



PUBLIC PROTECTOR  
SOUTH AFRICA

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MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING SIGNING: ALHF AND CERT



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## 1. Opening Remarks

Distinguished guests, colleagues, members of the African Left Handers Foundation, Centre for Educational Rights and Transformation, members of the University community, and all those who are friends of justice and inclusion.

It is both an honour and a privilege to join you for this significant occasion, marking not only the recent commemoration of International Left-Handers Day on 13 August, but also the signing of this historic Memorandum of Understanding between the African Left Handers Foundation and the Centre for Educational Rights and Transformation. This day represents more than an administrative formality—it is a milestone in our collective commitment to human rights, educational equity, and the constitutional promise of dignity for every South African.

I also wish to extend heartfelt congratulations to the African Left Handers Foundation on celebrating its 5th Anniversary this year—a milestone that embodies dedication to advancing the rights and dignity of left-handers.

## 2. The Constitutional and Legal Framework

As Public Protector, my office operates under the constitutional mandate established by Section 182 of our Constitution. This grants me the power to investigate, report on, and remedy any conduct in state affairs or public administration that is alleged or suspected to be improper or to result in any impropriety or prejudice. Importantly, this broad jurisdiction allows my office to address cases of discrimination and maladministration across all spheres of government, including in our educational institutions.

South Africa's Constitution, in Section 9, guarantees equality as a foundational right. This right has three critical components: equality before the law, permission for the state to take positive measures to advance previously disadvantaged groups, and a prohibition on unfair discrimination by both the state and private individuals[25]. The Promotion of Equality and

Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) gives practical effect to these constitutional guarantees.

### 3. The Invisible Discrimination: Left-Handedness in Education

Left-handed individuals comprise approximately 10% of the global population, yet they remain one of the most invisibilised minorities in our post-apartheid democracy. Recent research from the University of Johannesburg confirms that discrimination against left-handed children persists in South African schools, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas where the practice of forced hand-switching continues.

This discrimination manifests in multiple ways:

- **Educational Barriers:** Left-handed students often struggle with tools and materials designed for right-handed users, from scissors to desks]
- **Teacher Training Gaps:** Many educators lack training to recognise and accommodate left-handed learners' needs
- **Psychological Impact:** The bias against left-handedness can result in reduced self-esteem, increased anxiety, and feelings of exclusion
- **Physical Challenges:** Inappropriate tools and forced adaptation to right-handed environments can cause physical strain and impair learning

### 4. The Science of Handedness: Neurological Advantages and Realities

Recent neuroscientific research has revealed fascinating insights about left-handedness that challenge historical prejudices. Studies from 2024-2025 show that:

- **Enhanced Brain Connectivity:** Left-handed individuals have an 11% larger corpus callosum—the communication bridge between brain hemispheres—leading to enhanced multitasking abilities and quicker reaction times

- **Cross-Training Benefits:** Growing up in a right-handed world provides left-handed individuals with unique neurological exercise, developing greater dexterity in their non-dominant hand through the cross-training effect
- **Developmental Differences:** Left-handedness is associated with distinct patterns of brain lateralisation, affecting not just motor function but potentially language processing and cognitive strategies

However, recent meta-analyses have also dispelled myths, showing that while left-handers develop remarkable adaptability, claims about inherent creativity advantages lack scientific support.

## 5. International Context and Best Practices

Globally, awareness of left-handed educational needs is growing. International organisations like LEFT-IN (Left-Handers Education Forum & Training International Network) are conducting the first comprehensive global survey on left-handed students in educational environments in 2025. This research aims to create evidence-based policies and training programmes for educators worldwide.

The international recognition of International Left-Handers Day, established in 1976 by Dean Campbell and formalised in 1992, has created momentum for inclusive policies. However, South Africa has an opportunity to lead the African continent in developing comprehensive educational accommodations for left-handed learners.

## 6. The Public Protector's Role and Mandate

Under my constitutional mandate, the Public Protector can play a crucial role in addressing handedness discrimination through several mechanisms:

### 6.1 Investigation Powers

My office has the authority to investigate complaints where left-handed learners face discrimination or lack appropriate accommodations in educational settings. This includes

examining cases of forced hand-switching, inadequate provision of left-handed tools, or failure to provide teacher training on inclusive practices.

## 6.2 Policy Advocacy

While the Public Protector cannot make law, we can investigate policies and practices that result in improper conduct or prejudice. Educational policies that fail to accommodate left-handed learners may constitute unfair discrimination under PEPUDA.

## 6.3 Systemic Remedies

The Public Protector's remedial powers extend beyond individual cases to systemic interventions[26]. We can recommend policy changes, teacher training programmes, and resource allocation to create more inclusive educational environments.

## 6.4 Constitutional Alignment

Addressing handedness bias aligns with our constitutional mandate to ensure that all learners enjoy their right to basic education without unfair discrimination. Section 29 of the Constitution guarantees everyone the right to basic education, and this right cannot be compromised by preventable barriers.

## 7. The Partnership: ALHF and CERT

Today's partnership between the African Left Handers Foundation and the Centre for Educational Rights and Transformation represents exactly the kind of collaboration that drives meaningful change. This Memorandum of Understanding bridges the gap between grassroots advocacy and evidence-based research—a combination essential for sustainable transformation.

As I stated last year: "*When we speak of a nation, when we leave behind women, when we leave behind children, we leave people. And we have to add the element that when we leave behind left-handed people, we leave people. The more you speak of something, the more you create consistency about it, you create awareness about it. Information does not*

*always equate to understanding, but through awareness we move in the direction of understanding, and ultimately, policy."*

Today, we see these words becoming reality. By institutionalising research, formalising partnerships, and creating platforms for evidence-based advocacy, ALHF and CERT are moving us from awareness to understanding, and from understanding to inclusive policy.

