OPEN LETTER

Placing the truth on record

An open letter to Irvin Jim, General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

Ruth Ntlokotse

6 February 2026

Ruth Ntlokotse wrote this open letter to Irvin Jim, General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, on 6 February 2026.

Imraan Buccus's article was first published in the Sunday Times on 10 January 2026.

Richard Pithouse's commentary was first published on Substack on 12 February 2026.

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To: Irvin Jim
General Secretary of National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
From: Ruth Mamolaba Ntlokotse

Dear Mr Jim

Rejecting False Allegations and Placing the Truth on Record

NUMSA emerges from the long tradition of democratic trade unionism in South Africa. That tradition was forged in the wake of the Durban strikes of 1973, when workers rebuilt an independent union movement rooted in worker control and worker democracy. Democratic discussion, elected leadership, shop-floor decision-making, mandates and report-backs were treated as non-negotiable foundations of workers' democratic power. These are inviolable principles of our movement.

We all know that the tragic degeneration of NUMSA has taken the union very far from these principles and that the union is in serious crisis. The crisis is so severe that, over the years,

several people, including myself and at least two other women, have been subject to death threats.

We must confront this crisis openly and honestly, with respect for facts, evidence, and democratic forms of discussion. As Antonio Gramsci famously said, “To tell the truth is always revolutionary.” Nobody who acts with good faith should fear this. After all, as Amilcar Cabral said, “if we really believe in the people, then we must never fear the truth.”

This letter is prompted by your media statement of 18 January 2026, following the sudden breakdown in your relationship with your long-term ally, Khandani Msibi, the CEO of the NUMSA Investment Company, and the subsequent public fight between the two of you. While my name is not mentioned in that statement, it advances general claims and characterisations concerning leadership conduct, internal criticism and alleged wrongdoing. Those claims echo and reinforce false narratives that have previously been used, in internal correspondence and disciplinary processes, to misrepresent my conduct and to justify action taken against me. It is therefore necessary to place an accurate account of the relevant events on record.

The numbered points set out below respond to both the assertions advanced in your media statement, insofar as they bear on these issues, and to the broader pattern of misrepresentation and slander through which my integrity has been publicly and internally attacked. The matters addressed in this letter are confined to what is already established in the documentary and public record. They do not exhaust the full range of issues concerning governance, accountability and the handling of worker and donor funds that require further scrutiny.

1 The claim that there were no member complaints regarding 3Sixty Life

In your affidavit filed on 3 February 2022, you stated under oath that since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, NUMSA was not aware of complaints by any of its members regarding delays in payment or non-payment of funeral benefits, and that approved benefits were being honoured. While this claim is not restated in your media statement of 18 January 2026, that statement defends the leadership conduct from which the affidavit arose and rejects allegations of wrongdoing in relation to 3Sixty Life. It is

therefore necessary to place the factual record concerning member complaints clearly on record.

The claim that NUMSA was unaware of member complaints is directly contradicted by the documentary record available to the union well before February 2022.

Formal complaints regarding non-payment, delayed payment and partial payment of funeral claims were raised by union structures prior to the curatorship of 3Sixty Life. In January 2021, the Port Elizabeth Local wrote to the National Office Bearers setting out detailed concerns regarding the failure of claims to be honoured. This correspondence was followed by a written response from the NUMSA President later that month, and by a further follow-up letter in September 2021 indicating that the problems remained unresolved.

Concerns regarding funeral benefits were also discussed within union structures, including at NEC meetings during 2021. These concerns were not new. Discussions relating to difficulties with funeral claims had already taken place at the NEC level as early as 2018. These discussions took place, among others, at NEC meetings held on 7–10 December 2018 and again on 4–6 May

2021, confirming that complaints long pre-dated both the curatorship and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The existence of widespread member dissatisfaction was not confined to internal correspondence. It was also reflected in publicly available reports from the Office of the Long-term Insurance Ombudsman, which recorded unusually high complaint ratios and persistent unresolved follow-ups regarding 3Sixty Life. This was not a matter of inference or internal interpretation. It was confirmed under oath by the Prudential Authority in its replying affidavit in the curatorship proceedings. In that affidavit, the Prudential Authority records that the Office of the Ombudsman for Long-Term Insurance had disclosed to the provisional curator that substantial claims remained unpaid, including claims predating curatorship:

> The office of the Ombudsman for Long Term Insurance (Ombud) requested a meeting with the provisional curator. The Ombud's office disclosed to the provisional curator that claims worth R1.2 million has not been paid and a significant portion of these dates back to the period prior to curatorship. The Ombud's office

> is of the view that the bulk of these claims have not been paid because of incompetence at 3Sixty.

These failures had concrete consequences, including some employers cancelling stop-order arrangements due to poor service and non-payment of claims by NFS and 3Sixty Life.

After your affidavit was filed, union structures explicitly rejected the version of events it presented. In a letter dated 23 February 2022, the Port Elizabeth Local stated that the affidavit was "full of distortions and untruths", recorded extensive evidence of non-payment, late payment and partial payment of claims, and questioned whose interests were being represented in an affidavit that contradicted the lived experience of members and policyholders. The Local further recorded that the National Office Bearers had already received written complaints dating back to 2019. The letter concluded by stating: "The affidavit by the General Secretary constitutes nothing less than perjury."

