

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

How the South African government is using the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to promote racial discrimination



AfriForum is a not-for-profit South African civil rights organisation. With more than 240 000 active members, AfriForum is the largest civil rights organisation in Africa. AfriForum focuses on the rights of minorities such as Afrikaners and Afrikaans-speaking people on the one hand, while also working continuously to protect the constitutional rights of the broader South African community.

AfriForum distances itself from white supremacists and extremists who attempt to hijack the legitimate concerns of Afrikaners for their own purposes. For example, AfriForum requests support in its fight against farm attacks and murders based not on the race or culture of the victims, but based on the fact that these victims are humans of a specific vocation whose basic human rights are being violated.



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1. Introduction

Speaking to the media about the government-enforced lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said that the pandemic presented South Africa with the opportunity to "reconstruct" its economy.

South Africa was witnessing the "total destruction" of the economy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Ramaphosa said, adding that the pillars of a new economy had to be put in place and that South Africa's new economic future must be underpinned by **radical economic transformation**. He continued:²

The important principles [sic] is that it must be an economic future that is going to ensure that the growth that we will have is inclusive. It must also be empowering, empowering to women, young people and to black people in the main.

The focus of this report is to shed light on the extent to which the South African government is using the economic lockdown in response to the coronavirus as a pretext under which a very particular and predetermined state-driven racial ideology is being enforced on South African society.

2. Key takeouts

- 1. The United Nations has already cautioned against the "toxic lockdown culture" in South Africa.
- 2. More than 70 000 members of the South African Defence Force (SANDF) have been deployed to enforce the South African government's economic lockdown.
- 3. Gen. Khehla Sithole, the National Police Commissioner, threatened that the lockdown would be tightened if citizens were to "misbehave".
- 4. Several incidents of police and military brutality are mentioned in this report. These include the manhandling of children.
- 5. Over 230 000 cases have been opened to date against people for breaching these restrictions
- 6. The ruling ANC's perception of minority rights is that the majority should have more rights than minorities, as the recognition of minority rights amounts to an undermining of the majority.
- 7. The ANC is driven by the overarching strategy of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) a concept taken from the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
- 8. The NDR was drafted with the goal of "destroying the existing social and economic relationship" towards "the liberation of the black people in general and Africans in particular."
- 9. The NDR is based on Marxist ideology and the ruling alliance in South Africa has a strong proclivity to express its support for economic policies like those of the former Soviet Union, Cuba, Zimbabwe, China and Venezuela.
- 10. The ANC regards the South African Constitution as a "beach head" victory to further the goals of the NDR to "transform the state" and to "change society as a whole".
- 11. In 2012 the ANC declared that it was preparing for the "Second Transition" (the first being the ascendency to power of the ANC), which implied a next and more aggressive phase of "radical economic transformation" on a racial basis.
- 12. The policy of expropriation of private property without compensation (EWC) was adopted by the ruling party in 2017 and passed by Parliament in 2018. This policy carries a particular racial undertone, which is evident in 1) the wording of the motion that was passed in Parliament, 2) President Ramaphosa's use of the phrase "our people" to refer to black people as the beneficiaries of the policy, 3) Deputy President David Mabuza's threat that there would be a violent takeover if white people would not voluntarily hand over their property and 4) Minister of Health Dr Zweli Mkhize's assurance that the property of black people would not be expropriated by the state.
- 13. Blade Nzimande, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and member of cabinet, said in April 2020 that the COVID-19 pandemic requires "a second radical phase of our transition characterised by radical structural transformation of our economy with determined state interventions to systematically eliminate stubborn colonial features persistent in our economy".
- 14. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Ramaphosa said that South Africa's wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few

predominantly white people and that white people who had wealth had a "sense of entitlement". This "sense of the natural order of things", he said, led to among other the death of George Floyd in the US, but also the Rwandan genocide, the "continued occupation by Israel of the Palestinian land" and to white South Africans having "racist outbursts". He continued that this order of things must be constantly and consistently exposed, critiqued, fathomed, condemned, opposed, corrected, challenged and broken.

