

CONFERENCE OF THE LEFT

PROPOSED CONFERENCE RULES AND PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

Building a Left Movement for Working-Class and Popular Power

PREAMBLE

The Conference of the Left is conceived as:

- an open-ended political process;
- a space for strategic dialogue and convergence;
- a platform for principled debate;
- a contribution to ongoing mass-based and struggle oriented left renewal; and
- a contribution toward rebuilding working-class and popular power.

The conference recognises:

- the diversity of Left traditions, movements and political experiences;
- the fragmentation and crisis of the Left;
- the importance of democratic, plural, diverse and inclusive participation;
- the need to build genuine consensus, unity and solidarity; and
- the need for both unity and honest disagreement.

The conference therefore seeks to:

- encourage democratic, plural, diverse and inclusive participation;
- promote respectful but rigorous political engagement;
- prevent domination by any single formation or tendency;
- create genuine, meaningful and substantive space for grassroots voices and movement experiences; and
- build a political culture rooted in listening to each other, unlearning, learning anew, solidarity, accountability and collective action.

The conference further recognises that rebuilding Left politics requires not only strategic agreement, but also the rebuilding of democratic political culture itself. The conference therefore commits itself to:

- participatory and feminist democratic practices;
- anti-oppressive engagement;
- collective accountability; and
- political cultures that enable meaningful participation, especially from those historically marginalised within political spaces.

The conference understands that how we engage politically, how we exercise power, and how we treat one another are themselves political questions central to the rebuilding of emancipatory politics.

To assert feminist process in the rules helps the conference to:

- move beyond formal proceduralism;
- integrate feminist and anti-oppressive political culture;
- strengthen democratic participation;
- reduce sectarian degeneration;

- deepen accountability; and
- make the conference more genuinely accessible to movements, women, youth, LGBTQIA+ activists, grassroots organisers, and politically diverse formations.

Most importantly, they help align process, political culture, and socialist-democratic values. That coherence is strategically important for the credibility and future of the process itself.

Further, the feminist process approach adds several important dimensions that are often underdeveloped in the broad left. These are:

- relational political culture;
- active listening;
- emotional and interpersonal accountability;
- participatory facilitation practices;
- consciousness of power dynamics inside the conference itself;
- anti-dominance process; and
- collective responsibility for democratic discussion.

The feminist process framework helps move the rules from procedural democracy alone; toward democratic political culture and democratic political practice. That is an important distinction.

These rules are intended not simply to regulate procedure, but are put forward as a foundation and proposal to help build:

- democratic political culture;
- principled engagement;
- strategic clarity;
- discussion that can lead to concrete action as a basis for unity, solidarity and left renewal; and
- collective responsibility.

SECTION 1 — GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Rule 1: Character of the Conference

The conference is:

- not a parliament;
- not a disciplinary tribunal;
- not a rally; and
- not a platform for organisational competition.

It is:

- a democratic political dialogue;
- a strategic working conference; and
- a space for collective reflection, debate and coordination.

Rule 2: Equality of Participation

All participants have the right to speak, propose, disagree, raise concerns, and participate fully, regardless of organisational affiliation, ideological tendency, gender, age, race, class background, sexuality, religion, disability, or political tradition.

Rule 3: Unity Without Uniformity

The conference recognises that differences exist within the Left, that disagreement is legitimate, and that convergence cannot be forced. The conference therefore seeks principled engagement, democratic dialogue, mutual respect, and strategic cooperation where possible.

No organisation or tendency may claim political ownership of the conference, ideological monopoly, or authority over other formations.

Rule 4: Commitment to Democratic Conduct

Participants are expected to:

- engage respectfully;
- listen seriously;
- avoid personal attacks;
- avoid intimidation;
- avoid sectarian disruption;
- avoid sexual harassment;
- avoid the domination of male voices, patriarchy and heteropatriarchy; and
- contribute constructively.

Political disagreement is encouraged. Personal abuse, harassment and intimidation are prohibited.

Rule 5: Feminist, Anti-Oppressive and Participatory Political Culture

The conference recognises that democratic participation is shaped not only by formal speaking rights, but also by power relations, confidence and experience, gendered dynamics, race and class inequalities, organisational hierarchy, language, and interpersonal conduct.

The conference therefore commits itself to cultivating a political culture rooted in:

- active listening;
- humility;
- mutual respect;
- shared participation;
- accountability; and
- collective learning.

Participants are encouraged to listen seriously to others, create space for quieter voices, avoid dominating discussion, reflect on how power operates within discussions, and contribute toward a democratic and enabling political environment.

The conference recognises that the personal and political are interconnected, that political disagreement need not become hostility, and that strong democratic culture is essential for rebuilding principled Left politics.

Feminist process is a foundational political orientation and not merely behavioural etiquette. It deepens the political meaning of democracy inside the conference.

