



Professionals' League Position Paper to the National General Council of the African National Congress

1. From Forum to League: A Strategic Imperative for ANC Renewal

The African National Congress (ANC), in its historical capacity as a broad multi-class movement, has always drawn strength from its ability to represent a wide spectrum of South African society. The recent consideration to establish a Professionals Forum is a commendable and necessary acknowledgment that a critical component of society, the professionals and intellectuals, require dedicated and structured engagement, in order to derive mutual benefit for both the ANC and this stratum.

While this step is laudable, the ANC's current political reality, marked by declining electoral support, widening social distance between the leadership and the people, and complex governance challenges, demands a far bolder and more strategic intervention. A mere forum, with its inherent limitations, is inadequate for the task at hand in the current context.

Furthermore, strategic moves, such as establishing a professionals' body within the ANC, are as much about the "what" as they are about the "when".

While laudable, the realisation and the decision to accommodate professionals within the ANC as a niche grouping is rather delayed, and the material reality and political conditions in our cities and urban areas, where professionals reside, have shifted significantly over the last decade. The African National Congress suffered a devastating loss of several metros in 2016 LGE, and has never recovered, pointing at an eroding electoral base in urban areas (where professionals reside).

Over the last two National Government Elections, 2019 and 2024, the ANC has declined by close to 25% at the polls since 2014. The organization's social currency and public trust is heavily damaged, and these are the factors that must inform and guide the ANC's approach when considering enhancing the party's relationship with professionals. The ANC is not as attractive as it used to be and needs to have an honest diagnosis of where it is in order to define correctly, the form and shape in which it seeks to relate to, and attract professionals.

A mere Professionals' "Forum" inside the ANC is certainly the worst version of this relationship could be pursued.

Notwithstanding the fact that the ANC no longer commands an uncontested status as the leader of society, with multiple national discourses currently driven by other elements or organisations outside, the party remains a genuine hope for advancing socio-economic status and the human condition for the majority of the people, Black people in general, and Africans in particular. This is certainly confirmed by the fact that since the advent of democracy, ANC has been supported by more than 70% of African voters, compared to less than 10% of White voters. Africans have pinned their dreams and aspirations on the ANC for over 3 decades.

The ANC should leverage its continuing, albeit diminishing, influence in society to either **(1)** become the catalyst that drives the consolidation of all organized progressive professional associations and forums to form a single large block that will independently and autonomously relate to the ANC, almost in "Alliance" format and help provide objective and scientific advice and contribution to drive service delivery and global competitiveness; or **(2)** endorse the establishment of a fully-fledged, constitutionally recognized Professionals' League, endowed with the autonomy and authority to meaningfully contribute to the movement's renewal agenda, as initially envisioned by professionals themselves, in 2018; or **(3)** considers doing both.

August 2025, marked the seventh anniversary since the launch of the Professionals' League, initially envisioned to reside within the African National Congress, as a consolidation of intellectual gravitas and professional expertise, to capacitate the then governing party with the necessary skills, experience and foresight to reimagine South Africa, dismantle the systemic architecture we inherited from Apartheid that continues

to propagate poverty amongst Black people, and carve out a shared future in which all South Africans are committed to equality and equitable distribution of our plentiful but limited resources.

The Professionals's League had identified the following **Triangular Objectives** as the guiding focus of the organisation:

1. **Objective 1:** Consolidate a highly educated skills base and intelligentsia to advance the agenda of the African National Congress, through providing scientific and evidence-based mechanisms to implement the organization's aims and objectives across the whole of society. – **The Implement Objective**
2. **Objective 2:** Address labour-related needs and challenges facing professionals, and deal with the slow pace of "qualitative transformation" within corporate South Africa. – **The Serve & Defend Objective**
3. **Objective 3:** Position the cosmopolitan outlook of professionals as leverage for recruiting all racial groups to the ANC and advancing the vision of a truly non- racial South Africa. – **The Recruit Objective**

Drawing wisdom from the evolution of other leagues that have come before us, such as the Congress Youth League and Bantu Women's League, who opted not to use the name of the ANC until such a time that they were formally approved at a National Conference, we have taken an informed decision not to incorporate "ANC" in our operational name and any branding collateral, until such a time that such permission is officially accorded to us. To this end, the Professionals' League, has since been officially registered as an NPO, which continues to advance the agenda and role of professionals in society.