- 15. In order to achieve non-racialism, Ramaphosa said that a "fundamentally different society" must be built. This requires of institutions that are regarded to represent institutionalised racism to be "demolished" in order for a new "just and equal" society to be built in its stead.
- 16. The Tourism Relief Fund of R200 million, which is aimed at providing assistance to small, micro and medium-sized enterprises that are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, is guided by racially-based policies in the selection of beneficiaries of government-sponsored relief. The criteria, in brief, relate to the racial composition of a business' employment, management and ownership. Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, Minister of Tourism, said that it was "perfectly rational" to use race as a criterium for determining which companies should receive relief.
- 17. A well-known hotel in the Limpopo province had to lay off 90% of its black employees because the owner of the hotel is white and the hotel was therefore refused government's COVID-19 crisis relief.
- 18. President Ramaphosa said that government will use its COVID-19 relief response to promote the interests of black people "in the main". He also stated that "radical economic [i.e. racial] transformation" would underpin economic policies in future. Ramaphosa said in 2018 already that South Africans were tired of seeing businesses being run by a minority, and that "our own people must run their business".
- 19. The South African government is attempting to regulate food distribution to the poor, among other by requiring organisations involved in the distribution of food to provide their "transformation plans" and to indicate the extent to which these organisations supported the interests of black people.
- 20. The South African government's lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been described by leading scientists as "nonsensical" and "unscientific".

3. South Africa's "toxic lockdown culture"

The South African lockdown in response to the coronavirus has been described as one of the strictest in the world.³ The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights warned that South Africa was flouting the rule of law in the name of fighting the coronavirus to the extent that it could create a "human disaster".⁴ The High Commissioner called on South Africa to refrain from violating fundamental rights "under the guise of exceptional or emergency measures."⁵

The civil rights organisation AfriForum voiced its concern that the South African government is using the COVID-19 pandemic to promote its ideologies and to severely violate citizens' rights. As a consequence, the organisation intends to launch an international campaign to garner support for the protection of fundamental rights in South Africa. The purpose of this report is to point in particular to the manner in which the South African government is using its response to the COVID-19 pandemic to promote a particular racial ideology; however, for the purpose of context, it is necessary to first provide several general examples of human rights concerns as a result of the South African response. These include but are not limited to the following:

- » Initially, 2 820 SANDF soldiers were deployed to patrol the streets. More than 70 000 additional soldiers were later deployed in April.⁸ The SANDF patrols areas with assault rifles and live ammunition⁹ in an effort to support the South African Police Service (SAPS) in maintaining law and order. People are stopped and searched at roadblocks by SAPS and SANDF, who are armed with assault rifles.¹⁰
- » President Ramaphosa, as well as some of his ministers, including Lindiwe Zulu, the Minister of Social Development, are addressing the media and the public in military uniforms.
- » Alcohol and tobacco sales have been banned since the start of the lockdown.¹¹ When the Fair Trade Independent Tobacco Association (FITA) requested the minutes of the discussion that resulted in the sudden reversal of the lifting of the tobacco sales ban, the ANC government refused to provide these, saying these were "classified".¹²

