



Conference of the Left Written Submissions

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South African Students Congress
Floor 7, Chief Albert Luthuli House, 54 Pixley Ka Isaka Seme St, Johannesburg, 2001

Introduction

The South African Students Congress (SASCO) submits this contribution to the Conference of the Left in the spirit of revolutionary unity and collective struggle against the social, economic and political crises confronting South Africa. We do so from the understanding that the challenges of poverty, unemployment, inequality, exclusion and underdevelopment are rooted in the contradictions of capitalism and cannot be resolved without a coherent, mass-based and socialist alternative. As a Student movement guided by the Students Charter, SASCO affirms that education is not a neutral sector of society but a critical terrain of ideological, political and economic contestation. The transformation of education, the decommodification of knowledge, and the advancement of the interests of working-class and poor Students are inseparable from the broader struggle for social justice, economic democracy and socialism. It is within this context that we present the following submission, aimed at contributing to the development of a united left programme capable of advancing the aspirations of Workers, Students, Youth, Women and all oppressed People.

Commission #3: Property Relations and the Commanding Heights

The South African Students Congress (SASCO) submits that any genuine transformation of property relations must begin from the understanding that the economic base of South African society remains owned and controlled by a capitalist, mainly white, bourgeoisie, despite the democratic breakthrough of 1994. As articulated in our ideological discussion document, the economic base, including the forces, means, and relations of production, still determines the superstructure, including the state, legal institutions, and the ideological apparatus of education. The commanding heights of the economy; mines, banks, monopoly industries, and major private equity; remain in private hands. This structural reality explains why university councils, which govern higher education, are chaired overwhelmingly by corporate executives, bank leaders, and mining capital representatives. As long as the bourgeoisie controls production and the state apparatuses (including the ideological state apparatus of education), higher education will remain a mechanism for producing compliant, exploited labour rather than a public good for social emancipation.

SASCO welcomes the passage of the Land Expropriation Act as a critical weapon to restructure property relations. However, we argue that the programme of expropriation must extend beyond land to include Student accommodation and other assets controlled by private capital. Our Funding Model memorandum explicitly states that private landowners, who outsource Student housing from university councils, profit exorbitantly while Students suffer booking fees, upfront payments, and unsafe conditions. SASCO therefore deposits that the state use expropriation powers to take private Student residences and dilapidated buildings, converting them into state-owned Student Villages as part of the broader restructuring of property relations. Furthermore, we reaffirm our call for the nationalisation of mines and other strategic heights of the economy, including mineral resources and commodity export surpluses, as the primary seed capital for a South African Sovereign Wealth Fund (SASWF). This



fund must be constitutionally mandated to invest in free, quality, transformed higher education as a developmental service, alongside Healthcare, Housing, Food Security and potentially Universal Basic Income. Without transferring ownership of the commanding heights from the bourgeoisie to the People, free education will remain an unfulfilled promise. The struggle for property relations is the struggle for the material base that makes free education possible.

Commission #6: Climate, Energy Sovereignty, and a Worker-led Just Transition

SASCO submits that the demand for climate justice and energy sovereignty is inseparable from the struggle against capitalism and the commercialisation of public goods. Pillar 5 of the Students' Charter explicitly demands that "*Campuses must be clean, healthy, sustainable and energy efficient*". This is not merely an environmental slogan but a direct challenge to the current energy crisis, which is rooted in the profit-driven failures of privatised, coal-dependent monopolies. A worker-led just transition means that energy sovereignty must be reclaimed as a public good: campuses must be retrofitted with state-funded solar and renewable micro-grids, moving off the apartheid-era fossil fuel grid. Furthermore, SASCO insists that any transition must be worker-led, not corporate-led, ensuring that mineworkers and energy sector workers are not abandoned but retrained and redeployed into a publicly owned renewable energy sector. The Student movement stands with organised labour to demand that universities and TVET colleges become demonstration sites for a post-colonial, sustainable, and publicly owned energy future, where Students graduate alive on a liveable planet.