SECTION 2 — PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

Rule 6: Delegates and Participants

The conference shall consist of:

- delegates from organisations;
- social movements;
- unions;
- community formations;
- youth formations;
- feminist organisations;
- LGBTQIA+ formations;
- environmental justice organisations;
- Left political formations;
- solidarity economy initiatives;
- independent activists;
- intellectuals; and
- invited guests.

Rule 7: Inclusivity and Diversity

The conference commits itself to gender inclusivity, generational diversity, political and ideological diversity, movement participation, working-class representation, and meaningful participation from marginalised communities.

Chairs and facilitators should actively ensure participation from women, youth, grassroots activists, rural participants, informal workers, LGBTQIA+ participants, social movement activists, and other often marginalised voices and constituencies.

Rule 8: Language and Accessibility

Participants should avoid unnecessary jargon, communicate clearly and accessibly, and ensure that discussions remain understandable to a wide diversity of participants.

Facilitators should encourage translation where necessary, the use of the diverse languages spoken by our people, summarisation of complex points, and inclusive communication practices.

SECTION 3 — CONDUCT OF DISCUSSION

Rule 9: Speaking Rights

Participants may speak when recognised by the Chair, within allocated time limits, and in accordance with the discussion process.

Rule 10: Time Limits

Unless otherwise agreed:

- ordinary interventions: maximum 4 minutes;
- responses or clarifications: maximum 3 minutes;
- commission report-backs: maximum 15 minutes.

The Chair may reduce speaking times where necessary to ensure broad participation.

Rule 11: No Domination — Share the Air and Encourage Broad Participation

No organisation, delegation or individual may dominate discussion. Chairs should balance participation, prevent monopolisation, and prioritise voices that are underrepresented.

Participants are encouraged to consciously share discussion space. Those who speak frequently or confidently are encouraged to make room for others, avoid repetition, and contribute toward balanced participation.

Participants should avoid restating points already made unnecessarily, monopolising airtime, interrupting, side conversations, dismissive gestures or reactions, and conduct that discourages participation.

Facilitators and Chairs should actively encourage participation from women, youth, grassroots activists, social movements, LGBTQIA+ participants, and participants who may be less accustomed to formal political spaces.

Participants should engage arguments, political positions, analysis, and behaviour, rather than speculate about motives or intentions. Participants should avoid personal labelling, imputing hidden agendas without evidence, and reducing disagreement to accusations about character or loyalty.

Political disagreement should remain principled, specific, and focused on ideas and political implications.

Participants are encouraged to speak from their own experience, political understanding, and reflection, using formulations such as “I think”, “In my experience”, “I understand”, or “From our organising experience”. This approach helps create openness, dialogue, and mutual political learning.

This rule operationalises feminist anti-dominance practice in concrete terms. It is especially important in Left spaces often dominated by senior leaders, confident male speakers, intellectuals, and organisational cultures of rhetorical competition. It is also critically important for managing sectarianism, avoiding destructive ideological conflict, and building principled political disagreement.

Rule 12: Respectful Disagreement

Participants may challenge arguments, criticise political positions, and raise disagreements robustly. However, personal attacks, insults, intimidation, harassment, discriminatory language, and bad-faith disruption are prohibited.

Rule 13: Political Diversity

The conference welcomes participation from:

- Marxist;
- socialist;
- feminist;
- Pan-Africanist;
- Black Consciousness;
- eco-socialist;
- democratic socialist;
- progressive religious;
- decolonial;
- indigenous knowledge;
- labour;
- community-based; and
- other progressive anti-capitalist traditions.

Participants should engage differences politically and respectfully.

SECTION 4 — DECISION-MAKING

Rule 14: Strategic Orientation Toward Consensus

The conference should seek broad convergence, strategic clarity, collective understanding where possible, maximum consensus, and to enable ongoing post-conference processes and mechanisms for ongoing debate and action as necessary.

Rule 15: Voting

The conference is not primarily a decision-making congress. Voting should therefore be used sparingly and only where necessary. Voting may be used:

- for procedural matters;
- adoption of reports;
- adoption of declarations;
- resolutions where consensus cannot be reached; or
- matters that may not wait for post-conference processes and mechanisms.

Rule 16: Minority Positions

Where significant disagreement exists, minority views should be acknowledged and areas of disagreement recorded respectfully. The conference should avoid artificial unanimity.

SECTION 5 — COMMISSIONS

Rule 17: Role of Commissions

Commissions are strategic working spaces, not mini-rallies, and not organisational caucuses. Their purpose is to deepen discussion, identify strategic proposals, generate campaign ideas, and contribute to the overall conference process.

Rule 18: Participation in Commissions

Participants should contribute substantively, engage constructively, and avoid repetition. Commission Chairs may intervene to maintain focus, redirect discussion, and limit repetitive interventions.