The claim that NUMSA leadership was unaware of member complaints is therefore incorrect. At the time the affidavit was deposed, documented complaints had already been raised by Locals,

discussed within union structures and recorded in public reports. In these circumstances, your affidavit of 3 February 2022 did not merely place an inaccurate version before the court: it constituted the intentional denial, under oath, of facts already known to you, and therefore amounted, as the Port Elizabeth Local had correctly noted, to perjury.

The members' complaints were not a marginal issue. They concerned worker funds and the protection of members at a moment of serious institutional crisis. The seriousness of this crisis is underscored by the financial findings recorded by the Prudential Authority. In its replying affidavit, the Prudential Authority confirms that the provisional curator identified unexplained financial flows out of 3Sixty Life during this period: "There are also unexplained transfers from 3Sixty's bank accounts to various group entities that are not governed by outsourcing agreements nor commensurate with services provided."

Public reporting on the Deloitte investigation shows that 3Sixty Life was used to lend large amounts of money to other companies linked to NUMSA. For example, it loaned millions to Doves, including R6 million in 2017 and R27.5 million in 2018 and by 2019, these loans

amounted to about R32 million still owed. In 2021, the company also drew R70 million from policyholder funds, described as a “loan”. This is money that should have been protecting members and policyholders, not being moved around inside a network of connected companies.

Raising concern about a sworn statement that denied the existence of complaints by workers, complaints that have been confirmed to have been based on genuine malfeasance, was not an act of defiance against the leadership. It was an act of responsibility to the members of the union.

2 The claim that the affidavit represented a collective decision of NUMSA leadership

In your media statement of 18 January 2026, you present the affidavit filed on 3 February 2022 as having been undertaken in defence of the union and in accordance with NUMSA’s leadership structures. While the statement does not set out the internal process followed, it claims that the affidavit was a legitimate organisational act taken through proper procedures.

This is not correct.

On 21 December 2021, the High Court placed 3Sixty Life under provisional curatorship. Given the seriousness of that ruling and its implications for members and worker funds, it required urgent collective discussion within the leadership of the union. No such discussion took place.

No meeting of the National Office Bearers was convened to consider the judgment. No meeting of the Central Committee or the National Executive Committee was called to discuss its implications or to determine the union's response. At no point was a mandate sought or granted authorising the deposing of an affidavit on behalf of NUMSA.

On 21 January 2022, I was informed via a WhatsApp message that you intended to depose an affidavit in the curatorship proceedings. This message did not invite discussion and did not seek approval. It communicated a decision that had already been taken.

At that stage, the affidavit had not been shared with the National Office Bearers. Its contents were not discussed collectively, and no opportunity was provided for leadership structures to consider whether the position to

be advanced was accurate, appropriate or consistent with the experiences of members and the union's own records.

Being informed of an intention to act is not the same as being consulted. Notification cannot be retrospectively converted into a mandate. In terms of Chapter 6(2)(1) of the NUMSA Constitution, the power to institute or defend legal proceedings by or against the union vests in the Central Committee, and no such mandate was sought or granted in this instance.

NUMSA's constitution requires collective decision-making. This most certainly includes matters involving litigation, worker funds and the affairs of union-linked entities. The deposing of an affidavit in High Court proceedings is not an administrative matter. It is a constitutional and political act that requires authorisation through proper structures.

The affidavit filed on 3 February 2022, therefore, did not represent a collective decision of NUMSA leadership. It reflected a unilateral action taken without a mandate, without a democratic process and without collective deliberation. It was precisely this absence of collective leadership that gave rise to my concerns and objections.

3 The claim that my objections to the affidavit were illegitimate and politically motivated

While your media statement of 18 January 2026 does not refer to me by name, it advances a general narrative in which internal criticism of leadership conduct is portrayed as malicious, conspiratorial or politically motivated. That same narrative was subsequently relied upon in internal correspondence and disciplinary processes to characterise my objections to the affidavit as improper rather than principled.

This misrepresents both the timing and the substance of my actions.

On 21 January 2022, I was informed via a WhatsApp message that you intended to depose an affidavit in the curatorship proceedings concerning 3Sixty Life. This was the first time I became aware that such an affidavit was to be filed on behalf of NUMSA. At that point, no meeting of the National Office Bearers had been convened to discuss the curatorship judgment or to determine the union's response.

The affidavit had not been shared with leadership structures, and no mandate had been sought or granted authorising its filing. Immediately upon receiving this message, I

raised concern about the absence of collective discussion and requested that the matter be discussed within appropriate leadership structures.

Despite this, no meeting was convened. I was not informed of the date of the court hearing and only became aware that the matter was to be heard on 3 February 2022 through external sources.

The affidavit was filed on that date without collective discussion and without authorisation by NUMSA's constitutional structures. Nothing in the NUMSA Constitution grants the General Secretary the authority to institute or defend legal proceedings on behalf of the union on his own initiative. That power resides with the Central Committee, which alone is constitutionally empowered to mandate such action. The deposing of an affidavit in NUMSA's name without such authorisation was therefore not merely procedurally irregular, but constitutionally impermissible.