- » Bheki Cele, the Minister of Police, threatened people that lockdown rules will be tightened if the citizenry misbehaved.
 Cele also expressed his wish for continuing the total ban on alcohol sales even after the lockdown is lifted.
 If the citizenry misbehaved.
- » To date, over 230 000 cases have been opened against people for breaching lockdown restrictions. 15
- » Neighbourhood and farm watches were forbidden by the government to patrol and protect communities. This meant that people's safety rested exclusively in the hands of the state. By the end of April, more than 15 000 people had already signed a petition to allow neighbourhood, farm and smallholding watches to keep their communities safe. 16
- People are held in compulsory quarantine camps that comply with neither the World Health Organization's standards, nor standards specified by South Africa's own regulations. AfriForum secured a victory when the Northern Gauteng High Court in Pretoria ruled that one such camp, the Zithabeseni quarantine camp, had to close down and its detainees released.¹⁷ AfriForum reached a settlement in the case against the Department of Health regarding the unconstitutionality of these quarantine camps, which has since been sent to the Northern Gauteng High Court for approval.¹⁸ Furthermore, AfriForum obtained another victory in the Northern Gauteng High Court in June 2020 when the Court granted the civil rights organisation's urgent application to declare invalid the regulations (which forbids self-isolation) published by Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. These draconian and irrational regulations were aimed at putting anyone who tests positive for COVID-19 under compulsory state quarantine.¹⁹
- » AfriForum and the trade union Solidarity are currently involved in legal action against the Department of Tourism and the Department of Small Business Development, which are prescribing black economic empowerment (BEE) criteria as a prerequisite for state support to struggling companies during the pandemic.
- » SAPS officers and other law enforcement organisations are arresting members of the public for minor violations of the lockdown regulations. These include a Cape Town family who was arrested after their toddler ran from a sidewalk onto the beach; a man who was arrested in the presence of his wife and three-year-old daughter while out on a walk, his baby of 10 months still in a carry bag strapped to him;²⁰ and SAPS officers manhandling a child and his father in Ballito, the disturbing incident recorded on video.²¹
- » Gwede Mantashe, National Chairperson of the ANC, said that "the current lockdown regulations will be applicable far beyond the lockdown period".²²
- » Politicians are making statements to advocate regulations that would make the state the only entity allowed to distribute food to vulnerable communities.
- » President Ramaphosa announced the release of 19 000 prisoners, despite the current conditions that amongst others prevents people from working and earning an income.²³
- » By 13 April nine South African citizens had been killed by SAPS or SANDF members in relation to breaking lockdown rules.²⁴ Soldiers were accused of beating a man to death with sjambok.²⁵
- » The pandemic has been characterised by a concerning lack of clarity on and disclosure of information surrounding the COVID-19 situation in South Africa by government. AfriForum therefore wrote to the Minister of Health to request the disclosure of COVID-19 information, including the protocol that is followed for reporting a death as a COVID-19-related death.²⁶
- » In April 2020, the Executive Mayor of the Matjhabeng Local Municipality was temporarily suspended as member of the ANC as well as a public representative after he referred to coloured South Africans as "Boesmans" (English: bushmen) in a derogatory manner in a video. He also said in the video that members of the SANDF must go to Bronville and show that they were soldiers. He added the soldiers must "skop and donner" (English: lit. kick and beat) if necessary and that he would support them.²⁷

4. Understanding the South African government

4.1. Minority rights

The ANC government demonstrated on a number of occasions a strong disinterest and even contempt for the notion of minority rights. Their understanding of democracy is clearly majoritarian in nature, with sheer numbers determining justice.

Former President Jacob Zuma said in Parliament in 2012 that his understanding of democracy was that minority communities should have "fewer rights" than the majority:²⁸

Sorry, we have more rights here because we are a majority. You have fewer rights because you are a minority. Absolutely, that's how democracy works.

During the negotiations for a new dispensation in South Africa in the early 1990's, ANC leader Pallo Jordan acknowledged that the recognition of minority rights was indeed a prerequisite for empowerment and self-determination (of minorities). However, he said that it would be "reactionary" to acknowledge minority rights in South Africa, since the recognition of minority rights was regarded by the ANC as undermining the rights of the majority.²⁹

Zuma's sentiment on minority rights was also echoed in 2017 by ANC spokesperson Zizi Kodwa. When members of the mostly coloured community of Eldorado Park in Johannesburg protested the appointment of a black principal at a local high school, Kodwa responded that people who had played an integral part in the struggle should not feel as if they had been reduced to the status of a minority group.³⁰

4.2. The National Democratic Revolution

The ideological backbone of the ruling Tripartite Alliance³¹ is the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). The NDR is a Cold-War-era Soviet concept whose own inventors within the Soviet Communist Party have long since abandoned, writing the whole concept off as misguided and proven to fail. However, within the ruling alliance, the NDR still enjoys a strong base of support.³² Therefore, in order to understand the worldview of the ANC, as well to rationalise their policy steps, one must first understand the NDR. Joel Netshitenzhe, former Head of Policy to the Presidency, explains:³³

The National Democratic Revolution is a process of struggle that seeks the transfer of power to the people. When we talk of power we mean political, social and economic control.

The NDR was drafted with the goal of "destroying the existing social and economic relationship."³⁴ The NDR's intended destruction of the economic order is directed at "the liberation of the black people in general and Africans in particular".^{35, 36} At its 1994 Congress, the ANC adopted a strategy and tactics document, which explains the NDR as follows:³⁷

The main motive forces of the democratic transformation are represented by black workers in general and the black middle strata. These are the forces which possess the best political and ideological potential to lead and defend the process of transformation.

