

**ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA AT THE JOINT  
SITTING OF PARLIAMENT ON THE CRISIS OF VIOLENCE IN  
SOUTH AFRICA**

**18 SEPTEMBER 2019  
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, CAPE TOWN**

Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Thandi Modise,  
Chairperson of the NCOP, Mr Amos Masondo,  
Honourable Members,

I have called this special joint sitting of the houses of Parliament  
because there is a dark and heavy shadow across our land.

The women and children of this country are under siege.

There is a very violent and brutal war underway against the women of  
South Africa.

Last year, 2,700 women and over 1,000 children died at the hands of  
another person.

Every single day the police receive over 100 cases of reported rape.

This does not count the many more cases of rape and sexual assault  
that are not reported.

Research by Statistics South Africa shows that one in five South African women older than 18 has experienced physical violence by a partner.

South Africa is one of the most unsafe places in the world to be a woman, with levels of violence that are comparable to countries that are at war.

While it has its own specific causes and features, gender-based violence reflects a broader crisis of violence in our society.

As one writer wrote this week:

*“We conveniently refer to the attack on women as Gender-Based Violence. This is too vague, too euphemistic, and too simplistic. We should call it what it is. It is the despicable and deplorable violent attacks by men on women, girls and babies. It is more appropriate to refer to it as Male-Perpetrated Violence.”*

Over the past two weeks, we have witnessed acts of violence against both foreign nationals and South Africans, a situation worsened by the circulation of fake and incendiary messages designed to sow panic.

Lawlessness is corroding the fabric of our society.

This manifests itself through violent crime, destruction of public and private property, vehicles and trucks are destroyed and burnt on our roads and highways.

Business operations are violently halted as people demand economic benefits from business deals.

There are many in our country who have increasingly shown scant regard for the state, for the police and the rule of law, for community and religious leaders and institutions, for our elders, and for each other.

There are many who have lost respect for the values that define our very essence as Africans – the protection of women and children, tolerance and the accommodation of difference.

We need to restore the human rights of others, a principle that so many South Africans fought for, and a cause for which so many gave their lives.

Regardless of where we stand across the political divide, each of us here today recognises the reality that we are confronting a crisis of violence and intolerance.

We have to act now before anger, hopelessness and despair engulfs our country.

I am today calling on all Members of Parliament and all political parties gathered here to come together to signify the magnitude of the challenge we face, and the importance that our Parliament should attach to it.

Confronted with this bad situation the women of our country are demanding that we should have a 'state of emergency' which perhaps will enable us to deal more effectively with the scourge.

In my address to the nation two weeks ago I said I would be approaching Parliament to determine what emergency measures can be put in place to address this crisis more effectively.

Ordinary people and civil society organisations have been waging this struggle.

Many women's organisations have been fighting a rearguard battle, at times with meagre resources to stem the scourge.

Now it is time for all political parties to place violence against women at the centre of their concerns.

I am looking forward today to hearing concrete proposals from political parties on how we can tackle these challenges together.

In this Parliament there are leaders who are both women and men; the voices of men and women alike must be heard.

Let us all work together to turn the tide.

Outside of this Parliament, on the streets of this country, we have heard the demands of women to be safe.

We cry with the parents who have lost their daughters, the children who have lost their mothers, and the friends who have lost their classmates.

We feel their pain as fathers, as mothers and as grandparents.

We affirm right here, right now, *Sekwanele* – Enough is enough.

The people of this country want action now.

Women should not have to protect themselves from men.

They should feel safe and secure with us as men.

They have the right to feel safe.

To enhance the safety of women we are going to, as a matter of urgency, make the necessary amendments to our laws and policies to ensure that perpetrators of gender-based violence are brought to book.

We will make substantial additional funding available for a comprehensive package of interventions to make an immediate and lasting difference.

We will complete the implementation of the decisions of last year's Presidential Summit on Gender-based Violence and Femicide.

In line with those decisions, and following consultation between government, business, traditional leaders, the media, Chapter Nine Institutions and civil society, we have developed a draft National Strategic Plan, which will be finalised shortly.

Given the urgency of the situation, we have developed an Emergency Action Plan, which will be implemented over the next six months.

The Plan strengthens existing measures and introduces new interventions in five principal areas:

Firstly, how to prevent gender-based violence;

Secondly, how we should strengthen the criminal justice system;

Thirdly, the steps we should take to enhance the legal and policy framework;

Fourthly, what we should do to ensure adequate care, support and healing for victims of violence; and,

Fifthly, measures to improve the economic power of women in South Africa.

