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SPEECH

MINISTER MACPHERSON ANNOUNCES PROGRESS ACHIEVED AGAINST CONSTRUCTION MAFIA, SAYS CABINET-APPROVED SOCIAL FACILITATION FRAMEWORK MARKS NEXT PHASE IN FIGHT

(Note to editors: The following address was delivered by the Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Honourable Dean Macpherson, during a media briefing at the GCIS Imbizo Centre in Parliament, Cape Town, on Tuesday afternoon, 7 July, following Cabinet's approval last week of the Integrated Social Facilitation Framework (ISFF). He was joined by the Acting Deputy Director-General for Real Estate Management Services in the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, Mr Molatelo Mohwasa; the CEO of the Council for the Built Environment, Dr Msizi Myeza; and the President of the South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions, Ms Sharon Shunmugam.)

- Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Dean Macpherson said Cabinet has approved the Integrated Social Facilitation Framework as a binding national policy instrument to standardise community engagement, build community buy-in, and help prevent construction stoppages before they happen.
- He said progress has been achieved since the signing of the Durban Declaration, with more than 770 reported cases, 241 arrests, 176 convictions, and construction disruptions in KwaZulu-Natal reduced from more than 60 per month to fewer than 10.
- The Minister said government is moving from reacting to construction-mafia disruptions to preventing them through coordinated law-enforcement responses, contractor blacklisting, professional Social Facilitators, stronger monitoring, and clearer channels for lawful community participation.

Today, we announce Cabinet's approval last week of the Integrated Social Facilitation Framework as a binding national policy instrument - a major step in moving from policy development to formal government implementation.

Since the Durban Declaration, our work has shifted from establishing coordination mechanisms to making sure those mechanisms are used effectively across the sector.

It is the next phase in our fight against the construction mafia.

It is the next phase in restoring law, order and confidence to construction sites.

And it is the next phase in our work to ensure that communities are properly engaged, that legitimate local participation is protected, and that criminals can no longer exploit community frustration to hijack construction projects.

When I entered office in July 2024, one of the first and clearest threats facing public infrastructure delivery was the construction mafia.



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It was clear to me then, as it remains clear to me now, that South Africa cannot turn itself into a construction site if construction sites are controlled by criminals.

At that time, the problem was no longer isolated.

It had begun in KwaZulu-Natal, but had spread across the country.

Contractors, developers, public entities and investors were raising the same concern: projects were being stopped, workers were being intimidated, equipment was being damaged, and companies were being forced to pay money or surrender work to people who had no lawful claim to it.

These syndicates were not only delaying projects.

They were increasing costs to the state.

They were scaring away investment.

They were threatening the lives of workers.

They were robbing communities of infrastructure.

They were turning the legitimate need for local economic participation into a weapon of extortion.

Shortly after my appointment, I visited and engaged on projects where this threat had become very real.

In KwaZulu-Natal, I was briefed on how construction-mafia activity had resurfaced and how violent these disruptions had become.

At the uMkhomazi water project, an altercation linked to construction-mafia activity had resulted in the deaths of three people and the assault of another person.

That was a defining moment.

It confirmed that this was not a procurement inconvenience.

It was not a normal community protest.

It was not a labour dispute.

It was organised criminality.

And it required an organised national response.

At the time, the country was already living with the consequences of years of weak coordination, inconsistent reporting, poor project-level community engagement, and too little consequence management.

The widely cited figure remains that more than 180 infrastructure and construction projects, worth approximately R63 billion, had been disrupted, delayed or affected by construction-mafia activity in the years leading up to our intervention.

Those figures represent roads not built, schools delayed, water projects disrupted, public buildings stalled, private investment lost, workers sent home, and communities left waiting.

It was therefore clear that the old approach was not working.

For too long, we had treated construction disruptions as isolated site incidents.

One contractor would report a problem.

One municipality would try to negotiate.

One project manager would try to keep the site open.

One police station would respond if a case was opened.

But the networks behind these disruptions were organised.

They were mobile.

They were often politically connected.

And they were learning how to embed themselves not only through open violence, but also through subcontracting arrangements, local participation structures, security contracts, front companies and self-appointed community representatives.

So, we had to change the approach.

We had to move from isolated responses to national coordination.

We had to move from private fear to public confrontation.

We had to move from negotiation with criminals to consequence management.

And we had to move from reacting to site invasions to preventing the conditions that allow them to happen in the first place.

That is why, in August 2024, I committed together with KwaZulu-Natal Public Works and Infrastructure MEC Martin Meyer to convene a national summit on construction-mafia activity.

The purpose was clear: bring together public works departments, law enforcement, National Treasury, regulators, public entities, provinces, municipalities and the construction sector to build one coordinated national response.

That summit took place in Durban in November 2024.

