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**Date** : 01 January 2026

**For Attention:** Provincial Presidents, Secretaries, and Members of Provincial Leadership

**SUBJECT** : New Year Message and Chess Celebrations

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**FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT OF CHESS SOUTH AFRICA**

Dear Provincial Presidents, Secretaries, and Members of Provincial Leadership,

As we approach the close of 2025, I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to the chess leadership across all provinces for your unwavering support, resilience, and commitment throughout the year. Together, we can reflect with pride on a year marked by significant progress, difficult decisions, and historic successes for Chess South Africa.

When this Executive Board and National Council assumed office, many in South Africa believed that we would fail as a collective. Some questioned our ability to stabilise the federation, others doubted whether unity was even possible, and regrettably there remain a few who still wish for us to fail. Yet leadership is not proven by opinion, but by outcomes. What has defined this term off office and the year of 2025 has not been noise, but progress; not just empty promises but delivery and measurable results.

As a collective leadership, we have achieved milestones that many once believed were unattainable. Over the past 18 months, Chess South Africa has successfully paid more than R570 000 towards our FIDE debt. We now have an outstanding balance of only €16 291 out of the €44788 we owed in June 2024, which we are on track to fully settle by December 2026. Importantly, these payments were achieved without government funding and sponsorships, but through dedicated leadership, disciplined financial management, and bold institutional reform, most notably the introduction of a sustainable rating fee system.

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Together, we modernised our rating and Grand Prix systems, ensuring that rapid and blitz tournaments now count towards Grand Prix points. This reform has significantly enhanced inclusivity, allowing more players, particularly in rural areas and townships to benefit meaningfully from the Grand Prix system. As leadership, we have acknowledged the inequalities within Chess South Africa that make it difficult for many players to access international tournaments and obtain FIDE titles. In recognition of the dedication and achievements of our players, we introduced national chess titles, ensuring that excellence is rewarded within our national context.

One of our most important collective achievements has been our partnership in the rebuilding phase of Chess South Africa, culminating in the successful lifting of our SASCOC suspension. This required countless late nights, long hours away from our families, and deep collaboration to redesign governance documents and systems for both provinces and the Chess SA Executive. Our work on SASCOC compliance has unlocked access to R1.471 million in funding for 2026, which will significantly boost national development. For the first time in nearly seven years, our players were awarded national colours, and for the first time in the same period (in 7 years), Chess South Africa will receive government funding, a moment of restored national pride for our sport.

Our Coaching Department has played a pivotal role in transforming the coaching landscape. For the first time in our history, Chess South Africa now has a National Coaching Strategy, accredited Chess SA coaching courses, a school chess curriculum linked to Chess SA certification, and a national coaching database. We have further allocated R270 000 for the capacity building of coaches in three provinces between January and March 2026, marking the beginning of a new development era for Chess South Africa.

In addition, our engagements and discussions with the Indian chess fraternity have begun to yield meaningful developmental outcomes. Through our relationship with the All India Chess Federation, Chess South Africa has secured much-needed sponsored resources aimed at strengthening the training of arbiters, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas. This initiative is critical to ensuring that marginalised players can access officially rated tournaments and fully benefit from our rating and Grand Prix systems, thereby deepening inclusivity and fairness across the federation.

At a continental level, the December 2025 African Chess Confederation (ACC) Annual General Meeting formally recognised South Africa as a key growth point for chess on the African continent. As a result, South Africa has been selected to host the first-ever Southern African Chess Olympiad Teams Training Camp, to be held in Gauteng within the next few months. This landmark camp will be facilitated by Indian

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Grandmasters under the auspices of the African Chess Confederation, further cementing South Africa's role as a leader in regional chess development and high-performance preparation. In strengthening our Olympiad aspirations, our treasury has already allocated more than R200 000 to support the 2026 Olympiad team. This demonstrates the remarkable progress we have made together as a collective.

Despite predictions that the introduction of rating fees would reduce participation, the opposite has occurred. Chess South Africa is now the 7th largest federation among the 78 SASCOC-recognised federations. Player participation has exceeded all historical benchmarks:

2022: 17 487 players

2023: 24 027 players (record)

2024: 27 092 players (new record)

2025: 28 013 players (highest ever)

In 2025, we proudly declared the **Year of Women's Chess**. Through our partnership with the FIDE (International Chess Federation) Women's Commission, we introduced the first-ever online coaching programme for female players, alongside a national in-person coaching camp in Langebaan, Western Cape. Female participation increased from 3 537 players in 2015 to 7 297 in 2025, representing a 106% increase, with 2025 recording the highest female participation in our history.

It is important to place these achievements in their proper context. Many of the reforms and successes realised during this term were only formally acknowledged by FIDE following the resolution of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) matter on 18 June 2024. Furthermore, Chess South Africa only regained full recognition by SASCOC in April 2025. These milestones underscore that much of our progress was achieved under conditions of limited recognition and significant constraint, making the collective accomplishments of our leadership even more noteworthy.

As we look ahead to 2026, I wish to emphasise the critical importance of unity and shared purpose. Stability and progress are not achieved through individual effort alone, but through collective commitment and trust. As Helen Keller wisely observed, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

It is this unity, across provinces, regions, clubs, and national leadership that will safeguard the stability we have worked so hard to build and ensure continued progress for Chess South Africa.

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We are mindful that challenges remain, including recent difficulties experienced at the African Youth Chess Championships in Zimbabwe, as well as other challenges faced during 2024 and 2025. As the National Council, we will take stock of these matters as we prepare for the transition to a new Executive after 21 February 2026. For now, let us celebrate our victories, appreciate how far we have come, and honour the sacrifices made by our families and loved ones throughout 2025. May we return in 2026 with renewed unity, purpose and energy.

I thank you for making my work easier as the President of Chess South Africa and your support to our full executive. I wish you, your families, and the entire chess community a happy, peaceful, and prosperous New Year. Kindly convey this message of appreciation, unity, and optimism to your provincial executives, regional leadership, and clubs.

May God continue to bless you all and the work you do for chess in South Africa. May we continue to pray for Chess SA.

Yours in chess,



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Andre Lewaks  
President