

President Cyril Ramaphosa: Update on security situation in the country

16 Jul 2021

Update by President Cyril Ramaphosa on security situation in the country
My Fellow South Africans,

Earlier today, I visited the areas of KwaMashu, Springfield, Mobeni and Umlazi in KwaZulu-Natal, which have been sites of unprecedented violence and destruction over the past several days.

The streets and buildings I saw bear the scars of looting and mayhem.

But what is most devastating is the toll that these events have taken on people's lives, livelihoods and sense of security.

The human toll will take much longer to repair.

It is clear now that the events of the past week were nothing less than a deliberate, coordinated and well-planned attack on our democracy.

The constitutional order of our country is under threat.

The current instability and ongoing incitement to violence constitutes a direct contravention of the Constitution and the rule of law.

These actions are intended to cripple the economy, cause social instability and severely weaken – or even dislodge – the democratic state.

Using the pretext of a political grievance, those behind these acts have sought to provoke a popular insurrection.

They have sought to exploit the social and economic conditions under which many South Africans live – conditions that have worsened since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic – and to provoke ordinary citizens and criminal networks to engage in opportunistic acts of looting.

The ensuing chaos is used as a smokescreen to carry out economic sabotage through targeted attacks on trucks, factories, warehouses and other infrastructure necessary for the functioning of our economy and the provision of services to our people.

Through social media, through fake news and misinformation, they have sought to inflame racial tensions and violence.

Worst of all, they have sought to manipulate the poor and vulnerable for their own benefit.

Yet, despite the widespread destruction, this attempted insurrection has failed to gain popular support.

It has failed because of the efforts of our security forces, and it has failed because South Africans have rejected it and have stood up in defence of our hard-won democracy.

I saw that determination in action today as I walked through the streets of eThekweni.

I saw people cleaning up the streets, rebuilding their lives, standing together united in their diversity – young and old, men and women, black and white.

They were grateful for the support of the security forces and made it clear to me that they stand united and will work with government to restore stability.

My fellow South Africans,

Since the outbreak of this violence, at least 212 people have lost their lives.

Of these, 180 have been in KwaZulu-Natal, and 32 in Gauteng.

The South African Police Service is investigating 131 cases of murder and has opened inquest dockets in respect of 81 deaths.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who have lost their lives to this senseless violence. This is a pain that no family and no community should have to endure.

Since the unrest started, the National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure has recorded over 118 incidents of public violence, arson, looting and other unrest-related instances.

These incidents were concentrated in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

Since the height of the unrest on Monday and Tuesday, there has been a sharp decline in the number of incidents and calm has returned to most of these areas.

Over 2,550 people have been arrested in connection with the unrest, and special arrangements are being put in place to ensure that these cases are prioritised.

The destruction of property and theft of goods has cost businesses, consumers and the country as a whole billions of rands.

According to preliminary reports compiled by NatJoints, extensive damage has been caused to 161 malls and shopping centres, 11 warehouses, 8 factories and 161 liquor outlets and distributors.

This does not include the damage caused to roads and other infrastructure.

Fellow South Africans,

As this government, we must acknowledge that we were poorly prepared for an orchestrated campaign of public violence, destruction and sabotage of this nature.

While we commend the brave actions of our security forces on the ground, we must admit that we did not have the capabilities and plans in place to respond swiftly and decisively.

Our police were faced with a difficult situation and exercised commendable restraint to prevent any loss of life or further escalation.

However, once additional security personnel were deployed, they were able to quickly restore calm to most areas that were affected.

Once this crisis has passed, we will undertake a thorough and critical review of our preparedness and our response.

For now, our priorities are:

Firstly, to stabilise the country,

Secondly, to secure essential supplies and infrastructure,

Thirdly, to provide relief and support recovery and rebuilding,

Fourthly, to encourage the active efforts of citizens in defence of lives, livelihoods and democracy.

To stabilise the country, we have massively increased the numbers of law enforcement and security personnel on the ground in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

I have authorised the deployment of 25,000 members of the South African National Defence Force to support the work of the police.

Of these, 10,000 are now on the ground, with the remaining forces arriving in their respective areas of deployment over the course of the weekend.

Steady progress is being made to secure our logistics infrastructure:

- The N3 freeway between eThekweni and Gauteng has been re-opened and security forces are in place to keep vital supply routes open.
- The security forces are working with business to ensure the safe transport of fuel, food, oxygen, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and other critical supplies.
- Operations at the ports of Durban and Richards Bay are being restored to enable the resumption of exports and imports.
- Regulations have been issued in terms of the Competition Act to enable firms involved in the supply of essential goods to share information about the availability and demand for certain goods. This is to help prevent shortages of

essential goods and promote the equitable distribution of scarce essential goods across the country.

These measures will ensure that supply chains remain intact.

I want to emphasise that there is no shortage of food or supplies in most parts of the country, and that panic buying will only worsen the situation.

In addition to supporting the police in maintaining order, SANDF members have been deployed to protect key installations and commercial sites that are vital to the functioning of the economy and the uninterrupted provision of services to citizens.

Specialised units of our law enforcement agencies are working around the clock to locate and apprehend those responsible for planning and coordinating this violence.

We will spare no effort in bringing these individuals to justice.

There have been calls from several quarters for the declaration of a state of emergency to contain this violence and destruction.

These calls are understandable given the levels and extent of disorder.