Contemporaneous WhatsApp exchanges among National Office Bearers confirm this sequence of events: the intention to depose the affidavit was communicated after the decision had already

been taken, objections were raised immediately, and no collective mandate preceded the filing of a sworn statement in NUMSA's name.

On 7 February 2022, I addressed a formal letter to the National Office Bearers setting out my concerns regarding both the process followed and the content of the affidavit. That letter raised constitutional and procedural issues and requested that these matters be discussed collectively.

My objections were not raised belatedly. They were raised at the earliest possible moment after I became aware that an affidavit was to be filed without a collective mandate.

They were not improper. They are directly related to the accuracy and authorisation of a sworn statement submitted to the High Court in proceedings involving worker funds.

They were not politically motivated. They were directed at preventing NUMSA from placing an unauthorised and inaccurate position before a court of law. Objecting to the filing of an unauthorised affidavit in proceedings of this seriousness is not misconduct. It is a constitutional responsibility.

4 The claim that the affidavit defended workers and protected their interests

In your media statement, you present the affidavit filed on 3 February 2022 as an act undertaken in defence of workers and the union. Framed in this way, the affidavit is treated as synonymous with the protection of members, with the result that objection to it is cast as opposition to workers' interests.

This is misleading.

As set out above, the affidavit denied the existence of member complaints regarding delays and non-payment of funeral claims. It therefore placed before the court a version of events that directly contradicted the experiences of NUMSA members whose claims had not been honoured.

Defending workers cannot mean denying their lived reality. A sworn statement that asserts that there were no complaints, when such complaints had in fact been raised repeatedly within union structures, does not protect members. It silences them.

Nor can the defence of workers be confused with the defence of a company. You placed the authority of NUMSA behind the defence of

3Sixty Life's bosses at the very moment when workers were raising complaints about unpaid claims and misuse of funds. NUMSA locals rightly criticised this as acting in the interests of the company and its bosses, rather than in the interests of ordinary workers who depended on their policies being honoured.

The scale of institutional failure at 3Sixty Life was not speculative, contested or politically constructed. It was documented by the Prudential Authority on the basis of the provisional curator's direct experience. In its replying affidavit, the Authority records the following assessment of the company's governance and operational condition:

> The provisional curator advises me that the consistent and overwhelming delay in providing information in an organised manner points to a lack of systems and controls, lack of governance structures and clarity of roles and responsibilities, as well as the potential lack of data integrity.

This assessment was subsequently reinforced in the judgment of Justice Dippenaar. The court rejected the suggestion that the concerns raised about 3Sixty Life were speculative or unfounded and made clear that they disclosed serious

governance failures that warranted regulatory intervention. These findings confirm that objections to the affidavit were grounded in fact and responsibility, not political hostility or bad faith.

The interests of members and policyholders are not identical to the interests of a service provider, particularly where that provider is the subject of widespread dissatisfaction, has been placed under curatorship by a court of law, and has been deliberately misrepresented to the court as functioning properly.

My objection was to a sworn affidavit that erased the painful experiences of workers and presented an inaccurate picture to the court. To remain silent in the face of that contradiction would have meant abandoning the very members whose interests the union exists to defend. To portray such objections as hostility to workers reverses the truth. Raising concerns about an affidavit that denied member complaints was not an act against workers. It was an act taken in their interests.

Moreover, subsequent independent investigations confirmed that the concerns raised about 3Sixty Life were neither speculative nor malicious. These investigations

identified serious governance failures, including the siphoning of millions of rands in policyholder funds, the misuse of premium income for purposes unrelated to funeral benefits, and the systemic failure to protect the interests of members and policyholders.

The Deloitte findings show that workers' money was being used in ways that had nothing to do with paying claims. Public reporting shows that 3Sixty Life paid for things with no business purpose at all, including personal expenses linked to you and your family. Workers are entitled to ask how this could happen while claims went unpaid and complaints were denied.

Member complaints were one of the primary means through which these failures could have been identified and confronted. By denying the existence of such complaints and misrepresenting 3Sixty Life to the court as functioning properly, the affidavit had the effect of neutralising an essential form of internal accountability and shielding an institution that was later shown to have been seriously mismanaged and financially abused. This was not the protection of workers, but an unethical

exercise of organisational authority against the interests of members and the safeguarding of their funds.

5 The claim that my 7 February 2022 letter constituted defiance or misconduct

In internal correspondence and disciplinary processes, my letter of 7 February 2022 to the National Office Bearers was characterised as an act of defiance and a breach of organisational discipline.

This characterisation is false.

The 7 February 2022 letter was an internal letter addressed to the National Office Bearers. It did not seek public escalation. It did not mobilise members against the union. It did not call for defiance of any constitutional structure. It placed factual and procedural concerns on record and requested a collective discussion.

In that letter, I recorded, as a matter of fact, that I had been excluded from key discussions that you claimed had occurred. I stated: “I place it on record that I have never been invited to such meetings and was never part of any feedback about the outcomes of those various meetings the GS talks about.”