The ANC's Marxist ideology explains why the movement has a strong proclivity to express its support for policies like those of the former Soviet Union, Cuba, 38 Zimbabwe, 39 China 40 and Venezuela. 41

The ANC described its ascendency of the ANC to power in 1994 as a "beach head" victory which would empower the ANC to use the mechanisms of state to "transform the state" and to "change society as a whole". 42 In 2012, the ANC further declared that it was preparing for the "Second Transition", which implied the next phase of radical economic transformation and a more aggressive approach to the policy of black economic empowerment (BEE). 43

Consequentially, the expropriation of private property without compensation (EWC) was adopted as an ANC policy in December 2017⁴⁴ and passed through Parliament in February 2018.⁴⁵ EWC carries a particular racial undertone. This is evident in –

- 1. The wording of the motion that was passed to this effect in Parliament;
- 2. President Ramaphosa's referral to black people as the beneficiaries of EWC and his use of the term "our people" to refer to black people⁴⁶;
- 3. Deputy President David Mabuza's threat of a "violent takeover" if white people did not voluntarily hand over their property to black people; and
- 4. Minister Zweli Mkhize's assurance that the property of black people would not be expropriated by the state.48

In April 2020, during the economic lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Blade Nzimande, General Secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and current Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, issued a statement on behalf of the SACP:⁴⁹

If anything, this period requires, in earnest, a second radical phase of our transition characterised by radical structural transformation of our economy with determined state interventions to systematically eliminate stubborn colonial features persistent in our economy. Neoliberal measures can only sink our country further into an economic abyss, as these would seek to place the burden of Covid-19 and the economic crisis on the shoulders of the workers and the poor.

Let us remind ourselves that we are engaged in a national democratic revolution, an ongoing process of struggle, transformation and development.

We will need to increase the pace of democratic transformation to wipe out the excluding and marginalising structures, relations and systems. Interventions adopted now should actually lay the basis for a rapid advance of this transformation process.

5. President Ramaphosa's New Economy

On 5 June 2020 – in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown – the ANC and its alliance partners launched an anti-racism initiative in reaction to the death of the US Citizen George Floyd at the hands of the police. President Cyril Ramaphosa said that South Africa's wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few predominantly white people, while the poor and unemployed were overwhelmingly black. He continued that poverty and inequality wore a black face: an African woman's face. He continued that (white) people who had wealth also had a "sense of entitlement" and that "this sense of the natural order of things" led to the death of Floyd, but also to, among others, the Rwandan genocide, the "continued occupation by Israel of the Palestinian land" and to white South Africans having "racist outbursts". This order of things, he explained, had to be constantly and consistently exposed, critiqued, fathomed, condemned, opposed, corrected, challenged and broken. Ramaphosa said that those in positions of power violated the rights of vulnerable people in all societies. To achieve non-racialism, Ramaphosa said that a "fundamentally different society" had to be built, which required of institutions that were regarded as representing institutionalised racism to be "demolished" for a new "just and equal" society to be built in its stead.⁵⁰

Earlier in 2020 the South African government launched a R200 million Tourism Relief Fund to provide assistance to small, micro and medium-sized enterprises that struggle as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It then came to light that the fund's allocation would be determined by broad-based black economic empowerment (B-BBEE) criteria. In brief, these criteria relate to the racial composition of the employment, management and ownership of a business. Mmamoloko Kubayi-Ngubane, Minister of Tourism, even said that it was "perfectly rational" for her, as a matter of executive policy, to use B BBEE criteria (or race-quotas) in distributing the R200 million in the Tourism Relief Fund.⁵¹

The labour union Solidarity and AfriForum took the matter to the Northern Gauteng High Court in Pretoria in April, but the Court ruled that using B-BBEE codes as criteria for providing relief to companies in the tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic was indeed lawful.⁵², ⁵³ AfriForum and Solidarity have since approached the Constitutional Court directly with an application to appeal the ruling. The Constitutional Court however ruled that it was not in the interest of justice for the matter to be taken on appeal to this court.⁵⁴ AfriForum and Solidarity then applied to the High Court for leave to appeal the ruling, which the Court did not grant.⁵⁵

Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, Minister of Small Business Development, was also caught up in a race controversy over relief funds, and AfriForum and Solidarity are also taking this minister to court. She contradicted herself on the racial requirements of her department's relief fund and lied under oath when she initially claimed that race would not be used as a criterion in giving relief to small businesses affected by the pandemic. Later, she proudly told Parliament that racial criteria would indeed play a role. According to Kallie Kriel, CEO of AfriForum:⁵⁶

As if it is not unethical enough that government is even in this time of crisis promoting a racial agenda, the situation is being worsened by the Minister's deliberate misrepresentations.