Our view has been that a state of emergency should only be declared when all other means of stabilising the situation have shown to be inadequate.

A state of emergency would allow a drastic limitation of the basic rights contained in our Constitution, which no responsible government would want to do unless it was absolutely necessary.

For now, it is our firm view that the deployment of our security forces, working together with communities and social partners across the country, will be able to restore order and prevent further violence.

We will extinguish the fires that are raging, and stamp out every last ember.

We will identify and act against those who lit the flame, and those who spread it.

We will find those who instigated this violence. They will be held accountable for their deeds. We will not allow anyone to destabilise our country and get away with it.

We will not allow any person or any group to challenge the authority of our democratically elected government.

While our security forces are steadily establishing control on the ground, the effects of this violence will be felt by all South Africans in the days, weeks and months to come.

The damage that has been done to vital economic infrastructure will take time to repair.

This in turn will have an impact on the availability of food, fuel, medicine and other supplies not only in South Africa, but across the region.

The violence and destruction has done enormous damage to our economy at a time when we are struggling to recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

It has destroyed businesses and will undoubtedly lead to further job losses.

Ultimately, it will deepen poverty and cause even greater hardship for millions of South Africans.

The widespread looting of the past week is likely to fuel a further increase of COVID-19 infections.

These events have also disrupted our COVID-19 vaccination programme in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng just as it was gaining momentum.

Now, it is imperative that we should take further steps to provide support to households and to help businesses to restock and rebuild.

We are in the process of providing immediate food relief to households. We are targeting areas affected by the looting and where people have no access to food.

Provincial Departments of Social Development and SASSA will use their remaining budget in the Social Relief of Distress programme to provide support in the form of food parcels, cash and food vouchers.

We are working hard to bring all SASSA offices into operation. Cash pay points are expected to resume services from the 19th of July in all the areas that have been declared safe to operate.

To assist with the immediate needs of affected communities, the Solidarity Fund has established a Humanitarian Crisis Relief Fund to assist those in greatest need at this time. We are calling on all South Africans to support this fund.

We appreciate the support of the many companies, organisations and faith-based groups that have already started providing support to families in distress.

Social partners have been meeting to discuss a range of measures which can be implemented to provide immediate relief within our fiscal means.

This includes the provision of emergency food relief and other assistance to those in greatest distress.

We will also help our small businesses, including those in townships and rural areas, to heal from the damage they have suffered.

Our business people provide important goods and services in our communities, and we will help them to rebuild their businesses.

A team in the Presidency and National Treasury is hard at work to develop a comprehensive support package for Cabinet's consideration.

We will be in a position to make a further announcement in this regard soon.

In the short term, it is essential that we get the vaccination programme back on track as soon as possible, and no effort will be spared in that regard.

Fellow South Africans,

While calm has returned to most of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, the threat to our country and to our democracy remains present and real.

Those responsible for organising this campaign of violence and destruction have not yet been apprehended and their networks have not yet been dismantled.

We must therefore remain vigilant and resist any efforts to incite further violence.

We welcome the unwavering support from religious, traditional, political party, labour and business leaders.

We applaud those individuals, organisations and communities that have taken the initiative, through peaceful means, to restore calm and protect lives, property and infrastructure.

We thank all those people who have remained at their posts under difficult and dangerous conditions, providing services to our people and our nation – the law enforcement personnel, health care workers, social workers, security guards, municipal employees and many other frontline public servants.

We thank the journalists who have been reporting as these events have been unfolding, helping to ensure that South Africans are informed and empowered.

We call on communities across the country to work with the police through Community Policing Forums.

No person should take the law into their own hands.

We must guard against vigilantism and anything that could inflame tensions further.

We call on all South Africans to encourage calm and restraint, to desist from sharing false information, and to report any incidents of violence to the police immediately.

By doing these basic things, we can all work to protect South Africa.

This Sunday, South Africans will join people across the world in celebrating Nelson Mandela Day.

As we reaffirm our commitment to our democracy, let us use Mandela Day to provide food to the most vulnerable in our society, to clean up our streets and to start the

task of rebuilding.

While security forces are essential to restoring order and stability, this assault on our democracy will ultimately fail because the people of South Africa will not allow it.

If we stand together, no insurrection or violence in this country will succeed.

We are engaged in a struggle to defend our democracy, our Constitution, our livelihoods and our safety.

This is not a battle that we can afford to lose.

When we look back on this moment in our history, let us say that we faced down a grave threat and defeated it together.

Let us bear witness to the strength and endurance of our democracy, not its downfall.

Let us speak of the triumph of our Constitution, not its destruction.

We will never allow this great project of humanity, our South African democracy, to fail.

Lasly, I wish to pass condolences to the families of the following South Africans who have passed away in the past few days:

iNkosi Mahlangu (Chairperson of the National House of Traditional Leaders), Tsepo Tshola (one of our outstanding artists), Prof Ben Ngubane (former KwaZulu-Natal Premier), Aubrey Mokoena (Leader of the Release Mandela Campaign and former MP), Khehla Mthembu (business leader), Dr Sam Gulube (Former Secretary of Defence), Geoff Makhubo (Mayor of Johannesburg), Dr Vanguard Mkosana (former Director-General of Labour) and Michael Zuma (younger brother of former President Zuma).

May God bless South Africa and protect her people.

I thank you.

Issued by:

[The Presidency](#)

More from:

[The Presidency](#)

More on:

[Safety and security](#)