This emergency action plan will be driven by an Interim Steering Committee located in the Presidency and co-chaired by government and civil society organisations.

The Steering Committee will coordinate rapid response at national level.

In this way, problems at police stations and courts, and challenges such as availability of rape kits or delays in DNA testing, can be channeled to the relevant authorities quickly.

As we have done with our response to HIV and AIDS, we should establish appropriate structures in the offices of Premiers and Mayors to

work with social partners to drive and coordinate our efforts to end gender-based violence.

Honourable members,

In implementing our prevention measures, we must recognise that violence against women is not a problem of women.

It is a problem of men.

Our young men and boys are daily exposed to patriarchal attitudes and practices, and are often encouraged to prove their masculinity through domination and violence.

As part of our emergency response and with a view of embarking on prevention measures, we are going to launch a mass media campaign that will target communities, public spaces, workplaces, campuses and schools, as well as recreational spaces like taverns.

The focus will be on men's groups and formations, youth at risk and offenders inside prisons.

This will be matched with prevention education in schools.

Women's rights and gender power relations will be part of Life Orientation in the school curriculum.

As part of this campaign, we are going to provide gender sensitivity training to law-enforcement officials, prosecutors, magistrates and policy

makers – and ensure that those who are found in breach of their responsibilities in this regard are held to account.

We will undertake a mass mobilisation programme to train and deploy prevention activists to all of our 278 municipalities.

They will engage in household visits and community interventions focused on changing harmful social norms.

Compatriots,

The second part of our response is to strengthen the criminal justice system.

This is to ensure that justice is served, perpetrators are held to account, survivors do not suffer secondary victimisation, and the law acts as a deterrent.

We will therefore be directing resources to improve the functioning of Sexual Offences Courts, Thuthuzela Care Centres, and the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Investigation Units of the SAPS.

Funding has already been approved for the establishment of an additional eleven Sexual Offences courts over the next financial year.

The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development is already working on measures to clear the backlog of criminal cases for rape and other forms of gender-based violence.



These measures include the establishment of special courts, hiring additional court staff and clearing the backlog at forensic labs.

Since the advent of democracy, we have enacted several laws and undertaken a number of programmes to tackle gender inequality in our society, to promote human rights and to enable effective action against gender-based violence.

We have a Ministry in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

We have a Commission for Gender Equality.

In this Parliament, there is a Portfolio Committee and a Select Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

Government has launched many, many interventions over the past decade.

They have been well-intentioned, but they have not delivered the outcomes we have hoped for.

In many respects, however, these measures have fallen short of what is needed to confront the severity of the challenges we face.

We will therefore, as our third area of intervention, be proposing a range of legal and regulatory reforms to this Parliament to strengthen the response of the State to gender-based violence.

We will propose to Parliament the necessary legislative changes to ensure that all crimes against women and children attract harsher minimum sentences.

We need to engage with the Judiciary on the role that it can play in supporting the national effort to end gender-based violence.

Abusers, rapists and murderers must know that they will be caught and that they will face the consequences of their actions.

We affirm our position that the state should oppose bail for suspects charged with the rape and murder of women and children.

Those who are found guilty of such crimes should not be eligible for parole.

A life sentence must mean just that – life in prison.

We are also going to give urgent attention to strengthening programmes to rehabilitate offenders and youth at risk.

It is also important that legislation like the Victim Support Services Bill is finalised as it will strengthen support for GBV programmes and services.

We call on all Parliamentary committees to prioritise these areas of legislative reform and ensure that we have effective legislation in place without delay.

Honourable Members,

As part of our fourth area of intervention – care, support and healing for victims of violence – we will standardise the framework for funding civil society organisations working with survivors of gender-based violence.

Through our Emergency Action Plan, we will provide post-rape training for health care providers and lay counsellors who provide care and support to victims and survivors.

We will work with the private sector, concerned individuals and other institutions to substantially increase the number of Thuthuzela Care Centres across the country from the current 54 to over 100 by 2025.

During our visit to the OR Tambo District yesterday to launch the district development model we found that there are only three such centres serving a population of 1.5 million people.

As part of taking initiatives to address the challenges in the district, we have decided to establish a further five Thuthuzela Care Centres in the district.

We are planning to meet with representatives of the private sector to discuss the establishment of a Gender-based Violence and Femicide Fund to increase support to survivors, including persons with disability and the LGBTQI+ community.

Drug and alcohol abuse fuel gender-based violence pandemic.

The Department of Social Development has therefore been tasked with increasing the visibility of substance abuse awareness and education, and prioritising funding for more treatment facilities.

Institutions of higher learning require a particular focus.