1.1 The Urgent Need for Engagement in an Era of Decline

The decision to formally organize the middle strata is not happening in a vacuum. It comes at a time when the ANC's connection with this very group is visibly fraying, with significant political consequences. The party's own analysis in the National General Council (NGC) Base Document for 2025 concedes that disillusionment has grown among professionals due to corruption and poor governance, leading to a "drift of this group towards apathy or even opposition parties". This is not a trivial matter; it is an existential threat.

As the 2018 proposal for an ANC Professionals' League (ANCPL), now rebranded without the use of the party's name to Professionals' League, correctly identified, the loss of support in the 2016 Local Government elections demonstrated a worrying decline in the ANC's urban base, a trend directly linked to the disengagement of

professionals. This stratum consists of opinion-makers, skilled individuals essential for public and private sector functionality, and a significant portion of the tax base. Their growing alienation fuels the narrative that the ANC is primarily a rural movement, out of touch with the aspirations of modern, urban South Africa.

The NGC document further notes the precarious economic position of many in the black middle class, who fear "falling back to whence they came" and blame the ANC for this instability. Engaging them is therefore not just an electoral strategy but a core part of fulfilling the National Democratic Revolution (NDR).

1.2 The Inadequacy of a Forum

Our collective experience to modernize and renew the African National Congress is not a mere expedient part of the popular parlance of the current organisational renewal agenda, but dates back to several bold initiatives and campaigns in the past such as the Young Professionals' Forum (YPF) which was incorporated into the establishment of the Progressive Professionals Forum (PPF), which had to be formed leveraging the Progressive Professionals' Network (PPN) that was dominant in KwaZulu Natal. We also drove the formation of the Progressive Youth in Business (PYB) which drove significant participation of young entrepreneurs into the main market.

While a forum, as suggested by the ANC NGC Discussion Documents, is a step towards engagement, it is ultimately a half-measure that fails to address the core issues preventing professionals from participating fully in the life of the movement. A forum, by its nature, often lacks the structural autonomy and authority required for impactful work. Key weaknesses include:

- **Limited Autonomy:** Forums are typically established by, and report to, a specific office within the ANC's Top 7. This structure subjects their agenda and existence to the whims and political interests of an individual leader, rather than allowing for a mandate derived directly from its constituency.
- **Susceptibility to Manipulation:** This lack of independence makes a forum vulnerable to being used as a tool in factional battles, rather than a vehicle for harnessing professional expertise for the benefit of the entire organization. The ANC's own documents acknowledge the destructive nature of "endemic factionalism"; a dependent forum can easily become another casualty or instrument of these internal divisions.
- **Ineffectiveness:** The engagement provided by ad-hoc structures is often superficial. The ANCPL founding document dismisses the "ad hoc summits and gala dinners the ANC hosts with professionals" as a "waste of resources and precious time," arguing for a more permanent and integrated structure. Without

constitutional recognition, a forum cannot elect its own leadership from the ground up or send voting delegates to national conferences, rendering its voice advisory at best and irrelevant at worst.

1.3 The Compelling Case for a Professionals' League

To truly reverse the decline and harness the immense potential of the professional class, the ANC must establish a Professionals' League with a constitutional status similar to that of the Youth, Women's, and Veterans' Leagues. Such a structure would offer unparalleled strategic advantages:

