



ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA ON MIGRATION

**UNION BUILDINGS, TSHWANE
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Fellow South Africans,

I wish to address you this evening on a matter that concerns many South Africans.

Over recent months, South Africans from every walk of life have raised concerns about migration and illegal immigration.

These concerns are being expressed in our communities, our workplaces, our schools, our clinics and across social media platforms.

Many South Africans are asking difficult but legitimate questions.

They are asking whether our borders are secure.

They are concerned about jobs.

South Africans are raising these matters because they are concerned about pressure on public services.

They are concerned about safety, security and the rule of law.

These concerns are real. They deserve to be heard. They deserve to be addressed.

South Africans are asking whether government is taking the necessary steps to address these challenges.

Tonight, I want to address these concerns. I want to explain what government is doing to address them. And I want to outline the principles that must guide us as we confront this challenge together.

We must be honest about the context in which these concerns arise.

South Africa faces persistently high levels of unemployment, especially among young people.

Too many families are struggling to make ends meet.

Too many communities are experiencing poverty and inadequate access to opportunities.

In such circumstances, frustration can easily be directed at those perceived to be competitors for jobs and resources.

Yet we must recognise that illegal immigration is not the cause of all our economic challenges.

The answer must be faster economic growth, greater investment, industrial expansion, infrastructure development and the creation of millions of new jobs.

We know that migration is a global issue. It affects all countries.

Our country – like many others throughout history – is a product of migration.

It is the reason for our diversity and contributes to our vibrancy.

As a democracy, we have welcomed visitors to our country.

In line with our international obligations and our constitutional values, we accept people from other countries in need of protection from wars, conflicts, discrimination and violence.

Like every other country in the world, we have laws that determine who can come to our country, what they can do here and how long they can stay.

The basic principle, on which we all agree, is that every person within the borders of South Africa should be here legally.

Every person who works in our country must be legally permitted to work.

Every person who runs a business here must be legally permitted to run a business.

The challenge we have is that some people have migrated to our country irregularly and are here illegally.

South Africa has a right to implement policies and measures that prevent irregular migration.

South Africa is committed to protect, uphold and advance the human rights of all people in our country, whether citizens or foreign nationals.

We are committed to honour our international obligations.

The responsibility for enforcing immigration laws rests with the state and the state alone.

There have been weaknesses in the way migration has been managed.

There have been weaknesses in rigorous and focused enforcement.

There have been instances of corruption.

There have been gaps in our systems that have undermined public confidence.

South Africans are entitled to expect better.

We accept that responsibility and we are taking decisive action to correct these shortcomings.

South Africans have a right to expect a state that is effective, professional and capable of enforcing its own laws.

Government will accordingly take action to address the expectations of our people in dealing with the challenge of the violations of our immigration laws.

I must make it clear that only the authorised government officials may act against violations of the law, including violation of our immigration laws.

No other person is allowed, for example, to confront someone in the street to demand proof of nationality.

We know that South Africans are not xenophobic as there is no space for xenophobia, racism, sexism, Afrophobia or any other forms of intolerance in South Africa.

As communities and as a society, we must not be tempted to join those who want us to turn against people who were not born in South Africa and who are in our midst.

We will and must not allow groups to use the legitimate concerns of South Africans to destabilise our country through inciting lawlessness and violence.

We will act against forces who are exploiting the concerns of our people about illegal immigration to further their own political, personal or criminal agendas.

We will not be fooled or influenced by social media campaigns that spread misinformation, fake news and lies about foreign nationals.

We must be concerned that anti-foreigner sentiment is at times accompanied by tribal and ethnic slurs, insults or attacks aimed at other South Africans.

We expect foreign nationals to respect our laws. We therefore need to respect them ourselves.

Almost all South Africans recognise that illegal immigration is a significant challenge.

Illegal migration, if unchecked, poses a risk to South Africa's security, stability and economic progress.

We know that illegal migration affects service delivery and places additional burdens on essential services such as health care and education.

Illegal migration routes increasingly overlap with organised crime.

Criminal syndicates involved in trafficking, extortion, illegal mining, drugs and money laundering often use undocumented migration for recruitment and concealment of goods.

We know that illegal immigration undermines our efforts to create decent work for our people.

There are businesses in our country that employ undocumented immigrants because their legal status means that they cannot stand up for their rights.