I also placed on record that the court timetable and papers were not properly shared with National Office Bearers. I stated: “I only learnt from the media about the court date of the 3rd of February 2022. The GS affidavit was never shared with national office bearers. I only got the documents of the application through the court records, like any other person.”

I further recorded that I had sought an internal leadership meeting at the point when you announced your intention to depose the affidavit. I stated: “I requested the meeting to be convened to afford other NOBs an opportunity to discuss the matter.”

These were not abstract complaints. They related directly to sworn statements made to a High Court in proceedings concerning worker funds, and to the risk that NUMSA would be placed on record as advancing a position that had not been authorised and did not reflect internal realities.

To remain silent in those circumstances would have meant acquiescing in a process that excluded collective leadership and denied members’ experiences. Raising concern

through an internal letter was therefore not an act of defiance. It was the responsible course of action expected of an elected leader.

To treat such conduct as misconduct is to redefine accountability as insubordination. That is not democratic centralism. It is the misuse of disciplinary authority to suppress legitimate internal debate.

6 The escalation of discipline and the broader authoritarian shift within the union

Following my letter of 7 February 2022, no attempt was made to convene a leadership meeting to address the concerns I had raised, based on complaints and representations already received from union structures. There was no engagement with the substance of the issues. Instead, the response was disciplinary escalation.

Rather than opening a discussion within constitutional structures, the concerns I raised were misrepresented as misconduct. This marked a decisive shift away from collective leadership and towards the use of disciplinary mechanisms to repress expressions of concern about the situation.

Disciplinary charges were instituted against me, and the matter was progressively escalated through suspension and ultimately expulsion. At no point was the underlying issue the absence of a mandate for the affidavit and the misrepresentation of member complaints addressed through democratic processes.

The pattern of repression extended beyond my own case.

At the Western Cape Regional Congress held on 6–7 February 2022, delegates held an open discussion concerning leadership conduct in relation to the NUMSA Investment Company and the affidavit deposed to in the name of the organisation without a collective mandate. These discussions were not clandestine or factional. They took place openly within a constitutional regional forum.

The response to this discussion was not engagement, clarification or debate. Instead, the Western Cape Regional Secretary was suspended, effectively isolating him from collective leadership structures.

This was followed by a refusal to circulate the resolutions adopted by the Western Cape region to other regions ahead of the National Congress. Those resolutions sought to place concerns

regarding governance, mandate and the protection of policyholders before Congress in order to stimulate democratic discussion. Preventing their circulation had the effect of suppressing debate and shielding these issues from collective consideration by delegates.

It is also necessary to record that written objections were received from union structures regarding the union deposing an affidavit in support of 3Sixty Life, including letters from locals in Bellville, Port Elizabeth and Makhudupheko, and concerns raised through Western Cape structures. These interventions corroborated the core issue I raised: that a sworn position was placed before the court without a proper collective mandate and in a manner that denied or minimised known member complaints.

During the strategic planning meeting on 15–16 February 2022, my letter, along with other correspondence, was on the agenda for discussion. In your admission, you said that you "had to lie under oath", claiming that your "back was against the wall" because if you had been in agreement with the Prudential Authority this was going to make matters worse for 3Sixty Life.

This exchange was not recorded in a formal minute, but it took place in the presence of office bearers who can confirm what was said.

In the period before and after these events, a number of other leaders and members who raised concerns, questioned leadership decisions or were perceived to hold dissenting views were suspended, excluded or otherwise removed from organisational life through a range of disciplinary and administrative measures.

This pattern became most visible in the period leading up to NUMSA's National Congress.

In that period, more than twenty-five elected leaders and members were suspended across the union. This was followed by the suspension of a further group of leaders, bringing the total number of suspensions to well over fifty. These suspensions were concentrated in key regions and had the direct effect of excluding large numbers of delegates from participating in Congress processes.

The Mpumalanga region, one of the union's largest and most significant regions, was placed under administration. As a result, its elected

leadership was removed, and the region was effectively prevented from participating meaningfully in Congress.

These actions fundamentally altered the composition of Congress and restricted democratic participation at a decisive organisational moment. The debate was narrowed not through persuasion or political engagement, but through exclusion.

On 23 July 2022, the Labour Court interdicted NUMSA's 11th National Congress in Cape Town from proceeding. The court held that the mass suspensions imposed by the Central Committee were unconstitutional, invalid and unenforceable, that the Central Committee had acted outside the powers granted to it under the NUMSA Constitution, and that the exclusion of the Mpumalanga region fundamentally undermined the democratic character and legality of the congress.

This judgment confirmed that disciplinary authority had been exercised unlawfully and that internal constitutional safeguards had been overridden. The suspensions were not a matter of organisational discipline properly applied, but of power exercised without constitutional foundation. This finding is important to my own

case. It establishes that disciplinary power was exercised outside constitutional limits in order to suppress demands for mandate, collective deliberation and accountability.

This is why forensic audits and lifestyle audits are so urgently necessary. The appeal record calls directly for a forensic audit of the NUMSA Investment Company, and for lifestyle audits of senior office bearers. Instead of these demands being respected as clearly necessary for basic accountability, those who raised them were met with suspensions and disciplinary force.