It brought together the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, the South African Police Service, National Treasury, the Construction Industry Development Board, public entities, industry stakeholders and social partners.

It resulted in the signing of the Durban Declaration.

The Durban Declaration was our line in the sand.

It said that the state would no longer tolerate criminal disruption at construction sites.

It said that infrastructure projects must be allowed to continue uninterrupted.

It committed stakeholders to strengthening the legal and policy environment, improving data and reporting systems, enhancing rapid response, supporting arrests and prosecutions, embedding social facilitation in project planning and implementation, developing emerging

enterprises and skills, and creating collaborative platforms to solve problems in the construction sector.

Most importantly, it recognised that the fight against the construction mafia requires two forms of action at the same time.

The first is law enforcement.

Where there is extortion, intimidation, violence, vandalism, sabotage or criminal interference, people must be arrested, prosecuted and convicted.

The second is prevention.

We must close the space that criminals exploit by building community buy-in from the start.

That means ensuring communities are properly informed, meaningfully engaged, and given lawful, transparent channels to raise concerns and access legitimate opportunities.

We must create transparent mechanisms for local participation.

We must make sure that employment, subcontracting and enterprise-development opportunities are not captured by gatekeepers, politically connected groups or criminal networks.

Since the signing of the Durban Declaration, there has been measurable progress.

More than 770 cases of construction-related extortion and intimidation have been reported across the country.

Of those, 241 arrests have been made.

Most importantly, 176 individuals have been convicted.

In KwaZulu-Natal, which was historically regarded as the hotspot of construction-mafia activity, monthly site disruptions have dropped from more than 60 incidents per month to fewer than 10 incidents per month.

That is a significant improvement.

It shows what can happen when government, law enforcement, public entities and the private sector act together.

It shows what can happen when contractors report cases and the state responds.

It shows what can happen when criminals begin to understand that construction sites are no longer spaces where they can act without consequences.

Reports from the cidb further show that this progress is not only reflected in headline statistics, but also in the way incidents are now being managed on the ground.

Through its participation in the Priority Crimes Committee, alongside SAPS, Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority, private security, infrastructure clients and private-sector representatives, reported disruptions are now escalated more quickly and addressed through coordinated multi-stakeholder interventions.

This means that while reports of construction site disruptions have reduced, the incidents that do still occur are being responded to more rapidly, helping to reduce delays, restore stability on affected sites and ensure that law enforcement and project stakeholders act together.

But let me be very clear: we are not declaring victory today.

This fight is far from over.

Recent disruptions in Gauteng, including in Randfontein and the Vaal Region, show that risks remain.

But they also show that the response system is now working differently.

In those cases, incidents were escalated through the Provincial Priority Crimes Committee, SAPS and stakeholders responded, affected groups were engaged, and sites were stabilised without allowing the disruptions to spiral into prolonged stoppages.

The construction mafia is still active.

These networks are still looking for ways to infiltrate projects.

They are still trying to exploit legitimate participation and local economic-development requirements.

They are still trying to position front companies, manipulate community structures and influence subcontracting opportunities.

They are still trying to make public infrastructure serve criminal interests instead of public interests.

That is why today's announcement matters.

Cabinet has now approved the Integrated Social Facilitation Framework as a binding national policy instrument to standardise and institutionalise community engagement in infrastructure delivery across all spheres of government, state-owned entities and infrastructure development stakeholders.

This framework is designed to address community protests, project disruptions, vandalism, delays and security risks by promoting structured community participation throughout the infrastructure project lifecycle.

It introduces a professionalised and coordinated approach to social facilitation, including the accreditation of Social Facilitators, clearer governance arrangements, stronger monitoring and evaluation, and a risk-based approach to managing community-related risks.

In plain language, this means that communities must no longer be engaged only after conflict begins.

They must be engaged before a project starts.

They must understand what is being built, why it is being built, what opportunities exist, what the rules are, and how concerns can be raised lawfully.

This is how social facilitation helps prevent construction stoppages before they happen.

When communities are engaged early, when they understand the benefits of a project, when local opportunities are communicated transparently, and when there are lawful channels to resolve concerns, it becomes far harder for criminal groups to exploit confusion, frustration or exclusion to disrupt a site.

For too long, community engagement in infrastructure projects has been inconsistent and fragmented.

In some cases, it was treated as a box-ticking exercise.

In other cases, it was left to unqualified intermediaries.

In many cases, self-styled community liaison officers stepped into the vacuum and claimed to speak on behalf of communities, without any accountability, standards or ethical obligations.

That vacuum has been exploited by extortionists.

The Integrated Social Facilitation Framework closes that vacuum.

It embeds social facilitation throughout the entire project lifecycle, from pre-initiation to project close-out.

It provides for proper stakeholder mapping and community profiling.

It establishes Project Liaison Committees as formal communication and conflict-resolution platforms.