They are important sites of socialisation of young people, but they are also places where sexual harassment, victimisation of women students and rape are rife.

We are therefore going to resource the gender-based violence framework in universities and colleges, which will include the establishment of gender equity offices in these institutions.

The Vice Chancellors of our universities have asked to meet the President to discuss violence against women on campus.

We will be having a meeting to come up with initiatives that are focused on what we should do at institutions of higher learning.

Fellow South Africans,

Women are often hostages in abusive relationships because of poverty and unemployment.

Young women in particular are vulnerable to exploitation from older men with financial resources.

By tackling unequal economic power dynamics we can reduce the vulnerability of women to abuse.

Government will continue to prioritise women when it comes to access to employment, training opportunities and procurement of services.

We call upon the private sector to do the same.

Government is committed to reach its target to set aside 30% of the value of its procurement for women-owned businesses, and to progressively increase that to 40%.

The landscape of South African business would fundamentally change if the private sector made a similar commitment.

We will continue to prioritise support and training for women engaging in small business and informal sector activity, and call on established business to be part of this effort

All government departments will be expected to adhere to gender-responsive planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation.

We are also going to improve collection and analysis of data to monitor our GBV programmes.

As part of this a national gender-based violence prevalence study will be commissioned in the general population as well as a specific survey to monitor gender-based violence in the LGBTQI+ community.

Gender-based violence is a societal problem, and as such all sectors of society must become involved.

We could, for example, harness the Youth Employment Service initiative to recruit young South Africans to boost staffing at police stations, shelters and counselling centres.

The private sector should come on board to fund and capacitate rape crisis centres at hospitals and clinics, and victim support centres at our police stations.

Honourable Members,

The extraordinary and immediate response that is needed to turn the tide against gender-based violence and femicide will need to be matched by a substantial and urgent reallocation of resources.

Cabinet this morning resolved to direct R1.1 billion in additional funding in this financial year to the comprehensive response to gender-based violence.

It is government's intention that the funds appropriated for this programme will be raised from within the current budget allocation and will not require additional borrowing.

Honourable Members,

No man is born a rapist, a woman-batterer or a murderer.

Men and boys are being exposed to violence at a young age, some becoming victims of violence themselves.

The phenomenon of absentee fathers means that boys often grow up without positive role models and positive expressions of masculinity, leaving them at the mercy of the streets, and susceptible to involvement in crime and gangs.

The perpetrators of these crimes are the products of a brutalised society, a society still suffering the effects of centuries of dehumanisation.

We must break this cycle.

As men we must play an active role in the movement against gender-based violence.

We must lead by example in showing women respect and decency.

We must be positive role models to our sons and our daughters.

When we witness acts of violence against women we must not look away.

Many years ago, South Africa was swept by a revolution in how black people thought about themselves and about their place in society.

Like many others, I was involved in black consciousness politics, championed by Steve Biko and others.

It changed how we viewed the world and our place in it.

No longer would we accept injustice inflicted on us because of the colour of our skin.

This revolution is incomplete and it is still living.

I believe we are living through another such a revolution in consciousness today, but this time it concerns the injustices under which women have long laboured.

Protests driven by women, and particularly by our young people, these past few weeks, have broken a spell.

Less than a decade ago we were able to turn the tide on the Aids pandemic because we were able to work together.

There was clear commitment from leadership, funds were mobilised and there was solidarity across society.

We have the means to end violence against women and children.

Now is the time to unite to turn the tide.

We must realise the spirit of our Constitution.

The rights of women and men alike must be protected.

This time must be different.



We, South Africans, must be different.

Honourable Members,  
Fellow South Africans,

The recent public violence directed against both foreign nationals and South Africans exposed not only the levels of intolerance in our society but also the extent to which so many of our people are frustrated about their social and economic conditions.

In responding to these acts of violence and criminality, we must address both the intolerance and the frustration.

As we tackle racism and xenophobia, so too must we reinvigorate our efforts to grow an economy that is inclusive and build a state that is capable and developmental.

We must deal firmly with any and all acts of criminality.

Violent service delivery protests, the destruction of public facilities, cable theft, illegal electricity connections, truck hijackings and construction site invasions disrupt essential services and put lives and livelihoods at risk.

They destabilise communities and inhibit economic activity.

At the same time, we must attend to the concerns that our people have.

We know that our people are concerned about illegal immigration, and about some foreign nationals being involved in crime.

We understand the concerns of local businesses struggling to compete against counterfeit goods being sold at prices they cannot match.

We share your frustration that some South African employers are employing foreigners over locals to undercut wages, turning worker against worker.