## 8. Practical Implications for Educational Rights

What does inclusive education for left-handed learners look like in practice?

- **A left-handed child in a rural school should not be instructed to 'try the other hand'**
- **Classrooms should have appropriate left-handed tools and accommodations**
- **Teachers should receive training on inclusive pedagogies for handedness diversity**
- **Assessment and examination procedures should accommodate different learning approaches**
- **School infrastructure should consider the needs of all learners, regardless of handedness**

## 9. Legal and Constitutional Tools

South Africa's legal framework provides several tools to advance the rights of left-handed individuals:

### 9.1 Constitutional Rights

- **Section 9:** The right to equality and prohibition of unfair discrimination
- **Section 10:** The right to human dignity
- **Section 29:** The right to basic education

## 9.2 Legislative Framework

- **PEPUDA:** Comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation with enforcement mechanisms through Equality Courts
- **South African Schools Act:** Requires public schools to admit learners without unfair discrimination

## 9.3 Institutional Support

- **Chapter 9 Institutions:** The Public Protector, South African Human Rights Commission, and Commission for Gender Equality can investigate and address discrimination[28]
- **Equality Courts:** Accessible forums for addressing unfair discrimination with extensive remedial powers

## 10. A Vision for 2035: True Inclusivity

If I were to envision South Africa ten years from now, true inclusivity for left-handers would encompass:

### 10.1 Educational Transformation

- **Universal Teacher Training:** All educators trained in inclusive pedagogies that accommodate handedness diversity
- **Resource Allocation:** Left-handed tools and materials standard in every classroom
- **Curriculum Adaptation:** Teaching methods that recognise and value different learning approaches
- **Assessment Accommodation:** Fair evaluation procedures that don't disadvantage left-handed learners

### 10.2 Social Recognition

- **Cultural Shift:** Left-handedness celebrated as part of human diversity rather than seen as a deficit
- **Community Awareness:** Families and communities understanding and supporting left-handed children

- **Professional Recognition:** Workplace accommodations that enable left-handed individuals to thrive

### 10.3 Systemic Integration

- **Policy Development:** Comprehensive educational policies that embed handedness considerations
- **Research Investment:** Ongoing South African research into handedness and learning
- **Regional Leadership:** South Africa leading African initiatives for inclusive education

## 11. The Role of Partnerships in Human Rights Advancement

Partnerships like today's MOU between ALHF and CERT are critical because they:

- **Combine Expertise:** Bringing together advocacy experience and academic research
- **Create Sustainability:** Building institutional capacity beyond individual efforts
- **Enable Scale:** Moving from individual cases to systemic change
- **Generate Evidence:** Producing research that can inform policy and practice
- **Foster Collaboration:** Creating networks that amplify impact

This partnership exemplifies what the constitutional scholar calls "transformative constitutionalism"—using our legal framework not just to prevent discrimination, but to actively advance equality and human dignity.

## 12. Global Reach and Local Impact

I am pleased to participate in today's podcast, which will share our South African experience with a global audience. The voices of South African left-handers deserve to resonate across borders, contributing to international conversations about inclusive education and human rights.

Our experience in addressing historical discrimination provides valuable insights for other countries grappling with similar challenges. Just as we have worked to address racial,

gender, and socio-economic discrimination in education, we must now extend this commitment to handedness diversity.

## 12.1 Call to Action

As we witness this historic partnership, I call upon all stakeholders to embrace their role in creating a more inclusive South Africa:

## 12.2 Educational Institutions

- Conduct audits of current practices and resources
- Implement teacher training programmes on handedness diversity
- Establish procurement policies that include left-handed tools and materials
- Create supportive environments where all learners can thrive

## 12.3 Government Departments

- Review policies and procedures for handedness discrimination
- Allocate resources for inclusive education initiatives
- Support research into South African handedness experiences
- Collaborate with civil society organisations on implementation

## 12.4 Civil Society

- Continue advocacy and awareness-raising efforts
- Document experiences and build evidence for policy change
- Support affected families and individuals
- Hold institutions accountable for inclusive practices

## 12.5 Communities

- Challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about left-handedness
- Support left-handed children and adults in their communities
- Advocate for inclusive practices in local institutions

- Celebrate diversity as a strength of our democracy

### 13. Conclusion: Justice Cannot Be Selective

As Public Protector, I have often emphasised that inclusion cannot be piecemeal, justice cannot be selective, and dignity cannot be conditional. Today's partnership agreement embodies these principles, recognising that true constitutional democracy requires attention to all forms of discrimination, including those that might seem minor but profoundly impact individual lives.

The child who struggles with right-handed scissors, the learner whose writing is constantly smudged, the student who feels awkward and different—these experiences matter. They matter because every child deserves to learn in an environment that respects their inherent dignity and accommodates their needs.

This MOU represents more than cooperation between two organisations—it is a social contract, a commitment to advancing the rights, dignity, and opportunities of left-handers, particularly our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

As we move forward, let us remember that the measure of our democracy is not just in our grand constitutional principles, but in our attention to the everyday experiences of all our people. When we create a more inclusive world for left-handed individuals, we create a more inclusive world for everyone.

The partnership we celebrate today is part of the broader mandate to uphold and advance the rights of all South Africans, especially the vulnerable and the forgotten. It recognises that human diversity—including handedness—is not a challenge to overcome but a strength to celebrate.

Let us continue this vital work with the knowledge that every step toward inclusion brings us closer to the constitutional promise of a society based on human dignity, equality, and freedom for all.

Thank you for this opportunity to share in this historic moment, and thank you for your commitment to justice, inclusion, and the rights of all our people.