Commission #7: Safety, Security and Organised Community Power

SASCO submits that genuine safety and security for Students cannot be achieved through increased policing, private security contracts, or gated campus enclaves, which only commercialise and militarise our institutions. This pattern is identical to that seen in our communities, where crime and violence are met with policing and privatised security for those who can afford it, and not systemic change. Instead, safety must be built through organised community power rooted in the principles of the Students' Charter. Pillar 2 declares that "*All students shall be free from violence, sexual assault, rape, gendered violence, and danger of any kind*", while Pillar 5 demands that "*The students shall graduate alive*". These are not individual protections but collective mobilisation mandates. SASCO views the Students' Charter itself as a platform to organise Students into active political agents who, alongside workers and surrounding communities, can establish democratic safety committees, survivor-centred accountability structures, and community-led patrols that challenge patriarchal violence and criminal neglect. Institutional autonomy has allowed university councils to prioritise legal liability, and property protection over Student wellbeing. Therefore, organised community power, in our case rooted in Student-Worker solidarity, must reclaim safety as a public, democratic good, replacing corporate security with collective care, political education, and the dismantling of the violent conditions that colonialism and capitalism have embedded on our campuses and in our hostels. The Charter is our weapon to organise, and through organised power, we will make every campus a genuine zone of safety and dignity.



Commission #8: Youth and Women's Economic Participation

SASCO submits that meaningful economic participation for youth and women cannot be achieved through piecemeal entrepreneurship programmes or skills training alone. The Students' Charter provides the comprehensive, revolutionary framework for economic emancipation. Pillar 1 of the Charter demands "Education shall be free and open to all" and "Student debt shall be scrapped", because debt is the primary mechanism that excludes working-class and female youth from entering the economy. SASCO presents that Institutions of Higher Education should use their reserves to carry the burden caused by the economic systems, including historical debt, created through institutional autonomy. Pillar 4 declares "Employment after education shall thrive", mandating "mandatory employment, internship, and placement support" and that "Internships and graduate programmes in both private and public sectors shall be set aside for the immediate benefit of graduates". Without these structural guarantees, youth, and particularly young women, remain trapped in precarious labour or unemployment regardless of their qualifications. Furthermore, Pillar 3's demand for a "transformed and decolonised curriculum" directly addresses the epistemic exclusion that funnels Black women and disabled youth into low-pay economic roles while reserving professional, technical, and managerial positions for those who can afford elite, Eurocentric education. The Charter therefore insists that economic participation begins with dismantling the debt trap, guaranteeing post-graduation pathways, and decolonising the knowledge economy itself.

SASCO's previous research and reports provide a scathing diagnosis of why women's economic participation remains structurally obstructed. Women, and People in the LGBTQIA+ Community, bear additional burdens rooted in patriarchal labour patterns. Many contribute to household income, perform unpaid domestic work or care for children and siblings. These responsibilities intensify the gendered dimensions of poverty, revealing the patriarchal blind spots within institutional funding models. Furthermore, Students and People with disabilities face additional financial demands related to medical care, assistive devices, mobility services and specialised accommodation. Funding frameworks remain largely unresponsive to these needs. Therefore, SASCO insists that any serious discussion of youth and women's economic participation must begin by recognising that poverty is largely influenced by gender and ability, that unpaid care work is unrecognised labour, and that disability is systematically unfunded. The current funding architecture of NSFAS, which for many serve as the primary tool of economic emancipation through access to education, and institutional bursaries, to a lesser extent, assumes a male, able-bodied, unencumbered student who does not have caregiving responsibilities. This assumption systematically excludes young mothers, queer youth providing for siblings, and disabled women from completing their studies and entering the formal economy. Economic participation is impossible when the conditions for participation are designed for the privileged few.

SASCO's identified funding model make clear that youth and women's economic participation cannot be achieved through neoliberal appeals to "resilience" or "entrepreneurship" within an unchanged property relations system. Our National Policy Conference held in 2025 resolved that "the top 1% in the South African



populous has accumulated the wealth of the bottom 90%" and that "progressive taxation can exist in two forms: a Higher Education tax (5-10%) or a broader wealth tax (extra 10-15% on the top 5%)". SASCO submits that a wealth tax is the only short-term mechanism sufficient to fund the full-cost-of-study for all working-class and women Students in the intermediate, including the hidden costs of childcare, transport, assistive devices, and mental health support that are currently excluded from funding models. The Sovereign Wealth Fund (SASWF), seeded through the nationalisation of mines and farms, amongst other, must have a dedicated ring-fenced allocation for Student's access to postgraduate studies and technical vocational training, breaking the glass ceiling that reserves engineering, data science, and other fields for male-dominated elites.