Some employers hire undocumented immigrants because they pay them wages that are well below the minimum wage and make them work longer hours without due compensation.

We have uncovered a number of workplaces where undocumented migrants are made to labour under very bad conditions.

Employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers and exploit their vulnerability are breaking the law.

They undermine labour standards. They undermine fair competition.

And they undermine opportunities for South Africans.

Such conduct will attract far stronger penalties and far stricter enforcement.

Many communities have expressed anger about the number of foreign nationals running spaza shops, trading stores and other informal outlets.

They argue that foreign enterprises are squeezing out South Africans from operating in these markets in their own communities.

These concerns must not be dismissed.

Many South Africans feel excluded from opportunities within their own communities.

Government has a responsibility to support local enterprise, promote fair competition and create conditions in which South Africans can participate meaningfully in the economy.

As a country, as communities and as a continent, we need to work together – in accordance with our Constitution, our laws and our international obligations – to tackle illegal immigration.

We must do so without resorting to violence, intimidation, victimisation or xenophobia.

Following the announcements made in the State of the Nation Address in February, government is taking further decisive action to tackle illegal immigration.

Last week, Cabinet adopted a Comprehensive Approach for Migration Management.

This approach has been endorsed by the President's Coordinating Council, which includes Premiers and MECs, representatives of local government and representatives of the National House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders.

This evening, I would like to share with you the key actions we are taking.

As Government our objective is clear.

We want a South Africa where every person who enters the country does so lawfully.

A South Africa where immigration laws are respected and enforced.

A South Africa where businesses compete fairly.

A South Africa where communities feel safe and secure.

And a South Africa that remains true to its constitutional values and its commitment to human dignity.

We intend to achieve this objective by implementing the following measures, amongst others:

Firstly, we are and will continue to crack down on the violation of our immigration, labour and other laws.

Secondly, we will continue to prevent people from entering the country irregularly and illegally.

Thirdly, we are and will continue to stamp out corruption in our immigration system.

Fourthly, we will strengthen our immigration laws and policies.

Finally, we will continue to engage other countries, including our sister countries on the African continent, to forge a broader response to migration challenges across our region and the continent.

The first part of our response is a concerted crackdown on violations of existing immigration, labour and other laws.

The Department of Home Affairs, Border Management Authority, South African Police Service and other law enforcement agencies have been and will intensify the process of identifying and deporting undocumented foreign nationals residing illegally in South Africa.

In the past year alone, the Border Management Authority managed to intercept and stop over 450,000 people who were attempting to enter South Africa illegally.

We will set up dedicated courts to deal with immigration to speedily support the deportation of undocumented migrants.

The South African Police Service, Home Affairs and Department of Employment and Labour are increasing inspections targeting companies employing undocumented foreign nationals.

As part of rebuilding the labour enforcement capacity, the Department of Employment and Labour has launched the phased recruitment of 10,000 inspectors for this financial year.

We are going to increase the penalties, including imprisonment, for employers who violate the Immigration Act.

We cannot have a situation where employers who, after being charged and found guilty of violating our laws, merely pay a fine and continue employing undocumented foreign nationals whom they exploit.

To address violations of immigration and labour laws in the transport sector, we are implementing a plan that has been developed with the logistics and freight industry and labour organisations.

The second part of our response is to secure our borders.

Every sovereign nation has a responsibility to know who enters its territory, why they are entering and how long they are permitted to stay.

Secure borders are not a sign of hostility towards other countries.

They are a fundamental requirement of a sovereign and well-governed state.

Accordingly, we are taking further measures to secure our borders.

We will therefore continue to invest in modern technology, infrastructure and personnel to ensure that our borders are secure while facilitating legitimate trade, travel and economic activity.

We will undertake a phased relocation of refugee reception centres to border posts, starting with the Tshwane centre this year.

Many other countries have refugee reception centres close to the place where refugees enter the country seeking asylum or refuge.

The relocation of refugee reception centres closer to our borders is intended to ensure that asylum applications are processed more efficiently, more securely and more fairly.

This will enable government to determine protection needs at the point of entry to ensure that those who genuinely require protection receive assistance as quickly as possible.

The third part of our response will be to continue strengthening our immigration system by stamping out corruption and deploying cutting-edge technology.

We are continuing the crackdown on corruption and inefficiencies in the Department of Home Affairs.