My suspension and expulsion arose within this same pattern of repression, in which unconstitutional leadership actions were insulated from scrutiny while those who objected on constitutional grounds were punished.

The Labour Court's interdict against the 11th National Congress proceeding remains intact. The legal findings regarding the unconstitutionality of the suspensions and the compromised legality of the Congress remain. Consequently, the leadership elected at the Congress – including the election of yourself as general secretary – emerged from an illegitimate congress.

My suspension and expulsion must therefore be understood within this broader context as part of a wider pattern in which discipline was deployed often unlawfully as a weapon of political control and repression.

Taken together, these developments point to a broader authoritarian shift within the union. Internal disagreement has increasingly been treated not as a necessary and welcome part of democratic life, but as a threat to be eliminated. Disciplinary procedures have come to function less as instruments of accountability and more as tools for enforcing conformity.

When dissent is punished rather than debated, worker democracy is hollowed out from within. When elected leaders are removed for raising constitutional concerns, insisting on accountability, as we all should, becomes a risk.

7 The claim that court processes vindicated leadership and discredited my conduct

In your media statement, you rely on the outcome of court proceedings following my suspension and expulsion to suggest that leadership conduct was justified.

This is not true.

The urgent application brought before the Labour Court was dismissed on the basis of urgency only. The court did not determine the substantive issues raised and made no findings regarding my credibility, honesty or motivation.

At no point did any court find that my objections to the affidavit were improper, dishonest or politically motivated. At no point did any court determine that I had acted in bad faith or outside my responsibilities as an elected leader.

The dismissal of an urgent application does not amount to a ruling on the merits. It cannot be presented as a vindication of leadership conduct, nor as a repudiation of the concerns I raised.

To suggest otherwise misrepresents the outcome of the proceedings. It creates the false impression that judicial authority has confirmed the narrative advanced in your media statement.

The issues at the heart of this dispute – including the absence of a collective mandate, the treatment of internal dissent and the misuse of disciplinary mechanisms – were never

adjudicated by a court. They remain matters of organisational democracy and accountability, not judicial endorsement.

It is also important to note that in the Dippenaar judgment arising from the 3Sixty Life litigation, the court held that NUMSA did not have a direct and substantial interest in the matter, underscoring that the affidavit filed in its name was advanced in proceedings where the union's standing was ultimately rejected. This is significant because it reveals an act of unilateral overreach: the union's name was invoked in litigation where NUMSA lacked standing, and this overreach was later defended via moral and political blackmail, along with straightforward intimidation, rather than through constitutional mandate or collective judgment.

It is also necessary to place this in its proper context. On 23 July 2022, the Labour Court ruled that my suspension, along with the suspensions of other elected leaders, was unconstitutional, invalid and unenforceable in law. The court found that the central committee acted outside the powers granted to it by the union's constitution and that its actions violated basic principles of organisational democracy.

That ruling was not overturned. It stands as a judicial finding that the process used against me was unlawful.

This climate of escalating intimidation also carried serious personal consequences. I received death threats, but instead of this being taken seriously, it was dismissed, and my attempt to raise the issue was met with suspicion and hostility. This cannot be separated from the atmosphere in which good-faith disagreement was framed as hostility or conspiracy in an environment in which your own personal interests, and those of the 3Sixty Life bosses, were routinely conflated with the interests of workers.

For years, you and Khandani Msibi stood together in defending 3Sixty Life in court and in public. Now you are attacking each other openly, with accusations flying. NUMSA members have every right to ask: Why has this alliance, an alliance against the interests of ordinary workers, now collapsed into a bitter public fight?

Members are entitled to ask a basic question: where are all the audited financial statements? Public reporting has noted serious failures to produce audited accounts for years, and the

courts have recorded major problems around the 2021 financial statements. Why are documents of this importance not openly shared with the membership? How many other reports have been kept out of sight while ordinary workers carry the risk? Worker control and worker democracy, full transparency in all aspects of union affairs, including those pertaining to money.

8 The use of inflammatory political language

In your 18 January 2026 media statement, you employ extreme and inflammatory language, including comparisons to Joseph Goebbels and Nazi propaganda. You invoke the language of "liquidation" in describing criticism of your actions with regard to 3Sixty Health.

The use of such language is unacceptable within a workers' organisation or, indeed, any democratic organisation. Nazi analogies are not a political argument. They function as forms of vilification that shut down debate, replace reason with moral hysteria and make principled insistence on accountability impossible.

This objection to the paranoid and authoritarian language that you frequently use is not a defence of any individual or faction, nor an

endorsement of those criticised in your statement. A number of people who have entered recent debates on various aspects of the crisis in the union have done so on grounds of principle and at considerable personal risk. At the same time, there is clear documentation of serious wrongdoing by specific individuals involved in these disputes, and nothing in this letter seeks to defend or excuse that conduct.

The point is that when disagreement is framed through accusations of fascist conspiracy or physical liquidation, meaningful political discussion becomes impossible. Such language escalates conflict rather than clarifying the issues at stake.

The normalisation of this rhetoric corrodes internal democracy by transforming political disagreement into moral annihilation. It entrenches fear rather than persuasion and substitutes insult for accountability.

