as a moment to renew our revolutionary credentials and to vow to unite the working class and be prepared to pursue class struggle as the only guarantee for fundamental change in the lives of the working class and the poor.

We are assembling here today to use this conference as a platform to consolidate ourselves, share information, develop strategies and tactics and put together a working-class revolutionary agenda which we should use, as a rallying cry in pursuit of international solidarity, which is a critical pillar of the struggle for **Socialism**.

We need to remind ourselves as a trade union movement of our consistent, ever-relevant slogans, 'each one, teach one', 'united we stand, divided we fall', 'an injury to one is an injury to all', and 'solidarity is forever, for the union it makes us strong'. These slogans give us hope and renewed energy in our mission to liberate ourselves, as a class.

This conference has a duty to reverse the huge collapse of the state and its role in the economy as a result of neo-liberal policies which, through austerity measures, have ruined strategic transport sectors such as rail, road transport, road freight, urban transport, air transport, warehousing and logistics. When transport and infrastructure collapse, it is the working class that pays the highest price.

In South Africa, approximately R7.4 billion was cut from the estimated national expenditure for transport in 2021. The battle we have is to defeat the neo-liberal agenda and its austerity measures and ensure that the state intervenes in the economy and plays a catalyst role in rebuilding infrastructure that has been in the process of collapse and decay in our country. We must campaign to save the jobs of transport workers in this sector which constitutes the backbone of the economy as they carry all other workers and communities to and from work.

These workers and the rest of the working-class in our economy are the producers of wealth. The transport sector must be treated as a public good that must not be commodified. There is no doubt that the transport sector has changed drastically in the recent years. The question remains how do we position ourselves as unions to defend and advance the interest of workers in a fast changing conditions we live in?

NUMSA is very resolute in looking forward to the outcome of resolutions of the various sectors of this conference that are being assembled from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2023. NUMSA will use its revolutionary agenda and its revolutionary programme of action to deliver revolutionary outcomes. The conference will also be a platform to promote worker-to-worker contact and union-to-union contact. The fight back against the bosses and the bourgeois capitalist state by workers on an international scale is the best form of defence, and should be an attitude of mind and a way of life. It is against such a background that we view the strategic importance of this conference.

We chose to characterise it exactly as Lenin would have said,

*“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.”*  
*These words have relevance due to its momentary and timely period in the history of the struggles of the working class in our country and in the world today.”*

As a union, we would have failed in our responsibility if we do not call on this conference to emerge with a resolute stance to make a global clarion call, that the proxy war between NATO and Russia presented as a war between Russia and Ukraine, while in essence it's a war between NATO and Russia led by the empire, the United states of America, this war must end. This is a war driven by greed, this is not a war to advance humanity. We must remain resolute as the working class against any war, because all wars are always fought by the hands of the working class, and it is the blood of the working-class that always shed.

We say 'no' to the U.S. continuous imposition of sanctions onto the people of the world in Cuba, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Iran, and Syria. We remain resolute in standing in solidarity with the people of Palestine in their struggle against the racist, Zionist Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

This conference must come up with strong resolutions that as workers of the ITF, who are members of the global working class, we demand that the war must end. We must refuse to transport any ammunition, arms, or artillery that is destined to fuel the war in Ukraine. This includes staging protest actions in embassies of the US all over the world in our different nation-states. It would seem that we have no choice but to go back to basics in launching militant protests and campaigns led by international transport workers against the NATO-Russia war, led by the greedy bourgeoisie and bourgeois imperialist states.

In our history of struggle pursuing international solidarity, we have a litany of experiences where transport workers have demonstrated their strength on a global scale by standing in solidarity with the international working-class - such as the ILWU in San Francisco refusing to unload cargo from Apartheid South Africa in 1984.

On behalf of the National Union of Metal workers of South Africa, we wish this conference the best, in addressing the challenges that face workers and humanity today.

Solidarity is forever. Amandla!