In May, the Minister stated in court papers:57

Instead, the sharp point of the argument appears to be that all people are suffering equally as a result of the pandemic and therefore it is unlawful to distinguish among them on the basis of race, sex, age and disability in crafting relief initiatives. This contention is fallacious.

According to the South African Sunday newspaper *Rapport*, Minister of Finance Tito Mboweni's favourite hotel in Magoebaskloof had to send 90% of its black employees home without pay because the hotel's white owner had repeatedly been refused government's COVID-19 support.⁵⁸

The Democratic Alliance, South Africa's official opposition party, wrote a letter to the International Monetary Fund in a bid to stop racially-discriminatory use of COVID-19 relief funds by the South African Government.⁵⁹

Amidst his government being marred by all these race controversies, President Cyril Ramaphosa stated that the government will use its COVID-19 relief response to promote the interests of black people "in the main", further stating that "radical economic [racial] transformation" will underpin economic policies in future. Ramaphosa has a record of such rhetoric, stating in 2018 that South Africans were tired of seeing businesses being run by a minority, and that "our own people must run their business".

Solidarity Helping Hand has instructed its legal team to prepare for a lawsuit against government if it continues to implement regulations prescribing that the distribution of food to the poor and needy during the COVID-19 pandemic be centralised under government control. René Roux, Solidarity Helping Hand's head of communication, told *Daily Maverick* that it had received a complaint from a Krugersdorp NGO, which was allegedly stopped by government officials from running a soup kitchen. It also received reports from a number of churches that were prevented by government from distributing food parcels to the poor.⁶²

Hannes Noëth, Managing Director of Solidarity Helping Hand, confirmed that the South African government had requested the organisation to provide a "transformation plan" that indicates the extent to which the interests of black people were supported by the organisation.⁶³

6. Concluding remarks

In May 2020, Dr Glenda Gray, one of the top scientists who advises the ANC government, a member of the Ministerial Advisory Committee (MAC) and Chairperson of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC), slammed government's phased exit from the lockdown⁶³ as nonsensical and unscientific. According to Gray, hospitals are witnessing malnutrition cases, the month-to-month phasing-out of the lockdown has no basis in science, and many lockdown regulations are seemingly thumb-sucked. In the wake of this news, questions were raised about whether the ANC government was listening to the advice of experts and scientists. Dr Gray remarked:⁶⁵

We believe, as scientists, that we can give and are giving the government good advice and why they decided not to take advice or engage readily with the scientists is unknown. Why have experts if you don't really care what they think? ... I think the government has failed to understand the psyche of its populace.

Professor Marc Mendelson, another expert adviser and MAC member, who is the Head of Infectious Diseases and HIV Medicine at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, also said that the government's approach to phasing out the lockdown was not a science-led approach, suggesting a "rapid de-escalation" of the lockdown to level 1.65 Both experts were swiftly reprimanded by the government for speaking out.67

When the lockdown was first announced, the government's statements were focused on protecting people against the virus. However, as the lockdown progressed, these turned into statements about the transformation of the economy and equality, and promoting the interests of a particular racial group. It is clear that the government views the virus as an opportunity to advocate its own ideological goals of aggressive state centralisation and racial discrimination. This conduct is unreconcilable with a state that claims to be built on the principles of freedom, fairness and the rule of law. It is a violation of the dignity and most basic freedoms that people have.

Many South African politicians and commentators who support the ANC's lockdown have tried very hard to reframe the debate around whether to end the lockdown into a question of white versus black, implying or outright stating that rich white people want to reopen the economy while impoverished black people support keeping the lockdown in place. An example of this is when interim leader of the official opposition John Steenhuisen appeared on public broadcaster SABC for an interview on lifting the lockdown: The host asked him "which South Africans" he spoke for.⁶⁸

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