**SAIBA and SAIMechE CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO UTILISE THE CRITICAL SKILLS AND EXPERTISE OF VARIOUS PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TO TURN THE TIDE ON CORRUPTION**

*Professional associations such as the* [*Southern African Institute for Business Accountants (SAIBA)*](https://saiba.org.za/)*,* [*South African Institution of Mechanical Engineering (SAIMechE)*](https://www.saimeche.org.za/) *and others have the technical skills and expertise necessary to foster good governance, anti-corruption and state development. Government should be leveraging these readily available domestic resources and capabilities, argues Nicolaas van Wyk, SAIBA CEO* and Uncel Mhelembe, SAIMechE General Manager.

Integrating professional associations more closely into South Africa’s governance and legislative systems presents a strong antidote to state capture, corruption and ineffective economic policy frameworks.

Keeping professional associations outside the corridors of power creates silos that criminal elements and bad actors have gamed for their benefit.

The reality is that collectively, accountants, economists, lawyers, scientists, and engineers currently operate as a fragmented and uninspired technocratic class with little impact on government decision making. If it is our country’s goal to be a functional and burgeoning developmental state we need an integrated professional class to deliver a regional and continental hegemony that South Africa dreams of becoming.

A dream that can be attained, through incremental shifts that encourage collaboration, cross-disciplinary interaction, and a greater emphasis on *realpolitik*. This is a German term, derived from 19th-century European diplomacy, later popularised by American politician Henry Kissinger who during the 1970s served as White House national security advisor and secretary of state.

At its essence, *realpolitik* describes an approach to politics and power influenced by practical objectives rather than ideals. Put differently, it is pragmatism that values material factors over theoretical or ethical objectives. Practically, what could this mean in SA?

**Paris agreement, presidential commissions, and competitive advantage**

In late 2015, the [Paris Agreement](https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement) on climate change was adopted, and South Africa officially became a signatory to the agreement in April 2016. The goal of this landmark, legally binding, international treaty is to limit global warming through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. In line with the agreement, signatory countries must produce an updated national climate action plan - known as Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) every five years. SA’s first NDC was submitted in November 2016 and an updated version was released in [September 2021](https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/South%20Africa%20First/South%20Africa%20updated%20first%20NDC%20September%202021.pdf), outlining the country’s increasingly ambitious climate change target commitments.

More recently, the [COP26](https://ukcop26.org/) conference reaffirmed the international community’s target of keeping to a maximum of 1.5 C degrees of global warming through the signing of the [Glasgow Climate Pact](https://ukcop26.org/the-glasgow-climate-pact/) and continued the momentum towards achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Tools such as the [Climate Action Tracker (CAT)](https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/south-africa/) are used to quantify and evaluate climate change mitigation targets, policies and actions of countries which contribute to 85% of the global emissions. Unsurprisingly, according to [CDP](https://www.cdp.net/en/research/global-reports/africa-report), an NPO promoting transparency in environmental reporting, Africa contributes just 3.8% of global greenhouse emissions. This is a figurative drop in the ocean when contrasted against the European Union’s 13%, the United States’ 19%, and China’s 23%.

In [December 2020](https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/press-statements/presidential-climate-change-coordinating-commission-appointed), President Ramphosa after consultations with various social partners, established the [Presidential Climate Commission](https://www.climatecommission.org.za/) as a statutory entity to support the country’s transition to a “low-carbon, inclusive, climate change resilient economy and society”. Half of the commission's members are cabinet ministers, and the other half are representatives from trade unions, NGOs, corporations, development agencies, activists, and environmentalists.

What is glaringly absent from the Commission are professional associations representing the countries accounting, engineering, scientific and economic community of experts.

The cost of rapidly transitioning to the green economy and how this venture should be funded are important considerations and among the uncomfortable discussions that developing countries and much of the Global South have championed at different climate conventions.

While strides have been made to secure funding, such as the [$8,5 billion](https://www.news24.com/fin24/economy/cop26-chief-wants-to-see-sas-investment-plans-for-85bn-climate-finance-deal-20220622) announced following COP26, the transactional nature of global financing often means that there will be strict conditions linked to this investment.

Furthermore, pronouncements from asset management giants such as [BlackRock](https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-01-21-blackrocks-awakening-wall-street-head-recognises-climate-emergency/) that investors should shun companies that make use of fossil fuels, do not bode well. The likelihood that other asset management including SA’s Public Investment Corporation (PIC) could follow suit should be a major concern for South African companies both large and small, private or publicly listed companies, which will soon have to contend with reporting on their climate change efforts.

The truth is that the world is not in real harmony, and all states are leveraging their interests.

To return to the principle of *realpolitik,* it could be argued that given the country and the continent’s limited contribution, both historically and currently, to the climate emergency, could Africa not gain an important competitive edge by either demanding more grants from Western nations as major polluters or adjusting our climate goals and stage of transition?

This type of economic policy approach requires a dedicated, Afro-centric, and multilateral approach.

When it comes to using economic tools to advance our national security collective action significantly increases our ability to shape and influence the global economic system.