Your routine collapse into demagogic language is a matter of serious concern. In recent communication sent to union leaders following the explosive article by Imraan Buccus in the Sunday Times, you wrote that:

> There are forces who can be defined as marauding and Marauving gangs of no particular origin who destructive and hell bent to attack NUMSA by personalising its leadership with a clear target to liquidate despite NUMSA positions being taken democratically in constitutional structures this forces never stop to be busy tiptoeing in the shadow plotting with evil spirits, They will be exposed and be crashed by the revolution in the long march of class struggle.

This language is paranoid, conspiratorial, authoritarian and threatening. In a context in which death threats are being reported, it is extremely reckless. It can only function to intimidate and silence. This is not the language of a democrat, and it is a direct attack on the long tradition of worker democracy and the democratic traditions of the left.

9 New public scandals

While the primary purpose of this letter is to address your recent media statement and the wider issues around 3Sixty Life, I cannot be silent on other aspects of the rapidly growing crisis in the union. In recent weeks, new issues have entered the public domain. On 10 January 2026, Imraan Buccus, a respected intellectual

and trade union educator, made serious allegations about donor manipulation in the Sunday Times, raising specific questions about the role of Jonis Ghedi-Alasow and Vijay Prashad in driving the sudden new political direction that you are giving to the union. Similar questions were raised by Steven Friedman, a former trade unionist and a highly respected intellectual, writing in Against the Tide on 15 January 2026.

While this was the first time these issues entered the media, concerns about donor manipulation have been widely expressed in the union and in the broader labour movement and the left. There must be full financial and political transparency in terms of the role of Ghedi-Alasow and Prashad in the union, including full disclosure of any funds used to directly or indirectly support your personal lifestyle. You need to answer a direct question: Are you receiving money from a donor to subvert worker democracy and dictate the union's politics from outside?

Then, on 28 January 2026, the union's spokesperson, Phakamile Hlubi-Majola, resigned after receiving death threats. She is not the only person, and not the only woman, in the union to have received threats. Her resignation

brought into the open the culture of intimidation that has been allowed to take root in the union under your leadership. There needs to be a full and independent investigation into all death threats and other forms of intimidation.

10 The need for forensic audits and a judicial commission of inquiry

The once great union of Daniel Dube, Mthuthuzeli Tom and Jabu Ndlovu is now rotten to the core, as rotten as the ANC. The crisis is not just in NUMSA. The great trade unions that arose from the 1973 strikes, and the great trade union movement of the May Day general strike in 1986, have been devastated by money, greed, and capture by business and political elites.

The union investment companies have been central to this devastation, which goes far beyond NUMSA and has also wreaked havoc across many COSATU unions. Workers no longer see any difference between the ANC and the unions, and today, only 22% of workers are unionised, a dramatic collapse. Not that long ago, it was more than 40%. Many unions are deeply corrupt, and just as with the ANC, the battle of money and power now extends to intimidation, threats and assassinations.

The Labour Relations Act is clear that trade unions must keep proper accounting records, prepare annual financial statements, have them independently audited, and present them to members. It also requires that office-bearers act honestly and in good faith, avoid conflicts of interest, and ensure that union resources are not misused or diverted from their proper purposes. In recent years, NUMSA has systematically failed to meet these basic requirements.

A union cannot use workers' subscriptions, workers' hard-earned money, under conditions of exploitation for any purpose other than the interests of workers. At NUMSA, workers' subscriptions have been used on a massive scale, up to R95 million, to support businesses and bosses associated with the union. It is highly unlikely that the various 'loans' made with workers' money will be repaid to the union. To put it clearly under your authority, Mr Jim, the working class has been subsidising the bosses through their union as well as through their labour in their workplaces.

The shocking 3 April 2023 official compliance letter addressed to the NUMSA leadership from the Registrar of Labour Relations in the Department of Employment and Labour has

been hidden from workers. That letter raises serious concerns about NUMSA's failure to submit properly consolidated, audited financial statements, weak financial controls, delayed reporting, and large, unexplained loans and investment arrangements linked to the union's associated companies. It insists on full disclosure of loans, trusts, subsidiaries, and investment arrangements linked to NIC and related entities.

There is a real risk that the registrar may place the union under administration for its gross and sustained violations of the Labour Relations Act. The April 2023 letter must be made available to all union members so that all members can understand the gravity of the situation faced by the union, the once great union of Dube, Tom and Ndlovu.

If there is any chance of the union recovering from its current severe crises, it must be grounded in democratic practices and full financial transparency. This requires full forensic audits of all the finances in the union and related organisations, such as the NUMSA Investment Company. The results of these audits must be made available to all workers. It also requires comprehensive forensic lifestyle

audits of you and the investment company's senior management. These audits must also be made available to all workers.

It is vital that there be a Judicial Commission of Inquiry, similar to the Madlanga Commission, into the rot in the trade union movement, in NUMSA and in many other unions. All of us who have nothing to fear from transparency will support this call, a call for decisive action to rescue the trade union movement.

Conclusion

This letter has set out the factual record concerning my conduct, the objections I raised, and the manner in which those objections have been misrepresented in your media statement.

