

## Platform Statement – Reon van der Merwe

Position: IAPSS Secretary General

This Platform Statement outlines 1) My IAPSS Journey, 2) My Interest in the SG Role, 3) My Relevant Experience and 4) My Vision for the Role.

### *My IAPSS Journey*

It is my great pleasure to submit my candidacy for the position of Secretary-General of the International Association for Political Science Students. I joined IAPSS in 2019 when I first became a member of the Political Philosophy SRC. At the start of 2020 the IAPSS leadership team asked me to take the lead in the formation of a new SRC dedicated to the Africa & MENA region. I was honoured to accept the role and since then the Africa & MENA SRC has had two successful recruitment cycles (2020 & 2021), growing from 10 to 14 members. The SRC has played an active role in supporting the work of both IAPSS Global and the regional IAPSS Africa secretariat. Some of the most notable projects that my team and I have supported include the UN75 IAPSS Consultation Dialogue in the Africa region and the IAPSS 24-hour Telethon on Global Homelessness. Aside from these we also hosted and assisted with a series of smaller events and projects, including an inter-regional lecture series on Africa-Asia Relations hosted in partnership with the Asia & Oceania SRC.

### *My Interest in the SG Role*

From experience, I know how vital the Secretary-General role is to the well-being and growth of any organisation. If the Executive Committee can be metaphorically represented as the tip of a spear that leads the thrust, and the project portfolios as the hilt where IAPSS members first take hold, then the SG position is what binds these two parts together. Hence, I do not apply to take on this responsibility light-heartedly. On the contrary, my motivations for taking on this role are based on my belief in not only what IAPSS is, but also what it represents. IAPSS carries the unique mandate of unifying the political science students of the world under its banner so that those young people who strive to understand, form and challenge the political world can lay claim to the comradery of their peers from across the globe. IAPSS is a movement, seeking more than a seat at the table of global governance for youth, but rather establishing a global network for and by youth in its own right. However, to achieve this aim IAPSS must maintain a strong and reliable internal structure where membership engagement and empowerment take priority. In the position of SG, I hope to employ my knowledge, experience and time towards helping to build the kind of organisation that will ultimately outlast us all.

## *My Relevant Experience*

To my mind, an SG should be someone that can balance both the technical and human elements of running an organisation. They must be organised, adept at written and verbal communication, administratively savvy, able to connect with others, self-motivated and consistent in their work. The role of SG requires, among others, these key competencies and I hope to convince my reader that I can offer them as a candidate. Over the last 6 years, I have been actively involved in a variety of leadership and civil society spaces. While the positions I have held are outlined in my attached CV, there are a few that I believe are particularly relevant to this role and I would like to bring them to the attention of my reader.

First, I would like to highlight the work that I have done with the UN Association of South Africa, both at one of its leading chapters at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and at a national level. UNASA, like IAPSS, is an organisation that I believe has a manifest destiny in making global governance more people-centred in the 21st century by building vibrant networks for different segments of society. My roles within UNASA have included project-based, administrative and leadership responsibilities, all of which eventually culminated in my election as the youngest serving Board Member at UNASA earlier this year. The role that is most relevant to the position I am applying for was in serving as the Secretary-General of the UNASA UCT chapter in 2016/17. The UCT chapter was at that time one of the largest university-based UNASA chapters with over 450 registered members. During my tenure as SG, I used and developed my skills in communication and administration to enhance the impression that the chapter made in the minds of members and non-members alike. From emails to social media accounts to on-campus partnerships, every detail needed to leave people feeling at ease that they were dealing with a trustworthy team and a reputable organisation. It is this same attention to quality and membership-mindedness that I hope to potentially bring into the IAPSS SG position.

Second, I have spent a considerable amount of time working with remote teams on various projects, both in handling UNASA partnerships, but moreover through my roles within the World Federation of UN Associations (WFUNA). Remote teamwork has always been crucial to those who operate within international civil society organisations, even before COVID. At the same time working with international teams, across a diverse range of time zones, cultures and backgrounds, poses its own unique challenges to the effectiveness and day-to-day workings of international organisations. I believe that my experience in managing these kinds of teams will be invaluable when fulfilling the responsibilities of IAPSS SG.

Third, in addition to my civil society work, I have also held several paid positions that I believe attest to my dependability and the consistency of my work. These include primarily recurring contract-based positions at various departments at the University of Cape Town, including tutoring or facilitation roles that involved course admin, tutorial presentations and managing student queries. In 2020/2021 I have fulfilled these roles virtually, which has come with additional learning opportunities for how to remain efficient and achieve key project deliverables.

### *My Vision for the Role*

IAPSS is in a crucial period of its evolution as highlighted in the IAPSS President's Report for 2021. The organisation must seek to recover from the effects of the pandemic while also adapting to improve the effectiveness of its new regional structure. The regionalisation of the IAPSS structure has opened new opportunities for the organisation to get closer to its rank-n-file members, offering them more comprehensive and uniquely catered opportunities to engage with IAPSS. The regional structure also allows the organisation to build more durable partnerships at a regional level. I believe that this adds a new dimension to the SG role. While regional autonomy has allowed the organisation the chance to expand like never before it also means that IAPSS Global must work diligently to draw its teams from around the world together around the common mandate of the Association. This includes working proactively to ensure that regional teams feel well-supported and empowered to carry out their work effectively.

As SG I would prioritise the following items during my tenure:

- Empower regional teams to have more direct, consistent and effective contact with the registered IAPSS members in their regions.
- Aid the President and Excom in liaising, supporting and building strong working relationships between the IAPSS Global team and the regional teams.
- Work with the PR Department and regional PR teams to continue building a strong IAPSS brand and presence around the world via the various online platforms at our disposal.
- Support efforts to expand the reach of the organisation into the global South so that IAPSS can reflect a truly global demographic.
- Support the President and Excom in identifying and pursuing more political science associations and organisations that can be brought into the IAPSS fold.
- Assist the President and members of the Excom in efficiently and effectively carrying out their duties in so far as the communications and administration of day-to-day tasks are concerned.
- Continue the revamp of the IAPSS website to make it user-friendly, to have it reflect the expanding regionalisation of the organisation and to present the IAPSS brand as professional and reliable.
- Assist in ensuring that the election and selection of regional teams remains an open, fair and democratic process that serves the key objectives of the entire organisation.
- Carry out any and all duties that are required by the role with dedication, attention to detail and in cooperation with all necessary stakeholders.