SASCO submits that any left movement cannot credibly demand economic participation for women and youth in the broader economy while reproducing patriarchal, ableist, and exclusionary practices internally.

SASCO's input, derived from the Students' Charter is as follows:

- Access and Retention: Free education for all, thus ensuring women, queer, Students with disabilities, Students from working-class and rural backgrounds, access and succeed in Education, thus promoting economic emancipation of all People, including Women and Youth
- Post-Graduation Employment: Mandatory, legislated internship and graduate placement quotas for women and disabled youth in the public sector, as demanded by Pillar 4 of the Charter. This must include binding sanctions for non-compliance, enforced through amended Skills Development Act provisions.
- Funding: The immediate scrapping of historical student debt, using institutional reserves as public capital, as debt is a primary barrier to economic participation for generations of Black women graduates who remain excluded from credit, housing, and further study due to bursary clawbacks and registration blocks.
- Curriculum and Skills: The transformation and development of TVET and university curricula to integrate African, leftist, feminist and progressive knowledge systems, ensuring that women and disabled youth are not confined to feminised, low-wage sectors but have genuine access to engineering, data science, renewable energy, and financial management.
- Accountability: Annual public reporting by every institution on gendered and disability-disaggregated economic outcomes: graduation rates, postgraduate enrolment, internship placement rates, and graduate employment by sector and salary band. SASCO also suggests an independent Higher Education Ombudsman through amending the Higher Education Act, must have the power to investigate and sanction institutions that systematically exclude women and disabled youth from economic pathways.

SASCO submits that youth and women's economic participation is not a technical problem of "skills gaps" or "employability". It is a structural contradiction of a capitalist, patriarchal, and ableist economy that requires the working class to be disciplined by debt, the care work of women to remain unpaid, and the bodies of disabled youth to



be treated as exceptions rather than the norm. The Students' Charter is the weapon forged through decades of struggle. It provides the programme: free education, scrapped debt, transformed curriculum, guaranteed employment, and democratic ownership of institutions.

We strongly suggest that this Commission affirms the Students' Charter as the authoritative framework for youth and women's economic participation. We demand the redistribution of wealth from the bourgeoisie to the working class. We demand that every young Black woman, every queer youth, every disabled Student, and every rural child is guaranteed not only access to education but the material conditions to complete it and the economic justice to thrive beyond graduation. The doors of learning and of culture shall open, not as a privilege for the few, but as a right for all. And when those doors open, the economy itself must be transformed.

Commission #10: International Solidarity

SASCO submits that international solidarity is not a peripheral activity but the Fourth Pillar of Struggle, standing alongside mass mobilisation, underground organisation, and armed operations as a decisive force that secured our own liberation. Today, that pillar is being rebuilt through the **Fourth Pillar of Struggle Petition**, a national, Student-Worker driven campaign launched jointly by SASCO and several partners including the YCL, COSATU, and campus-based Student Societies. This petition is the concrete, programmatic expression of SASCO's International Relations Policy, which commits the organisation to unwavering opposition to all forms of foreign domination, economic exploitation, military aggression, and neo-colonial control.

The petition currently circulating on campuses demands that all South African universities, TVET colleges, and private higher education institutions publicly condemn and sever all academic, financial, research, and institutional ties with four specific regimes and entities implicated in grave violations of international law:

- i. the Israeli state and Zionist institutions, for genocide and apartheid against the Palestinian people;
- ii. the United Arab Emirates for fuelling war crimes and mass displacement in Sudan;
- iii. the Kingdom of Morocco for the illegal occupation of Western Sahara; and
- iv. the Mswati regime and Swazi Royal institutions in eSwatini for the brutal suppression of democratic rights.

The petition draws a direct line between the forces that commodify education and exploit South African Students and Workers and those that sustain war, occupation, and repression globally. It recalls with deep gratitude that the Palestinian people stood in solidarity with South Africans during our anti-apartheid struggle, and it insists that we honour that debt through reciprocal action.

SASCO recommends that this Commission endorse the Fourth Pillar of Struggle Petition as the flagship international solidarity programme of the Student movement for 2026. We call on all progressive formations to sign the petition, to mobilise on campuses, and to pressure university councils to abandon so-called "strategic silence"



and adopt ethical international partnership policies rooted in justice, decolonisation, and international law.

The petition link is as follows: <https://c.org/BhVfgQqSBy>