At every stage, I acted openly, through internal structures, and in accordance with my responsibilities as an elected leader. The concerns I expressed did not arise in isolation. They followed repeated complaints from members and union structures regarding the non-payment of claims and the handling of the 3Sixty Life matter. My intervention was grounded in those representations and in my responsibility to ensure that members' experiences were not denied or misrepresented.

The attempt to portray this conduct as malicious, conspiratorial or illegitimate is false. It replaces engagement with insult and accountability with accusation.

Moreover, my election as President of the South African Federation of Trade Unions – which you sought to overturn based on an abuse of disciplinary process – followed a democratic process in which delegates voted freely and in accordance with mandates from their regions. That outcome should have been respected as an expression of workers' democracy, not treated as an act of disloyalty by the delegates and the workers in the regions they represented.

I therefore reject the misrepresentations contained in your media statement, and your long history of slander against my person, and place this letter on record to correct the public and organisational record.

We must recall Cabral's famous words:

> We must practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect of our Party life. Every responsible member must have the courage of his responsibilities, exacting from others a proper respect for his work and properly respecting the work of others. Hide nothing from the masses of

> our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures.

Yours sincerely

Comrade Ruth Mamolaba Ntlokotse

Numsa must come clear on bid to realign SA politics

Transparency is needed around Irvin Jim's newfound role for political realignment

Imraan Buccus

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A potentially very well-funded attempt is underway to radically reconfigure the political landscape in South Africa. Irvin Jim, the general secretary of Numsa, the country's largest trade union, is the public face of this project, but there are other actors in the shadows.

The documents circulated to the leadership of Numsa by Jim before the union's central committee meeting held from December 3 to 7 last year were explosive. A report authored by Jim called for the leaders to discuss taking the union back into Cosatu, from which it was expelled in 2013.

A second document, authored by Jonis Ghedi-Alasow, who holds no elected or administrative position in Numsa, proposed that the union host a meeting with the unions affiliated to Saftu and

Cosatu, along with the senior leadership of the ANC, SACP, MK Party, EFF and Mayibuye, with the aim of uniting all these organisations under the banner of the ANC.

Although there was significant opposition, the Numsa central committee eventually agreed to engage Cosatu and the SACP about a return to the ANC-led tripartite alliance. It also agreed that Numsa would invite the ANC, SACP, MK Party, EFF and Mayibuye to a 'symposium' aimed at building 'unity'.

Saftu responded by issuing a statement condemning what it called the dishonest "come back home" narrative. After Jim sent a letter to the leaders of the Saftu-affiliated unions announcing Numsa's decision to convene the meeting aimed at uniting the ANC with its offshoots, Saftu issued a sharply worded response in a letter to all its affiliated unions.

It made the point that Numsa was an affiliate of Saftu, and not the other way around, and therefore cannot issue instructions to Saftu. This is an existential matter for Saftu, which could not continue to function in any meaningful way if Numsa, its largest affiliate, went back to Cosatu.

If Numsa does go back into Cosatu, and thereby the ANC, this will fundamentally change the politics of the union movement in South Africa and put an end to any possibility of the union movement contributing to the development of an independent left project.

It would also be a historic betrayal of the working class, as the ANC is presiding over mass unemployment, austerity, and rapid deindustrialisation.

On his own, Jim does not have the same power to bring the EFF, MK Party and the Mayibuye movement back into the ANC. The leaders of all these parties know that he could not persuade the members of his own union to vote for his Socialist Revolutionary Workers' Party in the 2019 election. He cannot seriously claim to be some sort of broker representing the wider working class.

It is highly significant that while the proposal to unite the ANC with its offshoots was circulated by Jim, it was written by Ghedi-Alasow, the director of Pan-Africa Today. This is an NGO that is widely understood to operate under the strategic direction of Vijay Prashad, the Indian communist, who is also widely understood to

play a central role in directing the political use of funds provided by the now retired Jamaican billionaire Roy Singham.

At this point, we do not know whether the ANC and its offshoots will be willing to participate in the meeting that Jim is moving ahead to organise.

But given that Prashad has access to a vast budget of millions of dollars, it is quite possible that, should this process move forward, it could be extremely well funded. The prospect of vast election funding could entice at least some parties to participate in the proposed unity-building process.

Civil society has long campaigned for transparency around party political funding, and the same standard must apply to this attempt to reconfigure both the labour movement and the wider political landscape.

Jim needs to explain exactly what role Ghedi-Alasow and Pan-Africa Today now play in Numsa, including in financial terms. Ghedi-Alasow also needs to be transparent about his and Pan-Africa Today's role in both Numsa and the proposed process to bring the offshoots from the ANC back into the party. This must include full transparency on all financial

matters. The South African public also needs to have clarity on exactly where Pan-Africa Today is taking its direction from, including the role of Prashad.

When, in 2019, the Washington-based magazine New Lines ran a story alleging that Singham was running a vast propaganda operation for China, the claim was blindly repeated as if it were credible by media elsewhere in the world, including the US, India and South Africa.

