

MEDIA STATEMENT

15 July 2021

Business Unity South Africa calls for implementation of 24-hour curfew, full deployment of army and police including reserve forces.

The violence and damage to property that has overwhelmed parts of the country must be stopped immediately. The loss of life and destruction of property is devastating. We now face disruption to supply chains that are essential for the country's basic functioning, including energy, food and supplies needed to fight the pandemic.

Critical transport networks are unable to function. Sapref, which supplies a third of the country's fuel needs, has been shut down. The Durban port, that is critical to the export and import of goods has been closed with its cold stores severely affected. National key points that include manufacturing of chlorine for our water system and explosives for our mining industry are shut down and under threat of invasion. Water works have been damaged that are key to provincial water systems in KwaZulu Natal. Many vaccination sites have had to close, slowing the fight against the pandemic. While the immediate loss of life is shocking, these disruptions will have a severe impact across the country to both lives and livelihoods.

This disorder has had a devastating economic impact, which represents a significant setback for economic recovery, and has significantly magnified the challenge of dealing with poverty, inequality, and unemployment. It has massively undermined investor confidence, which will take years to rebuild. The impact on employers and employees is severe and will be significant for some time as businesses rebuild. Government must mobilise funds to assist employers and employees.

The impact on vaccinations against the Covid pandemic is also serious.

This is an emergency unparalleled in our democratic history and requires the state to take immediate action. We believe this must include a strongly enforced curfew in specific areas to clear the streets and allow law enforcement to regain control. The violence is characterised by contagion as the impunity that is seen in one area emboldens those in others. This is both geographic and in the type of violence, with opportunistic looting evolving to wanton sabotage of key infrastructure and spreading from one area to another. Without clear and dramatic interventions, contagion will continue. We are concerned state action to date has been inadequate.

We believe the necessary order can be restored through the existing National State of Disaster regulations. The disorder is a major threat to our fight against the pandemic, both in the large and unsafe gatherings that are occurring and the disruption to access to healthcare including testing, the supplies of oxygen and medicines including the transport and administration of vaccines. Together with existing laws against criminality the state has the powers to take steps to stop the disorder in its tracks.

However, this requires that the state mobilise all its resources in the effort. We therefore call on the cabinet to:

1. Allocate emergency funds for the call up of all army reservists nationally and police reservists in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng.
2. Declare a 24-hour curfew in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng to enable order to be restored.
3. Deploy all available security services to strictly enforce the initial curfew and then existing curfews in terms of lockdown restrictions thereafter.
4. Station security services to at-risk areas to monitor the situation, enforce law and order, and be prepared to remain in position until order is fully restored.
5. Reverse the amendment to the Disaster Management Act allowing for gatherings by certain parties. Instead, we urge a restriction on gatherings must be strongly enforced.

Business Unity South Africa can support government by quickly identifying at-risk areas and critical infrastructure that should be prioritised. We are able and willing to work with the security services to align our own efforts and security personnel. While in several cases our security staff have had to be withdrawn from their posts, in many others they continue to protect lives and property but need support from state security services. Through Business Against Crime, we have working channels of communication between business and the security services that can be used for this purpose.

We would like to thank many communities for their active mobilisation to defend property in their areas. We call on communities to ensure they support the security services only and to strictly obey the law.

We offer sympathies to families of those who have lost their lives during the anarchy.

The country is heavily reliant on its security services at this point. We recognise the critical role they must play in restoring law and order to protect the people of South Africa. We call on the security services to do so with utmost professionalism.

South Africans live in a country in which the rule of law is sacrosanct. We must all come together to ensure that it is restored as soon as possible so that we are able to continue the project of building a country we can all be proud of.

Finally, we call on President Ramaphosa to take the lead instituting law and order and using the full might of the power and resources actively and decisively at his disposal to do so. The perpetrators must feel the full might of the law. The president needs to pull the entirety of government behind this effort. We call on the President to be present through regular addresses to the nation to instil confidence and demonstrate government cares about their security!

ENDS

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