

New Sars chief outlines modernisation and tougher tax-enforcement drive

The South African Revenue Service (Sars) has entered a new chapter with the appointment of Commissioner Johnstone Makhubu, who has formally begun his term at the helm of the country's tax authority.



Source: Supplied.

In his first statement, Makhubu pledged to strengthen fairness, rebuild trust and reinforce institutional integrity within the organisation.

Appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the recommendation of Finance Minister Enoch Godongwan he steps into the role at a time when South Africa depends heavily on an effective, credible and well-functioning revenue authority.



Source: Supplied. New Sars chief, Commissioner Johnstone Makhubu.

Makhubu said his leadership approach would be grounded in stewardship rather than authority.

“Leadership at Sars is not about power; it is about trust. That trust must be earned daily through fairness, consistency and humility in how we apply the law,” he said.

He stressed that Sars operates at the centre of South Africa’s social and economic contract, with a mandate to secure revenue, strengthen compliance and safeguard the integrity of the tax system.

“We carry one of the most serious responsibilities in the state. That trust is not symbolic — it must be protected in every decision and every interaction,” he said.

Reform and renewal

The Commissioner paid tribute to the institution’s recent history of recovery and reform, crediting the leadership of former Commissioner Edward Kieswetter for restoring institutional stability and rebuilding public confidence after a turbulent period in the organisation’s past.

He said Sars enters this new phase with a strong global reputation as a modern, capable revenue authority

However, he cautioned that maintaining that standing would require continued discipline.

A central feature of the new Commissioner’s agenda is an internal reform drive named “Doing Basics Right” which focuses on strengthening core operational performance. The aim, he said, is to build a system where compliance becomes simpler and more intuitive, and where “the best service is no service” because processes are efficient and seamless.



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Makhubu reaffirmed the commitment of Sars to tackle the country’s growing illicit economy, which continues to erode the tax base and distort legitimate competition.

“Sars has developed its own Illicit economy strategy that will complement national efforts. The scale of the challenge is significant, and it demands co-ordinated and decisive action,” he said.

Modernisation and enforcement

Another key pillar of his strategy is what he termed Modernisation 3.0, an expansion of Sars' digital transformation agenda. The programme will deepen the use of data analytics, automation and digital platforms to improve service delivery and compliance monitoring.

However, he emphasised that technology alone would not be sufficient.

“Modern systems must be matched with strong human capability. We will continue to invest in skills, training and professional excellence to ensure Sars remains at the forefront of tax administration globally,” he said

Compliant taxpayers, he said, would be treated with clarity, respect and professionalism, with systems designed to reduce friction and make compliance easier.

At the same time, he issued a firm warning to those who deliberately evade tax obligations.

“Those who choose not to comply, who abuse the system or undermine it for personal gain, should expect decisive enforcement action. A tax system only works when everyone contributes fairly,” he said.

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