Statement by Chess South Africa on Visa Challenges in Samarkand

Chess South Africa is deeply concerned about the unresolved visa challenges affecting members of our delegation and several other African representatives attending the Chess Olympiad and FIDE Congress in Samarkand.

Two South African accompanying persons have visas valid only until 19 September 2026, and neither has yet received the extension needed to remain for the duration of the event. One is a father who travelled to support his child; the other is a spouse who travelled to support his wife and care for their infant child. Without an urgent extension, they will be forced to return home leaving the players they came to support without them for the remainder of the tournament. Behind these visa applications are real people and families. One can only imagine the anxiety and emotional distress these parents and children are experiencing. Separating a parent from the child they travelled to support and care for creates serious safeguarding concerns, particularly where an infant is involved. We therefore appeal to the organisers and the relevant Uzbek authorities to treat these two applications with the urgency, care and compassion they deserve.

Chess South Africa President and voting delegate, Mr André Lewaks, has also not yet received his visa, despite being scheduled to travel on 17 September 2026. Several other African delegates, including members of the African Chess Confederation Executive Board, are reportedly facing similar difficulties. We have taken note of the communication from the Uzbekistan Chess Federation confirming that the outstanding applications are still being processed. We appreciate the assurance that efforts are being made. However, affected delegates need more than hope they need clear answers and enough time to make the necessary travel arrangements.

These delays are not only administrative. They may directly affect the ability of African federations to participate fully in the FIDE General Assembly and the elections scheduled for 26–27 September 2026. Delegates must be able to travel in time to engage with one another, consider the issues before them and exercise their democratic rights freely and meaningfully. The continued absence of a significant number of African delegates and continental leaders could affect the campaign environment and potentially the outcome of the elections. We sincerely hope

that this is not a deliberate attempt to disadvantage African representatives or influence the electoral process. However, the situation risks creating that perception and undermining confidence in the fairness of the elections.

Chess South Africa therefore respectfully calls for the visa matters of the two accompanying fathers, Mr Andre Lewaks and all other outstanding African delegates to be resolved without further delay. We also request clear and direct communication with every affected applicant regarding the status of their application.

We remain committed to constructive engagement and trust that the Local Organising Committee, the Uzbekistan Chess Federation, FIDE and the relevant authorities will act urgently. Every accredited delegate deserves a fair opportunity to participate, every family deserves to feel safe and supported, and the elections must take place in an environment that is free, fair and credible.

Issued by:
Gerald Neels
Public Relations Officer
Chess South Africa
17 September 2026