Rule 19: Rapporteurs and Reporting

Rapporteurs must accurately reflect discussion, identify convergence and disagreement, capture strategic proposals, and avoid partisan reporting. Reports should reflect the diversity of views expressed, not artificially suppress disagreement, and identify practical outcomes.

SECTION 6 — CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY

Rule 20: Conflict Resolution

Where tensions arise, Chairs and facilitators should first seek dialogue and de-escalation; participants should be encouraged to clarify misunderstandings; and political disagreements should be addressed politically rather than personally.

Rule 21: Collective Responsibility for Democratic Process

All participants share responsibility for the quality of discussion, the inclusiveness of participation, and the political culture of the conference.

Leadership is understood not only as speaking, persuading, or advancing positions, but also as enabling others to participate, developing collective capacity, and strengthening democratic discussion.

Participants are encouraged to help de-escalate tensions, support constructive engagement, and contribute toward collective political learning. This rule introduces a feminist conception of leadership — enabling others, not only asserting oneself — which is politically important for Left renewal.

Rule 22: Accountability, Reflection and Repair

The conference recognises that mistakes, misunderstandings, insensitive conduct, and harmful interactions may occur during intense political discussion. Participants are encouraged to acknowledge mistakes openly, apologise where necessary, and engage disagreements and harms in a spirit of accountability and repair rather than humiliation or punishment.

The conference seeks to cultivate a political culture in which reflection, growth, accountability, and principled correction are possible without fear of public shaming or exclusion. This shifts the culture from punishment and humiliation toward accountability and political maturity — critically important for coalition politics, Left plurality, and movement-building.

Rule 23: Harassment and Discrimination

The conference prohibits:

- sexism;
- racism;
- homophobia;
- transphobia;

- xenophobia;
- ableism;
- religious intolerance;
- sexual harassment;
- intimidation; and
- abusive conduct.

Participants engaging in such conduct may be warned, asked to apologise, removed from speaking, or removed from the conference in serious cases.

Rule 24: Safe and Democratic Space

The conference commits itself to creating a respectful environment, enabling vulnerable and marginalised voices to participate fully, and ensuring that disagreement does not become hostility or exclusion.

SECTION 7 — MEDIA, DOCUMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Rule 25: Media Engagement

Official conference communication shall be coordinated through designated media and communications structures which will be appointed by the conference in a manner that represents the broad diversity of the conference participants.

Participants may engage publicly but should avoid misrepresentation, avoid spreading misinformation, and avoid attributing positions to the conference that were not agreed.

Rule 26: Social Media Conduct

Participants are encouraged to engage responsibly, share political content constructively, and avoid online harassment or misrepresentation of conference discussions.

Rule 27: Use of Conference Name and Materials

No organisation may claim exclusive ownership of the conference, its logo, its name, or its political outputs. Conference materials should reflect collective ownership, plurality, and democratic participation.

SECTION 8 — DECLARATION, RESOLUTIONS AND OUTPUTS

Rule 28: Nature of Conference Outputs

Conference outputs may include:

- a declaration;
- synthesis reports;
- strategic recommendations;
- campaign proposals;
- working groups and future coordination structures; and
- other decisions in line with the conference objectives and programme.

These outputs should reflect the broad spirit of discussions, acknowledge diversity, and avoid falsely presenting complete agreement where none exists.

Rule 29: Declaration Drafting

The declaration drafting process should reflect commission discussions, incorporate key political themes, and circulate drafts transparently where possible. The declaration should identify convergence, state political commitments, be brief, precise, punchy and aspirational, and outline future directions.

SECTION 9 — POST-CONFERENCE PROCESS

Rule 30: The Conference as Process

The conference is not an end in itself. It should contribute toward:

- ongoing dialogue;
- building unity and solidarity in ongoing and concrete action;
- campaign coordination;
- political education;
- strategic convergence; and
- rebuilding working-class and popular power.

Rule 31: Continuity Structures

The conference may establish:

- working groups;
- coordination platforms;
- thematic forums;
- political education initiatives;
- grassroots consultation, debate and action;
- campaign committees; and
- future assemblies.

Such structures should remain broadly representative and democratic, avoid bureaucratisation, and remain accountable to participating formations.

SECTION 10 — FINAL PRINCIPLES

Rule 32: Political Ethos

Participants are encouraged to approach the conference with seriousness, humility, openness, solidarity, curiosity, and strategic commitment.

Rule 33: Spirit of the Conference

The conference proceeds from the understanding that no single organisation possesses all the answers, the Left must learn anew, and rebuilding collective political power requires dialogue, struggle, experimentation, reflection, democratic practice, and principled cooperation.

The conference therefore seeks to help initiate a renewed culture of Left democratic engagement, strategic coordination, and working-class and popular politics rooted in dignity, justice, democracy and solidarity.