

FROM THE DEK OF THE PRESIDENT:

SUPPORT THE POLICE TO MAKE SOUTH AFRICA A SAFER PLACE

Dear Fellow South African,

There is growing public frustration and anger at the levels of crime in our country.

Last month's robbery and gang rape of eight young women in Krugersdorp caused nationwide outrage and led to calls for decisive action against armed illegal mining gangs operating in the area.

The South African Police Service is to be commended for its decisive actions over the past three weeks in response to the gang rape and criminality in the area. However, communities have rightly pointed out that it should not take a high profile crime for action to finally be taken against criminality.

The reality is that there are serious challenges facing policing in South Africa. But we are working hard to overcome them.

Like all government departments, the South African Police Service is feeling the effects of the country's fiscal crisis, several years of understaffing and state capture. Police members also work in a dangerous environment where they often have to face violence, injury or death.

Crime in South Africa cannot be eradicated without a strong, capable, professional police force. The capacity of the SAPS was one of the issues flagged in the report of the Expert Panel into the July 2021 Unrest, which we are taking steps to address.

Having restored much-needed stability to the leadership of the SAPS, our focus now is on closing capacity gaps that led to our law enforcement authorities being found unprepared to deal with the events of last July.

Understaffing and lack of adequate training has had a particularly dire impact on community and Public Order Policing.

Government has allocated funding for the recruitment of 12,000 new police trainees, and the first cohort is undergoing basic training. The SAPS Public Order Policing Units will receive an additional 4,000 members this financial year, and arrangements are being made for appropriate training for members.

Drawing on the lessons of last July's unrest, we are working to improve cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the private security industry in the fight against crime.

We need close coordination with all stakeholders, including business, so that resources and crime intelligence are shared to both improve public safety and deal with crimes that disrupt economic activity.

An example is the collaboration between Transnet Freight Rail and the SAPS to combat infrastructure theft and line sabotage. These crimes seriously affect the economy as companies cannot move their products to the ports for export. Another example of cooperation is between mine security, private security and the SAPS to fight precious metals theft.

As a result of these joint efforts, we are seeing progress in areas like Mpumalanga and Limpopo that have been flashpoints of instability as stolen metals were moved to illicit markets abroad.

Through its national intervention units, the SAPS has also been making progress in combating organised crime, including drug syndicates, gangs and illegal mining.

The SAPS is establishing a task team to tackle illegal mining, alongside other task teams dealing with construction site extortion, copper and cable theft, and theft and vandalism of economic infrastructure.

Besides the successes of effective policing in tackling economic crimes, the hard work of the SAPS in dealing with broader crime often goes unacknowledged.

In the last financial year, for example, SAPS Crime Investigations secured 206 life sentences against 209 accused, of which 154 were for murder and rape. The SAPS Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units secured 356 life sentences against 266 accused. Suspect tracing operations resulted in over 13,000 arrests.

Given the high levels of crime in our society, there is clearly much more that must be done. But these figures do show that many criminals are being arrested and successfully prosecuted. They are not being allowed to get away with murder.

The Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, known as the Hawks, achieved all of its targets for the last financial year, resulting in arrests and convictions, asset seizures, restraint and confiscation orders and forfeiture orders to the value of millions of rands. The arrests and convictions secured by the Hawks included for illegal mining, damage to fuel pipelines, cash in transit heists and for police murders.

The Hawks have started work with the NPA Investigating Directorate on cases emanating from the state capture commission.

The SAPS has been supporting the fight against gender-based violence, establishing more victim-friendly rooms at police stations and procuring nearly half a million evidence collection kits to be distributed to stations.

Policing cannot be successful without the cooperation of communities. For this reason, we are focusing on expanding the network of Community Policing Forums to improve both policing and community relations.

We commend the communities that are taking responsibility for keeping their areas safe through street patrols, crime awareness campaigns and other activities.

Using the report of the Expert Panel as a basis for organisational reform, we are re-organising and reprioritising resources, improving capacity and strengthening law enforcement capacity across the board.

Being a policeman or policewoman must be one of the most difficult, pressured and dangerous jobs in our country, and often a thankless task. While public frustration with crime is understandable, it is unfortunate that this should give rise to hostility towards our police, who continue to serve and protect.

As government works to provide the police with the necessary resources, training and budgets to perform their work, I call on all South Africans to join the effort to keep our streets and communities free of crime.

Let us acknowledge the hard work of our police and give them our full support in making South Africa a safer place.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril Ramaphosa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.