We need technocrats, that professional associations can provide, to advise on the most efficient transition trajectory considering our own political, economic and social needs. We should not be beholden to the West or any other economic block.

This is not a dog whistle for climate denialists to rally behind, but a call to action for South Africa’s decision-makers to enforce our right to self-determination and not acquiesce to the desires and whims of the international community, even to our detriment.

**House of Professional Associations**

Professional bodies, both statutory and voluntary, can play a greater role in redetermining the trajectory of our country by filling this chasm in leadership and decision-making. Professionals’ associations are not beholden to terms of office, shifting constituencies or silent investors or handlers. Their role remains, simply to advance their skills’ discipline and knowledge base among existing and new practitioners.

As SAIBA, our mission statement is centered around “supporting all measures that will improve: the ease of doing business, quality of service delivery, and responsible financial reporting”. Enjoying a clarity of purpose is imperative to leadership and why major professional associations should have a seat at the table of consequential entities such as the Presidential Climate Commission and beyond.

Legislatively, these professionals can also play a greater role. Until now, only through public participation, have associations been able to share an opinion on a proposed bill or law, a process which has proved cumbersome and ineffective.

This begs the question, why are they relegated to shouting from the sidelines?

Here’s a radical thought, South Africa should lean more on its technocratic class, and use their skills to supplement the executive’s strategic plan for the country.

**How?**

Currently, our Parliament consists of three distinct houses, the National Assembly (NA), the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) and the National House of Traditional Leaders composed of elected representatives. A fourth advisory house is needed, the House of Professional Associations, to offer the state its professional views on proposed laws and consult on how to address state development, anti-corruption, and climate change.

This idea is not nearly as radical as some may initially believe. In the United States, the [Congressional Budget Office (CBO)](https://www.house.gov/the-house-explained/legislative-branch-partners/congressional-budget-office#:~:text=The%20Congressional%20Budget%20Office%20(CBO,federal%20economic%20and%20budgetary%20decisions.) provides Congress with “objective, nonpartisan, and timely information, analyses, and estimates related to federal economic and budgetary decisions.” Surely our government could benefit from the same.

Our country has a wealth of resources both mineral and technical under our feet and figuratively under our noses. Paying closer attention to how these resources are extracted, developed, and primed for use will be for the benefit of all South Africans. Let us retake control of our country’s destiny.

**Ends**.

For further information from SAIBA please visit [https://saiba.org.za/](https://saiba.org.za/%20) or contact us on +27 (0)12 643 1800/ [saiba@saiba.org.za](file:///C:\Users\Brenda\Downloads\saiba@saiba.org.za). Should you have any questions or queries related to SAIMechE please contact 011 6155560 or [info@saimeche.org.za](mailto:info@saimeche.org.za)

**About SAIBA**

*SAIBA is a Professional Accountancy Organisation (PAO) and Self-Regulatory Organisation for accountants, tax practitioners, financial managers, and financial directors with offices in South Africa and Namibia.*

*We are associate members of the Pan African Federation of Accountants (PAFA) and full members of the International Association of Finance Executive Institutes (IAFEI).*

*SAIBA is authorised to issue designations as registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and our designated members are recognised as accounting officers, independent reviewers, and independent accounting professionals. SAIBA was awarded the status of Recognised Controlling body (RCB) in terms of Section 240A(2) of the Tax Administration Act.*

*We were established in 1987 as a non-profit company in terms of the Companies Act, 2008, and are governed by a board elected by members. SAIBA membership consists of more than 10000 associates including >5000 designation holders. We issue four designations or certifications relevant to a variety of job functions within the finance department.*

*We are a level 2 BBBEE contributor with more than 60% black membership. We have signed MOUs with the Department of Social Development (DSD) to provide professional volunteer services to the NPO sector, and we have recognition agreements with several professional bodies and Universities.*

*We have the legal authority to verify and monitor the delivery of quality professional services by business accountants in terms of Section 60(4) of the Close Corporations Act, 1984 (accounting officers), Regulation 29(4) of the Companies Act, 2008 (independent review), Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act, Act 67 of 2008 (professional body), SAQA Register of SAIBA designations, List of Accredited Professional Bodies whose members are eligible to be licensed as business rescue practitioners, Recognised Controlling Body as referred to in s 240A of the Tax Administration Act, FIC Namibia (Accountable Institutions).*

**About SAIMechE**

*SAIMechE is the senior body representing the discipline of mechanical engineering in South Africa. It covers all fields of application as diverse as automobile, energy generation, process engineering, heavy manufacture, design, management, research, mining and education. SAIMechE is over a century old, and originated as the South African Association of Engineers and Architects, established in 1892. SAIMechE is a voluntary association of Mechanical Engineers, Technologists and Technicians that have access to various grades of membership and the associated benefits.*

*SAIMechE's Mission: To serve the interests and needs of its members and of the Mechanical Engineering Community, and to promote the continued supply of appropriate and sufficient Mechanical Engineering skills to meet the nation’s needs, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of local industry to the benefit of all.*

*In addition, the SAIMechE motto is: ‘Scientia Progredimur’– By Knowledge We Advance.*