

MEDIA STATEMENT / BRIEF

THE NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION CALLS FOR MORE INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE UPCOMING NATIONAL ELECTIONS

The National Planning Commission (NPC) held a consultative meeting with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) on 11 March 2024. The objective of the meeting was to discuss voter education, and the IEC's state of readiness in general. More specifically, the aim of the engagement was for the NPC to understand the measures and protocols in place to ensure that the rights of persons living with disabilities are protected throughout the voting process. The NPC was particularly concerned about the need for people living with disabilities to vote in secrecy, integrity, and dignity.

The meeting was aimed at determining what measures the IEC will implement to ensure inclusive participation for persons with disabilities in the coming national elections. This is in line with the NPC's mandate to assist in forging a conversation among key stakeholders and to promote social cohesion and active citizenry, as stipulated in the [National Development Plan: Vision 2030](#) (NDP) Vision 2030. Persons with disabilities face multiple discriminatory barriers. Solutions must be integrated into all facets of planning, recognising that there cannot be a uniform approach.

The IEC informed the NPC about the progress it made through its collaboration with the South African National Council for the Blind (SANCB) to develop the Universal Ballot Template (UBT). This is a voting aid that assists persons with visual disabilities and special needs to have an independent and secret vote during elections.

To promote the use of this ballot by persons with disabilities, the IEC has announced it through its voter education programme, which includes all social media platforms, electronic and print media, radio, and television. The UBT is designed to assist individuals with both a visual and a hearing impairment during the voting process. The IEC encouraged persons with disabilities

to contact them directly should they experience any challenges in accessing or utilising the UBT during the course of the national and provincial elections.

The IEC further informed the NPC that it has implemented measures to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities such as making voting stations wheelchair accessible.

While the NPC commended the IEC on its community outreach programmes, it recognised that there are areas that require improvement in relation to making these programmes and access to information available for persons with disabilities. As many persons with disabilities may not be aware of the accommodative measures being implemented by the IEC, the NPC stressed the importance of including it in the outreach programmes and ensuring that IEC officials are trained to make it available when required. The NPC has committed to further engagements with the IEC after the elections to assess and evaluate the voting process for individuals with disabilities.

The NPC commended the IEC for administering the elections throughout South Africa's 30 years of democracy and stressed that this formed the motivation for the consultation as it was crucial that no one is excluded from exercising their right to participate in a democratic voting process.

The NPC is an independent advisory body appointed by the President, and the custodian of South Africa's NDP. The primary role of the NPC is to advise government and parliament on matters pertaining to the implementation of the NDP. It also has the responsibility to mobilise the whole of society around the objectives of the NDP, which remains the only cross-cutting long-term plan for national development in South Africa.

It is our future, let us make it work!

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