



media release

South Africa celebrates 30 years of freedom;

NSTF celebrates 29 years of promoting science, engineering, technology and innovation

Freedom Day, 27 April: This year, South Africans mark 30 years since the historic election of 27 April 1994. This day, now known as Freedom Day, is commemorated every year to honour those heroes and heroines who fought for freedom and paved the way for democracy that would give an equal, and representative voice to all citizens in our beloved country. During the month of April, South Africans are encouraged to reflect on the progress made over the democratic journey thus far and consider how democracy can be further strengthened. The **National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)** is an independent non-profit **stakeholder body and network** – a civil-society forum of over **130 member organisations** involved in science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation in South Africa (SA). On Freedom Day, we commemorate NSTF’s contributions to democracy in the country.

The establishment of the NSTF: The NSTF’s history is as long as that of our democracy and is intertwined with it. In 1991, the pre-cursor of the NSTF, the Science and Technology Initiative (STI), participated in SA’s landmark Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). NSTF was established in 1995 to oversee the implementation of the findings and recommendations that the STI and other key stakeholders made at the Convention. The Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology at the time recognised the body as a forum for consultation and addressing science issues within the broader science community. The NSTF was established to oversee the restructuring of SA’s national science system and to ensure an inclusive, integrated approach to science and technology.

Initially, NSTF had joint chairpersons, namely Jay Naidoo, the first Secretary General of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the then president of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Dr James Brian Clark. The NSTF contributed and provided input into the first White Paper on Science and Technology and other policy and planning processes within government. In 1997, the first Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was appointed, namely Dr Xolani Humphrey Mkhwanazi, Technology Transfer Manager at the Technology for Development division at the CSIR, was seconded to build up the new organisation.

The NSTF, which has since been registered as a non-profit company and now consisting of a **six-membership sector structure**, continues to diligently uphold its mission to promote SET and innovation through strategic collaboration, under current Chairperson Prof Jeffrey Mpahlele, and with Ms Jansie Niehaus overseeing its daily operations to expand the organisation, and build more bridges among stakeholders and between the SET environment and government.

Ukhozi Award Winner: In honour of Freedom Day, **Dr Philemon Mjwara**, recently retired Director General (DG) of the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), stands out as an unsung hero deserving of our recognition and celebration. As DG, Dr Mjwara has supported NSTF throughout his term of office. He received the prestigious **2023 NSTF-South32 Ukhozi Award** for his significant contribution to the South African National System of Innovation (NSI) and for the role he played in building strong relations between the DSI (as DST and later as DSI) and the NSTF. His entire career is marked by a commitment to uniting the SET community, playing a vital leadership role in establishing and expanding this country’s NSI, and putting SA on the map in terms of scientific research and innovation.

Ukhozi means eagle in IsiZulu, and the Award references the black eagle in particular, which is indigenous to Southern Africa. It is a fitting tribute for Dr Mjwara to receive this special award signifying the heights he has achieved and the distances he has travelled throughout his trailblazing career. Dr Mjwara has been working with the NSTF since the year 2000 as the then DACST Director and became even more involved since his appointment as DG of the DSI in 2006 playing a key role in facilitating the funding of the organisation to help fulfil its mission. He served on the NSTF Executive Committee as the main representative for the DSI. With 18 years of service, he holds the distinction of being the country’s longest serving DG, his incredible tenure ending with his retirement at the end of March 2024. He has truly left an indelible mark in the South African science community, having dedicated a better part of his life to ensuring that SET and innovation are a national priority in SA.



"It's not what I've done, but it's the efforts of all in the science system that has made this country proud."

Dr Mjwara said: "The day that I see it is natural and instinctive for the government of SA, the private sector and civil society, to think we can find a solution from the NSI, I am the happiest man." He has participated in various development initiatives run from the office of the President, since 2000. His contributions allowed for capacity building for research and higher education institutions, through the facilitation of international funding. Dr Mjwara was especially proud of South African scientists' involvement in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and to have been part of SA's bid to host the world's biggest radio telescope, the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). He said: "It's not what I've done, but it's the efforts of all in the science system that have made this country proud." Dr Mjwara concluded: "I hope even when I'm gone, this should become the way that South Africans do things."

NSTF current projects:

- **NSTF-South32 Awards** – The Awards recognise and promote outstanding contributions made to SET and innovation in SA by individuals, teams and organisations in various categories, since 1998, regardless of their race, gender, orientation or creed.
- **Discussion Forums** – NSTF Discussion Forums are high level platforms that provide constructive interaction and discussion with government and stakeholders on key priority areas of concern to the SET community.
- **The Brilliants Programme** – The annual Brilliants Programme recognises, inspires and assists more than 18 top matriculants, two per province, in physical science and mathematics who are studying in SET courses at university. Since 2003.
- **Share 'n Dare Programme** – Allows NSTF-South32 Award winners to share their knowledge with thousands of young people and communities across the country. Since 2008.
- **Distributing SET news through the monthly e-newsletter** – including opinion pieces, SET and innovation-related policies, events and South African SET-related news. Taken from a wide variety of sources to give readers a monthly overview of the SET and innovation landscape in SA.
- **Mapping the SET professional landscape** – The NSTF **proSET** sector produces the, 'SET Professionals' Who's Who' booklet, which promotes understanding of the SET environment and the role of the various professions active in these fields.
- **STEMulator.org** – An interactive exploratory platform of STEM fields to ignite a spark of curiosity in young minds. It was initiated by **proSET** and includes STEM careers guidance. (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics.)
- **Bursary Directory** – On the NSTF website, keeps learners and students updated with the available STEM-related bursaries across the NSI. **Young people and professionals** are also profiled as role models. Since 2011.
- **Promoting STEM careers** – The NSTF Science Based Careers booklet presents descriptions of more than 100 STEM careers and calls particular attention to careers of the future, '4IR careers'.
- **Raising awareness through the media** including social media – To raise awareness among the public through the dissemination of knowledge, newsworthy information, and the outstanding contributions of South African SET professionals and organisations, including new innovations.

Join the NSTF's conversations on social media:

- Facebook: [@NSTFSA](#)
- X: [@NSTF_SA](#)
- Instagram: [@nstf_sa](#)
- LinkedIn: [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#)
- YouTube: [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)](#)
- TikTok: [nstf_sa](#)

References:

[30 Years of Freedom and Democracy \(saneews.gov.za\)](#)

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics) - the NSTF **proSET** membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF **proSET**)

For more information
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