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South Africa Renews TB Fight, 2026 Conference Calls for Unity

Johannesburg — Nearly two decades after South Africa's TB and HIV crises forced government, researchers and civil society to abandon fragmented responses, the country is again being urged to unite behind a renewed push to end tuberculosis as a public health threat.

The call came at the close of the 2026 TB conference, held under the theme, *"Vuka! Let's Unite Towards a TB-Free World!"* The theme echoed the decisive shift made between 2006 and 2008, when South Africa began integrating its TB and HIV responses in recognition that TB could not be defeated in isolation from HIV, poverty and weaknesses in the health system.



Deputy President, Honourable Shipokosa Paulus Mashatile at the Closing Plenary of the 9th South African TB Conference 2026.

That period marked the beginning of a more coordinated national approach, including joint TB/HIV strategies, community-based care models and the development of the National Strategic Plan for HIV, TB and STIs. In 2026, speakers said the same spirit of collaboration must be rekindled if the country is to accelerate progress.



Opening the conference on Monday, **Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi** outlined the scale of the challenge, warning that the national picture remains deeply concerning.

Despite notable gains, South Africa continues to carry one of the world's heaviest TB burdens. The country is consistently listed among the top eight countries globally for absolute TB incidence and ranks first when incidence is adjusted for population size.

Conference speakers described the decline as evidence of political commitment, scientific innovation and the resilience of communities. However, they cautioned that the reduction in deaths has lagged behind. TB mortality has fallen by only 17% since 2015, far short of the 50% target.

Data, innovation and community action

The next phase of the response is expected to rely more heavily on strategic information, integrated service delivery and innovation. Delegates were told that interventions must reach vulnerable communities faster and more effectively, with leadership at every level held accountable for measurable impact.

One of the key milestones cited was the launch of South Africa's public TB data dashboard, which allows stakeholders to track information, target interventions and strengthen transparency. Officials said the platform supports faster decision-making and helps direct resources where they are most needed. Delegates agreed that TB control cannot be left to the health department alone.

While conferences help build a shared vision, delegates were reminded that the true measure of success lies in what happens after the closing session. The final message was one of realism and hope: South Africa's TB burden remains severe, but the country has shown that coordinated action can change the trajectory of an epidemic.

“TB is preventable, curable and beatable,” the closing message stated. “Each advancement confirms that the pursuit of a TB-free world is a tangible reality we are actively creating today.”

With that message, the Chairperson of the South African National AIDS Council officially declared the 9th SA TB Conference closed, calling on participants to carry forward the unity and determination that shaped the week's discussions.

Minister Mantashe backs coal's future and calls for continued investment in power generation



Mineral and Petroleum **Resources Minister Gwede Mantashe** defended the future of coal mining and coal-fired power generation, saying the sector will remain central to South Africa's economy and energy security for many years.

Speaking at the Coal Safe 2026 Conference on Thursday, Minister Mantashe said South Africa should continue investing in coal despite increasing international pressure to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. "Coal has a long life in South Africa. Mining is sustainable," he said.

Minister indicated government and industry must work together to improve the image of mining by tackling what he called the sector's "five Ds": dirty, difficult, diseased, dangerous and deadly.

"Mining is dirty. It is us who are going to make it clean," he said. "Mining is difficult. If we invest in technology, it will not be difficult."

The Coal Safe 2026 Conference focuses on safety, sustainability and leadership in South Africa's coal mining industry. It provides a platform for industry leaders, government representatives and stakeholders to share best practices, strengthen safety standards and advance the goal of Zero Harm.

The Minister said the industry must continue improving health and safety standards to reduce occupational diseases and prevent workplace deaths.

He signalled that South Africa may need to extend the lifespan of some coal-fired power stations as the country continues to face electricity supply pressures.

Addressing coal miners, Mantashe warned that a rapid shutdown of power stations could create serious challenges for the sector and the broader economy.

"You may not be here by 2030. We'll close so many power stations," he told coal miners. "We may extend their life. I'm just whispering to you."

He also praised Sasol's coal-to-liquids and destoning projects, saying South Africa's current petroleum challenges had underscored the importance of domestic fuel production capacity.

Mantashe further said he planned to engage Iranian authorities over concerns about disruptions to global oil trade routes through the Strait of Hormuz.

"You must remember, we're friends to Iran. Closing off this trade is costing us dearly," he said.

The minister also reaffirmed government's support for mining, describing it as a critical sector that would remain important to South Africa's economy for years to come.

However, he warned that the industry still needed to improve safety, cleanliness and working conditions if it was to protect workers and strengthen its social licence to operate.

Mining sector urged to collaborate and build local technology capability

By focusing on collaboration, localisation and responsible technology adoption, South Africa's mining sector can strengthen its equipment manufacturing base and improve long-term competitiveness, speakers said at the South African Mining Equipment Manufacturers (MEMSA) Mind Shift Conference 2026, held at the IDC Conference Centre in Sandton on May 21.



MEMSA chairperson **Mr. Matimba Mahange**, delivering the welcome address, said the cluster's tenth anniversary came at a time when South Africa needed to move beyond simply consuming technology and instead focus on developing, owning and exporting mining technologies.

Mandela Mining Precinct executive director Julie Courtneage cautioned that South African mining was not yet ready for full-scale AI deployment, with gaps remaining in infrastructure, skills and governance.

However, she noted that mining globally was also still moving from experimentation and selective piloting towards broader scaling.

Mine Health and Safety Council research and centre of excellence manager Fleckson Magweregwe said AI could help the sector move from reactive safety management to predictive and proactive risk management by identifying high-risk areas before incidents occurred.



AI's potential to improve operational competitiveness was also highlighted. Coaltech CEO Avhurengwi Nenegovhela said the technology could shorten geological modelling and resource estimation work, while helping companies ask new questions of existing geological data and make faster decisions.

Seriti Resources CEO and FutureCoal chairperson Mike Teke said legislation could support innovation when consultation was properly conducted and technologies aligned with business strategy and employee needs.

Minerals Council South Africa senior policy analyst Brian Ncube said innovation required stakeholders across the mining ecosystem to work together to increase value. The conference concluded that South Africa's mining future will depend not only on adopting new technologies, but on building the skills, partnerships, governance and local ownership needed to make those technologies deliver lasting value.