It supports the creation of targeted enterprise databases and Contract Participation Goal Plans to maximise lawful local economic participation.

It integrates training and skills-development programmes for local labour.

It requires continuous monitoring and evaluation of social issues.

It requires regular reporting, so that risks can be identified early and managed before they become disruptions.

This is a major shift.

We are moving from ad hoc consultation to structured engagement.

We are moving from informal gatekeeping to professional facilitation.

We are moving from crisis management to prevention.

And we are moving from allowing criminals to claim the language of community participation, to ensuring that real communities are engaged through lawful, transparent and accountable structures.

The professionalisation of social facilitation is central to this reform.

The South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions, working with DPWI, the Council for the Built Environment and other stakeholders, is leading the process to formalise social facilitation as a recognised professional category.

This will include defined competencies, qualification pathways, registration categories, continuing professional development and a code of ethics.

Social Facilitators must be qualified.

They must be registered.

They must be accountable.

They must understand community dynamics, project delivery, conflict management, local economic participation, governance and ethics.

They must be able to act as a bridge between communities and projects, not as gatekeepers, brokers or political intermediaries.

That is how we protect communities.

That is how we protect contractors.

That is how we protect public money.

And that is how we protect infrastructure delivery.

The implementation of the framework will be coordinated through the DPWI-led Integrated Social Facilitation Collaboration Committee.

This committee includes DPWI, the Infrastructure Technical Assistance Facility, the Council for the Built Environment, the cidb, the Independent Development Trust, the Association of Social Engagement Facilitators of South Africa, SALGA, MISA, the Association of Construction Project Managers, SACPCMP and National Treasury.

This is important because the construction mafia does not operate in one sphere of government, and infrastructure delivery does not sit in one department alone.

A national problem requires a national framework.

Going forward, we will focus on five practical areas.

First, we will prioritise implementation on high-risk projects where community conflict, extortion, vandalism or disruption risks are greatest.

Second, we will work with public entities, provinces, municipalities and implementing agents to ensure that social facilitation is built into project planning and procurement from the start.

Third, we will work with SACPCMP and the CBE to advance the professionalisation, accreditation and registration of Social Facilitators.

Fourth, we will strengthen monitoring and reporting so that we can measure whether professional social facilitation is reducing disruptions, improving community satisfaction and protecting project delivery.

Fifth, we will continue working with SAPS, National Treasury, the cidb, provinces, municipalities and the construction sector to ensure that those who commit extortion, intimidation, violence and procurement abuse face consequences.

This consequence management is already being strengthened.

Since September 2025, 52 contractors have been blacklisted, with a further batch currently under review.

Implementation guidelines for the Integrated Social Facilitation Framework are being developed, awareness webinars are being conducted across the sector, and SACPCMP is advancing the professional registration category for Social Facilitators.

The Integrated Social Facilitation Framework does not replace law enforcement.

It strengthens it.

Where there are legitimate community concerns, we must engage.

Where local businesses seek lawful participation, we must create transparent pathways.

Where young people want skills and work opportunities, we must link infrastructure projects to real development.

But where criminals invade sites, threaten workers, demand money, manipulate procurement, vandalise infrastructure or stop projects, they must be arrested.

There can be no negotiation with extortionists.

There can be no compromise with criminals.

And there can be no future for a construction industry where delivery depends on paying protection money.

South Africa's construction sites must be places of work, dignity, delivery, investment and growth.

They must not be places of fear.

They must not be places of criminal control.

They must not be places where politically connected syndicates decide who may build, who may work and who must pay.

Two years ago, the construction mafia had become one of the greatest threats to infrastructure delivery and investment in South Africa.

Since then, we have taken the fight directly to these networks: through the Construction Summit, the Durban Declaration, stronger coordination with SAPS, National Treasury, the cidb, public entities and industry stakeholders, better reporting, faster response, and stronger consequence management.

And now, with Cabinet's approval of the Integrated Social Facilitation Framework, we are institutionalising the prevention side of the fight.

This is how we turn the tide.

The Durban Declaration has evolved from a commitment on paper into an operational response.

To the construction sector, our message is clear: government is serious about restoring confidence.



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To communities, your voices matter, and this framework is designed to ensure that you are engaged properly, fairly and continuously.

To workers and investors, we are working to make construction sites safer, more stable and more attractive for investment.

And to the construction mafia, the message is simple: the space in which you operate is closing.

Public infrastructure belongs to the people of South Africa.

It does not belong to extortionists, self-appointed gatekeepers or criminal syndicates.

We are determined to build.

We are determined to protect infrastructure delivery.

We are determined to restore the rule of law.

And we are determined to ensure that South Africa becomes a country where construction sites create jobs, grow the economy, serve communities and build dignity.

Thank you.

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