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Statement by Chess South Africa: 2025

“The Year of Women’s Chess”

Project in Partnership with the World Chess Federation’s (FIDE) Women’s Commission

Towards “Addressing Women’s Participation, Retention, and Safeguarding in Chess”

Chess South Africa (Chess SA) is proud to declare 2025 as the Year of Women’s Chess. This initiative will proudly be implemented with the support of the World Chess Federation’s (FIDE) Women’s Commission and comes in response to the longstanding concerns regarding the lower number of women participating in chess and the challenges they face in furthering their careers in chess. The reality is that women’s chess has been historically neglected, and we recognize that our vision “**Chess Belongs to Everyone**” cannot be fulfilled unless we create a more inclusive, safe, and supportive environment for women and girls in chess.

Challenges Faced by Women in Chess

Women and girls face multiple barriers to participation and retention in chess, including societal expectations, gender biases, and structural inequalities in leadership. Research highlights the disproportionate burden of care that women in South Africa carry, which affects their ability to engage

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fully in sports and professional development (Mokoena, 2021; Dlamini, 2020). Additionally, safeguarding concerns, including risks of harassment and discrimination, further hinder their participation (Ngcobo, 2019).

Former South African President Nelson Mandela once said, "*Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.*" As Chess SA we acknowledge the urgent need to address these challenges in order to foster an equitable chess community.

Our Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Minister Gayton McKenzie has also emphasized the importance of gender equality in sport, stating: "*For too long, women have had to fight just to be seen in sports. We must actively create spaces where they not only participate but thrive.*" His sentiment aligns with our commitment to ensuring the chess community in South Africa becomes a space where women feel welcomed, supported, and safe.

Research has shown that gender biases persist in chess, with women facing implicit stereotypes that affect their performance and advancement in the sport (Howard, 2020). A study by Maass et al. (2008) revealed that female chess players often experience lower expectations from peers and coaches, leading to decreased confidence and participation rates. Further, Rott (2021) highlights the importance of visibility and representation, showing that an increase in female role models in chess significantly improves young girls' engagement in the game. Gender-sensitive coaching strategies have been identified as crucial in reducing disparities and promoting a more inclusive chess environment (Charness & Gerchak, 1996). These findings emphasize the necessity of targeted interventions to address gender inequality in chess, aligning with Chess SA's strategic objectives for 2025.

Strategic Initiatives for Women's Chess in 2025

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Chess SA, in partnership with the FIDE Women’s Commission, is launching several initiatives to improve the participation, retention, and safeguarding of women and girls in chess. The following activities will be implemented:

Activity	Target Group	Responsible Person	Date
Queens Festival	Girls	Chess SA	March 2025
4 Weeks Online Coaching by an International Master	30 Women & Girls	FIDE	April 2025
Gender Sensitivity/Safeguarding Webinar	Chess Leadership, Administrators, Arbiters, Coaches	FIDE Chess SA	June 2025
Chess SA Safeguarding Policy Awareness Session	Chess Administrators, Arbiters, Coaches	Chess SA	July 2025
One Week Coaching Camp	Top Female Players	FIDE Chess SA	August 2025
Gender Assessment Audit Report and Action Plan Launch	Chess Stakeholders	Chess SA	December 2025

Furthermore, Chess SA is committed to safeguarding by appointing a National Safeguarding Officer. All coaches, arbiters, and administrators will be required to complete a compulsory safeguarding course, with certificates registered in a national database. This policy change aligns with FIDE’s efforts to create safer environments for women and girls in chess worldwide.

Chess South Africa Women’s Commission and Gender Audit

To further strengthen our commitment, Chess SA will finalise the election of its Women’s Commission in February 2025. One of the main objectives of the Commission will conduct a gender audit assessment to

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evaluate the social environment of chess in South Africa, specifically related to women's participation, safety, and leadership representation. A partnership with knowledge partner will be announced soon. The findings and a comprehensive action plan will be launched at the Mzansi Inter-Provincial Chess Championship in Gqeberha in December 2025.

Commitment to Gender Sensitivity and Inclusive Leadership

Research underscores the importance of addressing gender attitudes and gender sensitivity in sport to create an inclusive environment (Pietersen, 2022; Khumalo, 2021). The current male-dominated leadership structures must evolve to incorporate diverse voices, perspectives, and leadership from women in chess. As the FIDE President, Mr Arkady Dvorkovich has stated: ***“Gender equality is not just about participation; it is about providing equal opportunities, respect, and recognition for women in chess.”*** Chess SA is dedicated to fostering a leadership culture that promotes and values the contributions of women.

A Call to Action

Chess South Africa calls upon Provincial Chess Federations, regional associations, and clubs to join us in implementing chess activities that actively promote women's participation. Our commitment to gender equality and safeguarding must be a shared responsibility within the chess community.

As the President of Chess South Africa, Mr André Lewaks states: ***“If chess is to truly belong to everyone, then we must ensure that women and girls are not left behind. We cannot claim inclusivity while their participation is limited, their safety is uncertain, and their voices go unheard.”***

Nelson Mandela once said, *“The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its women and children.”* Chess SA stands firm in its commitment to making chess a sport that truly belongs to everyone, by ensuring inclusivity, safety, and empowerment for women and girls across South Africa. Chess South Africa's 2025 Year of Women's Chess is a ground-breaking step toward addressing the longstanding gender disparities in chess. This initiative demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusion, safeguarding,

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and leadership development for women and girls in chess. The outlined programs, including coaching camps, safeguarding policies, and leadership training, provide a solid foundation for long-term impact.

To further enhance the initiative's success, Chess SA should incorporate:

- 1) **Measurable Goals & Evaluation** – Implement clear KPIs to track progress in participation, retention, and leadership representation.
- 2) **Funding & Sponsorship Transparency** – Outline financial commitments and explore corporate partnerships to sustain the initiative.
- 3) **Rural & Underprivileged Access** – Expand outreach to ensure girls from all backgrounds benefit from training and leadership programs.
- 4) **Mentorship & Allyship Programs** – Encourage male and female leaders to support and mentor young female players, fostering a more inclusive chess culture.
- 5) **Mid-Year Review & Adjustments** – Assess progress midway through 2025, making necessary adjustments to maximize impact.

With the collective support of Chess SA, federations, clubs, and the chess community, this initiative has the potential to reshape the future of women's chess in South Africa—ensuring that chess truly belongs to everyone.

For any media enquiries or contributions, sponsors or donations please liaise with our Public Relations Officer, **Mr Bongani Mazibuku** at specialprojects@chessa.co.za or +2783 488 2875.

Chess SA: Promoting Women in Chess, Ensuring Safety, and Advancing Inclusivity.

ENDS...

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