1. **Constitutional Authority and a Real Voice:** A league would have its own constitution, hold elective conferences from branch to national level, and, most importantly, have constitutionally mandated representation at the ANC's National Conference. This grants professionals a direct, powerful, and legitimate voice in shaping party policy, leadership selection, and strategic direction.
2. **Harnessing Skills for Renewal:** A league would provide a structured mechanism to address the ANC's internal capacity challenges. The ANCPL proposal envisioned a "highly educated skills base" that could assist with credible research, policy formulation, and even volunteer time to improve the administration of the party at all levels. This moves professionals from being passive donors to active participants in the renewal project.
3. **Championing Transformation:** A league can directly address the "peculiar needs" and workplace challenges facing professionals, such as the slow pace of transformation in corporate South Africa and discrimination in post-graduate studies. By becoming a vanguard for professionals, the ANC would demonstrate its relevance to their daily material conditions, moving beyond historical sentiment.
4. **Advancing Non-Racialism:** Professionals operate in cosmopolitan environments and often share similar lifestyles and frustrations across racial lines. A Professionals' League would provide a strategic platform to recruit members from all racial groups, leveraging this shared identity to substantively advance the ANC's vision of a truly non-racial South Africa.

The ANC stands at a critical juncture. To reinvigorate its urban support, enhance its governance capacity, and renew its claim as a leader of all society, it must do more than simply acknowledge its professional base, it must empower it. A Professionals Forum is a tentative gesture; a **Professionals' League is a strategic imperative**. It is a bold, structural reform that would institutionalize the voices and skills of a vital constituency, turning apathy into active participation and transforming a critical weakness into a formidable strength for the journey ahead.

2. Learning from the Adversary: Adapting AfriForum's Methods for Progressive Transformation

To truly revitalize the Mass Democratic Movements' connection with society and drive the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), the Professionals' League must be more than an internal structure; it must become a dynamic force in civil society.

Paradoxically, the most potent lessons for how to achieve this come not from allies, but from one of its most organized ideological opponents: AfriForum. While the ANC's base documents rightly identify groups like AfriForum as "forces resisting transformation" that push back against policies like affirmative action, their organizational effectiveness, strategic discipline, and community-level mobilization offer a powerful blueprint that, if adapted, can be used to advance genuine economic and political liberation for South Africa's black majority.

2.1 Strategic Litigation for Social Justice

AfriForum has masterfully used the legal system to protect and advance the interests of its constituency, often challenging government policies it deems harmful. The Professionals' League can and must co-opt this strategy for a progressive agenda such as advancing radical economic transformation, deepening employment equity in corporate South Africa, and repudiating all the imbalances of Apartheid that continue to alienate Black people in the country of their origin.

2.1.1 Lawfare as a tool for change

The Progressive Adaptation: The League should establish a **Progressive Legal Action Network**, comprised of its member lawyers, advocates, and legal academics. This unit would move beyond defensive legal battles to proactively use the constitution to drive transformation. Its mandate would include:

- Launching class-action lawsuits against industries that fail to meet transformation targets or engage in anti-competitive behavior.
- Using constitutional litigation to compel municipalities to deliver basic services like water, sanitation, and electricity, thereby directly addressing the failures that alienate urban voters.

- Challenging discriminatory practices in corporate South Africa, providing legal support for professionals facing racism and a lack of "qualitative transformation" in the workplace.
- Acting as a legal watchdog against corruption, taking public officials and private entities to court to recover stolen funds.

Through weaponizing the law for social justice, the League would demonstrate its commitment to tangible change, leveraging the very framework of the democratic state to hold it accountable to its foundational promises.

2. Grassroots Mobilization Through Tangible Delivery

A key source of AfriForum's strength is its focus on hyper-local, practical issues that affect its members' daily lives, such as community safety and infrastructure repair. This "do-it-yourself" ethos builds immense loyalty. The ANC's own documents acknowledge that its links with communities have "frayed". The Professionals' League can repair this breach through action.

2.1 Solve people's immediate problems

The Progressive Adaptation: The League should create **Professional Volunteer Corps** organized by sector. This would involve for example:

- **Engineers, architects, and town planners** volunteering their weekends to help communities identify and fix failing infrastructure, from potholes to water leaks.
- **Doctors, nurses, and psychologists** establish mobile clinics in underserved townships and rural areas to provide basic healthcare and mental health support.
- **Accountants and financial managers** running workshops for small black-owned businesses and cooperatives, helping them with compliance, bookkeeping, and access to finance.
- **IT professionals** setting up coding clubs and digital literacy programs for the youth, giving them a "stake in social upliftment" and equipping them for the modern economy.