But, as the respected Scottish media scholar Alan McLeod has shown, New Lines is not an independent media outlet but a Washington-aligned project largely staffed by former US military, intelligence, the state department and NATO-linked officials, with some figures drawn directly from Israeli military intelligence. New Lines has, McLeod shows, repeatedly smeared independent left projects as fronts for Russia and China.

While we need full clarity from Jim, Ghedi-Alasow and Prashad and, if necessary, credible investigative journalism into their project to realign our politics, we also need to avoid conspiracy theory and stick to the facts as we make sense of this possibly hugely significant new development in our politics.

Trade Union Democracy Under Threat

Irvin Jim's demagoguery disgraces the trade union movement

Richard Pithouse

First published on Substack on 12 February 2026.

Political violence, including assassination, is now an entrenched feature of political life in South Africa. So too is public slander, which often takes on a particularly threatening and malicious character when directed at women.

In this situation – which is rapidly worsening – people of influence within the political spaces in which political violence is present must take great care with how they speak.

On 26 June 2013 Nkululeko Gwala became the first Abahlali baseMjondolo activist to be assassinated. The story is well told in Yousuf Al-Bulushi's excellent new book *Ruptures in the Afterlife of the Apartheid City*. A few hours before Gwala was assassinated, Sibongeseni Dhlomo, at that time the chairperson of the ANC in Durban, made idiomatic statements at a public

meeting in the area where Gwala was organising that residents understood to mean that Gwala would face death if he did not leave the area.

We can't draw a direct line between Dhlomo's comments and Gwala's murder but, at the very least, the comments were culpably reckless. In a context in which violence is a clear and present danger dehumanising and threatening language always risks creating the conditions of possibility for intimidation and violence, even when no direct instruction is given and no line of causality can be clearly drawn between speech and action.

Language in which critique is rendered as betrayal or consequent to conspiracy, and critics as enemies, is often particularly dangerous. The same is true of militarised language more broadly.

While most political assassinations in South Africa have taken place within the ANC, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, what S'bu Zikode calls "the politic of blood" is increasingly moving into both other parts of the country and society. Trade unions are now among the spaces in which competition for money and power is sometimes carried out with intimidation and murder.

It is well known that, for years, there have been intense conflicts within Numsa, the largest trade union in South Africa. Nobody disputes this.

On 28 January this year the union's spokesperson, Phakamile Hlubi-Majola, resigned from her position. Her resignation letter, widely circulated and reported, was clear that her decision to resign was taken after she had been threatened with assassination.

On 6 February former Numsa leader Ruth Ntlokotse wrote a letter to Irvin Jim, the General Secretary of Numsa. The letter has been widely circulated in union circles and the wider left, and has also been reported on. Ntlokotse explains that her letter is aimed at placing "an accurate account of the relevant events on record" — primarily in relation to the Numsa investment company, her role in raising issues about the company, and her subsequent suspension and expulsion from the union.

In her letter she says that there is a culture of authoritarianism and intimidation in the union and that "The crisis is so severe that, over the years, several people, including myself and at least two other women, have been subject to death threats."

She also includes a section on what she calls the "use of inflammatory political language". Addressing Jim directly she writes:

> [W]hen disagreement is framed through accusations of fascist conspiracy or physical liquidation, meaningful political discussion becomes impossible. Such language escalates conflict rather than clarifying the issues at stake.
>
> The normalisation of this rhetoric corrodes internal democracy by transforming political disagreement into moral annihilation. It entrenches fear rather than persuasion and substitutes insult for accountability. Your routine collapse into demagogic language is a matter of serious concern.

Ntlokotse gives the following recent example of the demagogic language used by Jim:

> There are forces who can be defined as marauding and Marauving gangs of no particular origin who destructive and hell bent to attack NUMSA by personalising its leadership with a clear target to liquidate despite NUMSA positions being taken democratically in constitutional structures this forces never stop to be busy tiptoeing in the shadow plotting with evil spirits, They will be exposed and be crashed by the revolution in the long march of class struggle.

She concludes that:

> [I]n a context in which death threats are being reported, it [this kind of language] is extremely reckless. It can only function to intimidate and silence. This is not the language of a democrat, and it is a direct attack on the long tradition of worker democracy and the democratic traditions of the left.

To my knowledge Jim's only public response to Ntlokotse's letter is a tweet issued yesterday – 11 February – in which she is denounced as an 'enemy' and twice, in two languages, implicitly likened to a dog. No attempt is made to engage the detailed claims that she sets out in her letter, claims that include allegations of serious and criminal misconduct by Jim.

In a situation in which two women have publicly stated that they have been threatened with murder, and in which reference has been made to a third, Jim's public response to Ntlokotse's letter is, at a minimum, grossly reckless and authoritarian. It may be worse than that: a deliberate attempt to intimidate and threaten and to open the way for others to do the same.

Although there is a general rot in the trade union movement, it is not uniform, and the union movement continues to include many principled people, projects and organisations. They need to draw a clear line against Jim's authoritarian and threatening speech in general, and in this particular case. His demagogic and dehumanising rhetoric must also be clearly opposed by the wider left. A feminist critique is equally urgent.

Jim cannot be allowed to continue to conduct himself like this in the name of the trade union movement or the left, both of which he disgraces in his response to Ntlokotse.