

THE UPDATE

COSATU 40th Anniversary Special Newsletter Edition

Welcome

We are thrilled to welcome you to our weekly newsletter, your essential guide and official countdown to the COSATU 40th Anniversary Rally this December!

This Issue

the Formation of

COSATU

#COSATUHerStories

Elijah Barayi

Anniversary details



Date: 6 December 2025

Time: 10h00

Venue: Dobsonville stadium,
Soweto, Johannesburg



Tracing the Formation of COSATU

Amongst the initial engagements were the deliberations which took place at the Langa Summit on the 8th of August 1981,

where 100 representatives from 29 unions met to discuss a united response to the newly introduced labour laws which were the attempts to divide unions and tame them into useless sweetheart unions.

These early discussions were not without challenges where unions got divided around the question of being registered or not being registered, whether they should subscribe to the Freedom Charter or not. There were Congress aligned unions which rejected registration and Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) and the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) -aligned unions who were eager to use the space opened up by registration.



Mandates

- Secure social and economic justice for all workers.
- Understand how the economy affects workers and formulate policies for restructuring in the working class's interests.
- Restructure the economy so that the creation of wealth can be democratically controlled and its fruits shared with the working class.
- Strive for just standards of living, social security and fair conditions of work for all workers.
- Advance or oppose any law, action or policy of any authority or body affecting the interests of affiliates or the working class in general.
- Facilitate and coordinate education and training of all workers to further the interests of the working class.
- Conduct, coordinate and publish research into matters affecting workers.
- Encourage all workers to join progressive and democratic trade unions and strive for a united working-class movement regardless of race, colour, creed or sex.
- Form broadly-based industrial unions where none exist and assist unions in merging in industries to create stronger industrial unions.
- Coordinate joint activities among affiliates, resolve disputes, and institute or defend legal proceedings affecting affiliates or the federation.

Summits leading to the formation of COSATU

The process leading to the launch of COSATU went through four more summits which included the two Summits held in April 1982 in Wilgespruit and the third summit, held in July 1982 in Port Elizabeth.

The third summit in the process leading to COSATU's formation faced significant tension, primarily due to the participation of seven community-based unions that presented a set of seven non-negotiable principles. This grouping, popularly referred to as the Magnificent Seven, walked out of the proceedings at one stage, resulting in the collapse of the summit.

These tensions were ultimately resolved at the fourth summit, held in Athlone in April 1983, where the Magnificent Seven conceded by revising their previously rigid demands. Crucially, the convergence of views and ideological positions during this period was not merely the outcome of boardroom negotiations driven by rhetorical skill or technical compromise. Rather, they were heavily shaped by the broader political struggles unfolding on the ground, where grassroots mobilization exerted a powerful influence on the direction of negotiations.

Following the arduous deliberations and political mobilizations that characterized the union movement in the early 1980s, a decisive fifth and final summit was convened on 8-9 June 1985 at Ipeleng in Soweto. A broad spectrum of unions—aligned variously with the United Democratic Front, Black Consciousness traditions, and other ideological currents—gathered with their national executive committees to determine the federation's future. Over 400 delegates participated in this critical juncture of South African labour history.

This summit proposed the establishment of a tight federation, grounded in five founding principles: non-racialism, one union one industry, worker control, proportional representation based on paid-up membership, and cooperation at both national and international levels. This consensus provided the political and organizational blueprint that led to the historic launch of COSATU on 1 December 1985 at Kings Park Stadium in Durban.

Zakhele Cele

#COSATUHerStories

Thank you to all the incredible women who joined us in Boksburg. After four powerful days of unity and learning, #WomenPower proudly concludes!

**THE WOMEN WHO CARRY TOMORROW**

In Boksburg's air, the banners wave,
A tribute to the bold and brave.
From every province, sisters came,
With hearts of steel and eyes aflame.

Zingiswa stands with voice so clear,
A leader millions hold so dear.
She speaks of struggle, hope, and right,
And turns our pain to steadfast fight.

They honour women who broke the chain,
Who bore the weight, who faced the pain.
From past to present, truth runs deep,
Their promises are ours to keep.

In union halls the songs still sound,
Of power, pride, and common ground.
For every worker, every dream,
COSATU women lead the stream.





Blast from the Past: Celebrating Elijah Barayi

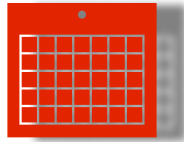
Elijah Barayi was a fearless trade unionist and a founding president of COSATU, remembered for his unwavering commitment to workers' rights and social justice. Born in Cradock in 1930, Barayi became active in the labour movement during apartheid, challenging oppressive labour laws and fighting for equality in the workplace. His leadership helped unite fragmented unions into one powerful federation – COSATU – officially launched in 1985. Barayi's courage inspired countless workers to stand firm against exploitation, often at great personal risk. He believed that true freedom could not exist without economic justice and dignity for all workers. As we celebrate 40 years of COSATU, we honour Elijah Barayi's legacy, a man whose vision, strength, and solidarity continue to guide the labour movement today.

Worker's Heritage

“We were not prepared to carry documents in the land of our forefathers”
– ELIJAH BARAYI



History maker! In 1985, Elijah Barayi was elected the first-ever President of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), launching a new era for organized labour.



Calendar

Coming this December



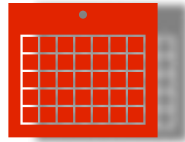
**COSATU CHARITY
GOLF CHALLENGE**

04 DECEMBER 2025

JOIN US AS WE DRIVE FOR CHANGE AND SWING FOR A
CAUSE AT THE COSATU CHARITY GOLF CHALLENGE

#COSATUGolfDay **#Bek2Skul** **#padagirl**

On Course for Change: 40 Years of Unity, Empowerment, and Equality with COSATU!



Calendar

Coming this December



Still Fighting Forward: 40 Years of Justice and Equality!