This model of active citizenry would not only deliver immediate and visible results but would also fundamentally rebuild trust. It would show communities that the ANC's skilled

members are not an aloof elite but are deeply invested servants of the people, willing to use their expertise to build a better life for all.

3. Winning the Battle of Ideas with Proactive Narratives

AfriForum is incredibly effective at shaping public discourse, both domestically and internationally, by consistently amplifying its worldview through a sophisticated media machine. In contrast, the ANC concedes its own messaging has been "poor," "incoherent," and "reactive," causing it to lose ground in the "battle of ideas".

This would shift the ANC from a defensive crouch to a confident and forward-looking posture, reasserting its role as the leading moral and intellectual voice for progressive change in South Africa. By adopting these strategies, the Professionals' League can transform itself from a mere internal caucus into a powerful engine for societal transformation, proving that the most skilled and educated members of the black majority are not detached from the struggle, but are, in fact, its most critical vanguard for the next phase.

3.1 Own the narrative

The Progressive Adaptation: The League must become the ANC's intellectual and communications vanguard by establishing a **Progressive Narrative and Research Unit**. This unit, staffed by professional researchers, marketers, journalists, and data scientists, would:

- Counter right-wing misinformation with credible, evidence-based research and data.
- Translate complex ANC policies into compelling and accessible content for various audiences, especially the youth and urban professionals who are active on digital media.
- Proactively celebrate the gains of democracy and the successes of transformation, drowning out the narrative of failure.
- Develop and wage sustained campaigns around key issues like non-racialism, gender equality, and economic justice, making the intellectual and moral case for the NDR in a way that resonates with contemporary society.

4. Reviving Pan-Africanism: The Professionals' League as the Vanguard of the ANC's Renewed International Agenda

The African National Congress has a rich history of internationalism, forged in the crucible of the anti-apartheid struggle and built on profound relationships with allies across Africa and the Global South. From the frontline states to Cuba, Russia, and the Nordic countries, this global solidarity was a cornerstone of the liberation project. However, the ANC's own analysis now concedes that in the democratic era, its influence in continental affairs has "waned".

To reclaim its role as a "champion of African interests on the global stage," the movement needs more than just state-level diplomacy; it needs a dynamic, skilled, and ideologically coherent engine to drive its agenda. The Professionals' League is uniquely positioned to be this engine, transforming the ANC's foreign policy from rhetoric into a tangible force for continental peace, stability, and development.

By leveraging the specialized skills of its members, the Professionals' League can revive the ANC's internationalist tradition. It can move foreign policy out of government boardrooms and into the realm of tangible action, re-establishing the ANC not just as the leader of South Africa, but as a principled and effective champion for a peaceful, prosperous, and truly independent African continent.

4.1 Economic Diplomacy for a Prosperous Africa

Africa's continued struggle against underdevelopment requires a fundamental shift away from neo-colonial economic patterns. The Professionals' League can spearhead this shift by leveraging its expertise to drive a new model of economic diplomacy.

- **Pan-Africa Professionals' Network (PAPN):** would serve as the primary institutional vehicle for realizing a renewed Pan-African and South-South international agenda. This transcontinental structure's strategic mission is to systematically harness the immense intellectual capital of African professionals, both on the continent and within the global diaspora, transforming the debilitating "brain drain" into a coordinated "brain gain." By creating a unified platform for lawyers, engineers, economists, scientists, and academics, the network's core purpose is to pool high-level expertise and deploy it in support of key continental objectives. This includes providing technical and policy support for the African Union's Agenda 2063, driving the successful implementation of the AfCFTA, and

building a cohesive intellectual vanguard capable of developing and championing African-led solutions for peace, stability, and sustainable development.

