

Professional bodies unite as corruption and state capture complaints against members escalate

Johannesburg – Six professional bodies have embarked on a ground-breaking initiative to pool their resources and institutional knowledge to foster a culture of accountability and restore credibility to the country's private and public sectors.

The bodies represent over 44 000 of South Africa's company directors, company secretaries, internal auditors, accountants, fraud examiners and risk management professionals.

This afternoon the six signed a memorandum of understanding that will now see them working together in tackling complaints against their members. This follows their receiving a litany of complaints relating to South Africa's state capture and corruption fallout. Many of their members hold memberships across these bodies.

The bodies involved in the initiative are members of the Anti-Intimidation and Ethical Practices Forum (AEPF) and includes the Institute of Internal Auditors SA (IIA SA), the Institute of Risk Management SA (IRMSA), the SA Institute of Professional Accountants (SAIPA), Chartered Secretaries Southern Africa (CSSA), the Institute of Directors in Southern Africa (IoDSA) and the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE).

The AEPF is made up of professional bodies and was formed to encourage whistleblowing and help eradicate corruption and unethical business practices.

Chair of the AEPF and CEO of the IIA SA, Dr. Claudelle von Eck, says current-day South Africa is awash with "complexities, ambiguities and ethical dilemmas and thus it is critical that the professionals we all represent live up to the highest standards of competence and ethical behaviour".

She adds: "Protecting the interest of the public is a key element in the mandate of professional bodies and central to this is holding professionals accountable against a Code of Ethics as well as Professional Standards."

She says reports of such breaches had risen in recent times which necessitated the six bodies coming together, adding: "Professional bodies have thus come under increasing pressure to hold their members accountable - and visibly so."

She says the primary rationale behind the initiative is to ensure greater accountability by its members, those who move from one profession to another as well as those who are members of more than one professional body.



“Professional bodies need to work together as an important line of defence. In doing so, we are in a much better position to execute their mandate that requires them to work in the interest of the public.”

She says the initiative will now see, for example, standardised protocols across the board while cases against those holding more than one membership will be coordinated.

“Of course, our long-term objective is to become a critical voice representing professional South Africans wherein we want to play a key role in regards to regulation and legislation in our various sectors. As professional bodies it is incumbent on us to be part of the national conversation and play a leading role in promoting good governance which will ultimately drive the South African economy.”

Von Eck says they are currently engaging with several other professional organisations within the AEPF to join the initiative.

The collaboration agreement signed today will now ensure:

- Professionals will not be able to use loopholes to evade being held accountable,
- Proper mechanisms of disclosure are put in place,
- The professional bodies can speak with one voice where an individual holds multiple designations and/or memberships,
- The unnecessary duplication of effort is avoided, and
- Costs that can sometimes run into the hundreds of thousands can be contained.

CEO of the IRMSA, Gillian le Cordeur, says the move would ensure the establishment of another key combatant in the fight against corruption.

She says professional bodies often work in silos even though many of the disciplines were inter-related.

“The bodies uniting will be a strong force against corruption and ensuring good governance and ethical behaviour to prevail in our country.”

CEO of CSSA, Stephen Sadie says that “professional bodies need to play a more proactive role in the fight against corruption and state capture. We need to support our members who do the right thing and weed out those who are acting unprofessionally”.

The executive chair of SAIPA, Shafiek Dollie, says the agreement “allows professional bodies to set the tone at the top at both organisational and professional levels in terms of ensuring its members conduct in compliance to legislation, regulation and standards”.

He adds: “It promotes a shared responsibility for regulating the conduct of professionals in protecting the public interest as well as promotes standards which governs processes in dealing with ethical and disciplinary matters.”

CEO of the ACFE, Jaco de Jager, says he was looking forward to working closely with the fellow professional bodies.

“For too long members who held a membership with more than one professional body dictated as to who can hold them responsible. Through collaboration, we are now able to save costs when combining investigation and litigation efforts.”

CEO of the IoDSA, Angela Cherrington-Oosthuizen, says the current dynamics in the country necessitated professional bodies “take a more proactive role in collaborating”.

“This is to ensure that our respective professionals remain skilled and are supported - but are also held accountable for their conduct.”

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