



# COSATU

CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE UNIONS

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11 November 2014

**To:** COSATU President  
COSATU Affiliated General Secretaries  
COSATU Provincial Secretaries

Dear Comrades

## RE: THE CRISIS IN THE FEDERATION

I take this unprecedented step to write this letter to you in my capacity as the General Secretary but also in my personal capacity as an activist who grew up in this movement. I have an unbroken record of commitment to building a strong united and effective Federation, and like many others, deeply care for its future. Recent events have brought this home to me in a very sharp way.

There is no doubt that the Federation is going through the most painful period in its entire life. There can be little doubt where we are heading unless the current logjam is tackled.

The risk we are facing is crystal clear – that we are in imminent danger of destroying what was painstakingly built through the blood and sweat of workers for many decades.

I believe that there will be no winners if we allow the Federation to fracture permanently. The impact on workers and the poor will be felt for many years, and there is a serious risk that we may never fully retain the strength that made us to be respected by so many within and outside the borders of South Africa.

Yet I believe it must never be too late to act to save the future of the Federation, and if we do not do everything we can, history will judge all of us extremely harshly. I believe we have to now put personal considerations and feelings aside. Scoring a victory today will be hollow if it leads to a weakening of the working class.

We have arrived at a point in my view where the future of the Federation must transcend who is right or wrong, or which faction is correct or mistaken or who has the numbers or not. It is the future of the Federation that is at stake. For two years now we have operated well below our capacity at a great cost to workers and their future they face. Today, COSATU is making daily headlines, not on the basis of what it has achieved, or what its programme is, – fighting for a living wage, improved working conditions, addressing unemployment etc. We are making headlines for all the wrong reasons and are being lampooned by cartoonists, and subject to commentary from all sections of society.

I have expressed my views to the Special CEC held on the 21- 23 October 2014 and on the 07 November 2014 regarding the expulsion of NUMSA. I stand by those views and

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the appeals I made at that time for a calm and reasoned response to the challenges we face. I still hold this view, and appeal again for a rational discussion.

I completely respect internal democracy and democratic centralism. This is what I have practised all my life in whatever labour movement organisation I have been active in. I am ready to admit that at times I have had to articulate views that contradicted my own, but always with the firm belief that they were arrived at democratically, and therefore have had to serve as a disciplined cadre.

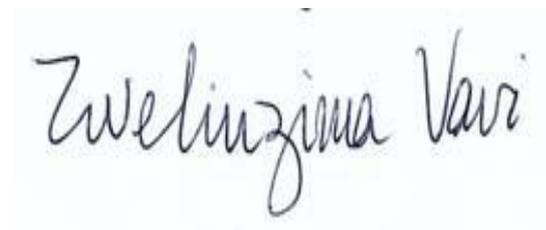
However, the magnitude of the decision that was taken by the Special CEC is not only of historical importance but has momentous implications. I have to say that I view the decisions that were taken as ones that could destroy what we have jointly built for so many years. In advancing this I am not in anyway suggesting that there should be no discipline in the organisation. I am advancing this argument with only one consideration that has weighed against all other considerations – what is in the best interest of the Federation at this moment. Let me repeat what I have said above – it does no longer matter who is right or wrong – what is at stake here is the future of workers as a whole.

From that point of view I plead with you to understand that I will not be able to defend a decision that I honestly believe is contradicting and undermining organised workers and broader working class unity, a decision that will have momentous implications for years to come.

I remain an optimist. My faith in the working class is stronger today than even in the days of my youth. I sincerely believe that if given the opportunity, we can address the challenges that we face and overcome them. With an honest commitment to unity, based on principles that have guided all of our lives, and in particular reflective of the resolutions agreed by the ground breaking 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress, I believe that we can work together to save our Federation from imminent disaster. I strongly believe that the basis of our unity has to be adherence to 11<sup>th</sup> Congress resolutions as well as all existing policies of the Federation. The decisions made by our sovereign democratic structure, the Workers Parliament, cannot be undermined or manipulated for narrow interests.

These are the reasons why I have decided not to participate in the NOB press conference of this afternoon or to conduct interviews or participate in any activity that will exacerbate division further, or will further jeopardise any chance of the Federation committing suicide by jumping off the cliff. There must an alternative to this.

Yours comradely



Zwelinzima Vavi  
**General Secretary**