- **Championing the AfCFTA:** The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a cornerstone of Africa's development agenda, yet its implementation is complex. The League's economists, trade lawyers, and logistics experts can form a dedicated **AfCFTA Task Team**. This team would work with government and business to identify and remove trade barriers, develop regional value chains, and ensure South Africa's industrial policy aligns with continental integration, thereby reducing "dependency on extractive global markets".
- **Driving Strategic Investment:** The League's financiers and business leaders can move beyond traditional diplomacy to actively court and structure "mutually beneficial" investment partnerships with allies in BRICS, Latin America, and the Middle East. Instead of just seeking capital, they can structure deals that include technology transfer, skills development, and local beneficiation, ensuring that foreign investment contributes directly to Africa's industrialization and development goals.

4.2 Building a Robust Peace and Security Architecture

The ANC has a legacy of contributing to peace and security on the continent, but this requires constant intellectual and technical reinforcement. A Professionals' League can provide the specialized skills needed to strengthen Africa's capacity for conflict resolution.

- **A Cadre for Peace:** The League can establish a **Peace and Reconstruction Cadre**, a roster of professionals, including lawyers, mediators, security analysts, and post-conflict governance experts, who can be deployed to support AU and SADC peace missions. They can offer technical expertise in drafting peace accords, demobilization programs, and constitutional reforms, institutionalizing an "African-led solution" to continental conflicts.
- **Intellectual Leadership on Security:** This cadre would also function as a think tank, analyzing emerging security threats like extremism and foreign interference and developing progressive policy responses that prioritize human security and development over purely militaristic approaches.

4.3 Reclaiming Intellectual Leadership and Fostering South-South Solidarity

The current global shift towards a multipolar world presents a historic opportunity for the Global South, but this can only be seized with intellectual clarity and strong alliances. The League must become the intellectual heart of the ANC's international work.

- **A Hub for Progressive Thought:** The League can host regular **Pan-African and Global South Dialogues**, bringing together intellectuals, activists, and policymakers from allied nations to develop a shared, post-neoliberal development agenda. This would revive the ANC's historical role as a center of revolutionary thought and strengthen its alliances in forums like BRICS and the G77.
- **Practical Knowledge Exchange:** The League can facilitate concrete, people-to-people partnerships that move beyond statecraft. This would involve creating networks where South African doctors collaborate with Cuban medical brigades, engineers learn from Chinese infrastructure projects, and agricultural scientists work with Brazilian experts on food security. This practical solidarity builds deep, resilient relationships and directly transfers the skills needed for development.

5. Executive Conclusion: The Strategic Imperative for a Professionals' League

The African National Congress stands at a defining historical juncture, facing a widening social distance between leadership and the people, and a significant erosion of electoral support in urban centers. The time for tentative gestures is over; the current political reality demands a bold structural intervention rather than a "mere forum," which lacks the autonomy and authority to effect genuine change.

To reverse the decline and successfully implement the National Democratic Revolution in a modern context, the ANC must transition from a loose engagement of professionals to the establishment of a constitutionally recognized **Professionals' League**.

This strategic evolution rests on three critical pillars:

- **Institutional Empowerment:** Unlike a forum vulnerable to factionalism and ad-hoc management, a League provides a stable, autonomous structure with voting representation at the National Conference, allowing professionals to directly influence policy and leadership selection.

- **Active Citizenry & Modernized Struggle:** By adapting disciplined strategies from civil society, the League will move beyond rhetoric to tangible delivery. This includes establishing a **Progressive Legal Action Network** to wage "lawfare" for social justice , a **Professional Volunteer Corps** to fix infrastructure and provide healthcare , and a **Narrative and Research Unit** to win the battle of ideas.
- **Pan-African Intellectual Leadership:** The League will operationalize the ANC's internationalist legacy by converting the "brain drain" into a "brain gain," deploying technical expertise to drive the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and peace missions, thereby reasserting the ANC as a champion of the Global South.

The proposal to establish the Professionals' League is not merely an organizational reshuffle; it is a mechanism to turn the apathy of the middle strata into active participation. By empowering the "highly educated skills base" to act as a vanguard for renewal, the ANC can reclaim its status as the leader of society. The movement must choose between a passive forum that manages decline, or a dynamic League that engineers a future of competence, non-racialism, and equitable prosperity.