We proceed from the principle, as does every other sovereign state, that all who live in South Africa must be legally permitted to do so.

That is why government has prioritised border control and security, and ensure that we tighten up regulations to deter illegal immigration.

Police and immigration officials who take bribes in return for making cases go away, for releasing impounded goods or for issuing fraudulent documents must be dealt with firmly.

South African employers, be they in the trucking industry, hospitality or agriculture, must obey the law.

All who operate businesses in this country must be registered and meet the requirements of the law.

We should consider, as many other countries have, the regulation of how foreign nationals can own and participate in certain types of businesses within the small and medium enterprise sector.

One of the issues raised, quite genuinely by communities, is the proliferation of drug trafficking in various localities, in urban and rural areas.

Both South Africans and foreign nationals are involved in this.

But we also have to acknowledge that there are certain parts of the country where specific foreign nationals have been identified as the main dealers and pedlars.

This needs to be dealt with as a law-enforcement matter, irrespective of the nationality of the individuals involved.

The illegal actions of a few must not lead us to turn on all foreign nationals, the majority of whom are decent and law-abiding.

Honourable Members,

Our fortunes are linked to those of our fellow African nations.

This country was built on the labour of not just South Africans, but migrants from India, from China, and from the entire Southern African region.

We are a diverse multi-cultural society that draws on the rich experiences and capabilities of people from across the continent and across the world.

This makes us a better, more tolerant and more prosperous nation.

Rather than retreating into a laager, we must embrace African integration and the benefits it will bring to our economy and those of our neighbours.

The African Continental Free Trade Area will fundamentally reshape the economies of our continent, and we need to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that will be created.

This week I despatched envoys to a number of African countries to address concerns that have been raised by reports of their citizens being attacked.

The message they conveyed to the African leaders they have met have been well received.

Earlier today, I spoke to former President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania and former President Joaquim Chissano of Mozambique to request them to lead a fact-finding mission to South Africa to examine the reasons for the recent violence.

They would then make recommendations on the measures we can take to prevent such incidents from happening again.

We are going to work with local and international humanitarian organisations as well as the various diaspora forums on an initiative to tackle xenophobia and intolerance.

Such a campaign must be aimed at eradicating stereotypes, encouraging cross-cultural understanding and promoting social cohesion.

There is no place for xenophobia in this country.

Nor is there any place for criminality, whether it is committed by foreigners or locals.

From history we know that there is a fine line between turning on foreigners and turning on each other.

We have all heard the story of a Shangaan man from Limpopo who was attacked in last week's violence because he was unable to pronounce the word 'elbow' in Zulu.

We will not tolerate this.

This is a South Africa that belongs to all who live in it.

We will not allow this country to be sucked into a maelstrom of primitive nationalism and tribalism.

We will courageously and actively resist with all our being any attempts that seek to divide us as Africans from each other.

We must devote the same energy to eradicating lawlessness in all its forms.

We must join and support our community policing forums.

The ward committees and local structures of our political parties must also step up and do their part in making our communities safer.

Everyone must see it as their duty to speak out against crime and to report misdeeds.

Criminals must have no nowhere to hide.

Communities must support initiatives to reintegrate foreign nationals.

There is the wonderful example of the way in which hostel indunas and community members in Jeppestown were able to talk to each other and find a way to reopen Jeppe Park Primary following a week of violence.

We want to see more of this dialogue.

Honourable Members,

Our nation is at a crossroads.

Our actions now will determine whether we rise or sink into the abyss.

Violence against women is not the problem of one province, one community or one political party.

It does not wear a green and yellow doek, a smart suit or a red uniform.

I call upon this Parliament to consider these and other emergency measures without delay so that all government departments, agencies and civil society formations can begin with implementation.

I call upon all our citizens to extend the hand of friendship to the immigrant community who just want to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Many of them have fled war and persecution in their own countries, and see South Africa as a safe place for them and their children.

Let us show them the spirit of ubuntu and show empathy for their situation.

At the same time, we need to continue our work through the African Union to strengthen democracy and good governance across the continent and silence the guns of war and conflict.

We must remove the cancers of gender-based violence and xenophobia, so that we can hold our heads up high among the community of nations.

The time for talk is over.

It is time to restore the hope and faith of our people.

Working together, we can turn this moment of crisis into an opportunity to renew ourselves and return to the values of respect for the rule of law and of human rights for all.

Working together, we can be a nation at peace with each other, and with our neighbours.

We can be a nation that confronts its challenges and overcomes them.

Working together, we can heal our nation and unite its people.

I thank you.