

Human Sciences Research Council

Ethical AI must speak out against social inequality, neo-colonialism and imperialist wars – Minister Blade Nzimande

Kempton Park, Wednesday, 16 September 2026 – The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Annual Conference 2026 concluded today at the Radisson Destiny Conference Centre, with a closing address by the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Prof Blade Nzimande.

The two-day conference was held under the theme, *The Age of Digitality and the Future of Society: Rethinking Knowledge, Ethics, and the Role of the Humanities and Social Sciences*.

In his closing address, Minister Nzimande commended the HSRC for convening a timely and critical dialogue on how South Africa navigates digital transformation. He said he was greatly encouraged by the conference theme focus, which seeks to place ethics, knowledge and the role of social sciences and humanities at the centre of debates about a future society defined by the digital revolution of our time.

“I say this because of my own deep discomfort about the terms in which many public debates and mainstream media narratives portray the future of society shaped by the growing impact of digital technologies. These narratives tend to represent technological change as if it evolves outside given social relations and power structures in which it is expressed.

“And it speaks about the promises, perils and threats posed by major technologies such as AI, robotics, bioengineering, materials science, etc., without a satisfactory critique of the political economy in which it is embedded. In fact, these narratives neatly side-step any critical view of the unequal patterns of capital accumulation through technology innovation,” said Prof Nzimande.

The Minister further reflected on how technology through AI can benefit humanity. He said if an ethical AI future for all humanity was to be promoted, then such an ethical framework must speak to the conditions of social inequality, neo-colonialism and imperialist wars.

“It must speak against the use of digital tools such as AI in the occupation and genocide in Gaza, the invasion of Venezuela and the Middle East.

“Such an ethical framework cannot pretend to be neutral or silent to the gross injustices – irrespective of where they are committed. It should not only be the domain of experts and governments. It must be pushed by social forces in civil society, labour and grassroots social movements.”

In conclusion, Minister Nzimande said he hoped that insights gained from the HSRC conference could contribute towards this historic task.

The HSRC Annual Conference is one of South Africa’s largest and most influential social

science conferences. Each year, the conference is organised around a pressing societal theme.

The HSRC will disseminate conference proceedings, policy briefs and research outputs emanating from the conference in due course. For more information, please visit: <https://annual-conference.hsrc.ac.za/>

END.

YouTube Link:

HSRC Annual Conference 2026: The Age of Digitality and the Future of Society_Closing ceremony.

<https://youtube.com/live/aD8IXV1WfsY?feature=share>

For media enquiries, please contact Adziliwi Nematandani: Cell: +27 82 765 9191 Email: anematandani@hsrc.ac.za

Follow HSRC Media Room WhatsApp Channel:

<https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Vb8pKy4L2ATzHkm7PM2V>

Join the Conversation:

#HSRCConference

#AgeOfDigitality

#FutureOfSociety

#DigitalTransformation

Notes to the editor

About the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

Established in 1968, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) is South Africa's statutory research agency and the largest dedicated social science and humanities research institute on the African continent. The HSRC generates evidence and insights that inform public policy, support development and improve lives. Through high-quality research, strategic partnerships and research capacity development, the Council contributes to evidence-informed decision-making in South Africa, Africa and globally.

Join the conversation at:

 www.hsrc.ac.za

 <https://x.com/HSRCza>

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/hsrc>

 <http://www.facebook.com/HumanSciencesResearchCouncil>

Click <https://repository.hsrc.ac.za/> to search the HSRC Research Output Repository.

Visit <https://hsrcpress.ac.za/books/> to access HSRC Press online catalogue.