We must recognise that illegal immigration is often enabled by corruption.

Officials who sell documents, facilitate unlawful entry or abuse public office for personal gain betray the trust of the South African people.

We will pursue these cases relentlessly.

Those responsible are facing dismissal, criminal prosecution and the full consequences of the law.

We are establishing an Intelligent Population Register that contains biometric data for every person in the country, laying the foundation for a Digital ID.

At the same time, we will progressively discontinue the green ID books, which have enabled identity theft by undocumented immigrants and criminal syndicates.

The Department of Home Affairs will set a date after which the green ID books will not be recognised.

We will end the abuse of the Traffic Registration Number, which foreign nationals require to register or buy vehicles, but which is being used as a form of identification.

The Department of Transport will issue new regulations to align with the identification laws of our country within the next 3 months.

The fourth part of our response is to close the gaps in our laws and policies.

The laws that regulate immigration in South Africa are fragmented and often contradictory. They allow legal loopholes that are exploited by undocumented migrants.

We are addressing these loopholes.

Government has finalised the National Labour Migration Policy, which proposes maximum quotas for the employment of documented foreign nationals, and deals with the prosecutions of employers hiring undocumented workers.

The Employment Services Amendment Bill has been approved by Cabinet for introduction to Parliament. This empowers the Minister to set quotas in respect of the employment of foreign nationals in any economic sector or occupational category.

The Department of Small Business Development, working with the South African Local Government Association, will complete the process of ensuring small and informal businesses are properly registered. It will also provide support for South African informal businesses through the Spaza Shop Fund.

The final part of our response is to work with other countries in our region and across the continent to address the broader challenge of migration.

We need to address the factors that drive migration on our continent and elsewhere.

South Africa cannot address migration challenges alone.

Migration is a continental and global phenomenon.

South Africa's future is inseparable from the future of the African continent.

Migration pressures cannot be addressed through enforcement measures alone.

They require peace where there is conflict, economic growth where there is stagnation and opportunity where there is poverty.

As South Africa, we will continue working with our sister countries to build an Africa in which people move by choice and not by desperation.

Through SADC, the African Union and in our bilateral relations with other countries, we will seek to find sustainable solutions to these challenges.

As part of this effort, I will be sending envoys to a number of sister African countries to outline the measures that we are announcing this evening.

Cabinet will remain seized with this matter and will regularly review progress in implementing these measures.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Migration will coordinate government's response across departments and spheres of government.

NATJOINTS and Provincial NATJOINTS structures have been directed to strengthen coordination among law enforcement, intelligence and security agencies to ensure effective implementation.

As we work to tackle the problem of illegal immigration, we are determined that we will not allow anyone to exploit this problem to destabilise our country.

Our law enforcement agencies and security services – working with other state entities and key stakeholders – are ready to act to protect public safety, maintain law and order, and safeguard critical infrastructure.

The changes we have recently introduced to our immigration laws and regulations will allow us to attract tourists, highly skilled global talent and investment through lawful channels.

We must also remember that many of our people travel to other countries to study, to work and to gain experience.

Many come home with valuable skills and expertise, with a wider view of the world, and in a better position to improve their lives and those of their families.

Migration is the way of the world and we must be prepared to embrace it.

South Africa is a better country for migration. And we can become better still.

But that means our laws need to be strengthened and more effectively enforced.

It means that we must end illegal immigration and deal with the social, economic and security challenges to which it contributes.

We must not allow ourselves to turn against foreign nationals or each other.

We must all respect the Constitution, uphold the basic human rights of all people and consistently uphold the law of the land.

We reject the notion that we must tolerate illegal immigration.

We can protect our borders while protecting human dignity.

We can enforce our laws while upholding our Constitution.

We can secure our communities while preserving the values of Ubuntu that define us as a people.

Like many challenges that we have faced before, we can overcome the problem of illegal immigration.

South Africa has overcome far greater challenges than this.

We have overcome division. We have overcome conflict. We have overcome injustice.

We will overcome this challenge too.

Let us do so not through fear, anger, hatred or violence, but through unity, determination and respect for the rule of law.

Let us build a South Africa that is secure, lawful, compassionate and prosperous.

A South Africa in which we expand opportunity, protect people's dignity and fulfil the promise of democracy for all.

I thank you.