

02 June 2026

Statement by the Southern Africa Migration Network (SAMIN) on the Escalating Afrophobia Crisis and its Threat to African Solidarity

The Southern Africa Migration Network (SAMIN) expresses deep concern and condemnation over the alarming escalation of anti-migrant sentiment and Afrophobic violence in South Africa. In recent weeks, thousands of South Africans have protested in major cities demanding the mass deportation of undocumented foreign nationals, while vigilante groups have been filmed harassing and intimidating African migrants. Disturbingly, this wave of hostility has now spread to schools, where children have been recorded joining protests and chanting anti-migrant slogans, a sign of how deeply Afrophobia is being normalised.

Videos circulating on social media have ignited continental outrage and a diplomatic crisis. A number of African nations have raised formal concerns, issued citizen advisories, or begun repatriation preparations. This is now a continental crisis, not a domestic South African matter.

SAMIN is troubled by the South African government's response. Rather than unequivocally confronting the Afrophobia that is visibly unfolding, official spokespersons have dismissed viral footage of attacks and harassment as "fake videos and images," and claimed that there are "no xenophobic attacks in South Africa." While President Ramaphosa and Foreign Minister Lamola have rightly affirmed that no grievance justifies violence, the overall government posture has been more defensive of South Africa's international image than protective of the people within its borders. Denying the reality of Afrophobia does not make it disappear. It emboldens perpetrators and silences victims.

Compounding this crisis is the Department of Home Affairs' deliberate closure of documentation pathways, particularly for African nationals. Over the past several years, the department has progressively narrowed legal avenues for asylum, work, and residence, suspending temporary permits, restricting visa categories, and creating a backlog of hundreds of thousands of unprocessed applications. *"This is not administrative failure alone; it is a policy choice that has systematically closed the space for African migrants to regularise their stay,"* said Rev Melton Luhanga, Chair of SAMIN. *"Most people are rendered 'undocumented' not because they refused to follow the law, but because the law has been made unavailable to them,"* Rev Luhanga added. The overwhelming majority of those caught in this trap are from other African countries.

SAMIN does not dismiss the genuine hardship that underlies public frustration. According to Statistics South Africa's most recent Quarterly Labour Force Survey, the official unemployment rate stands at 32.7%, with youth unemployment among those aged 15 to 24 at 60.9%, and the expanded unemployment rate reaching 42.1%, South Africa is under immense strain. Years of state capture, entrenched corruption, and the collapse of service delivery have hollowed out the institutions meant to serve ordinary people. The frustration many South Africans feel is real and legitimate. However, that suffering was not caused by migrants. It was caused by misgovernance and the systematic plunder of the state. What we are witnessing is a deliberate scapegoating of African migrants, a phenomenon that must be named for what it is: Afrophobia. Political actors and anti-immigration movements have

redirected legitimate public anger toward the most vulnerable, amplified by disinformation on social media and by parties building electoral campaigns on anti-immigration platforms. The fact that schoolchildren are now being drawn into these protests shows how deep this poison has seeped. Criminalizing migrants does not create a single job, restore a single service, or hold a single corrupt official to account.

What is also erased from public debate is the positive contribution of migrants. Far from being a drain, African migrants in South Africa run small businesses, pay taxes, fill critical skills gaps, and, crucially, create employment for South Africans. To blame migrants for unemployment while ignoring their role as job creators is not only false; it is a deliberate distortion that fuels Afrophobia.

The spirit of Pan-Africanism and the solidarity that sustained the anti-apartheid struggle are being betrayed by acts of Afrophobia against the very people whose nations stood with South Africa in its darkest hour. With the SADC Heads of State and Government Summit approaching in August 2026, SAMIN calls on member states to place the protection of migrants, the combating of Afrophobia, and the upholding of regional integration principles firmly on the Summit's agenda. South Africa, as a leading SADC member and with President Cyril Ramaphosa as interim SADC Chair, has a particular obligation to demonstrate through concrete action, not just diplomatic statements, that it is committed to these values. SADC must send a clear message: **Afrophobia is incompatible with African solidarity.**

SAMIN therefore calls on:

- The South African government to take decisive, visible action to protect migrants and foreign nationals, including prosecuting those engaged in harassment and violence, and deploying law enforcement in affected communities;
- The Department of Home Affairs to immediately reverse its policy of closing documentation pathways for African nationals, to reopen access to visa, asylum, and permit systems, clear the backlog transparently, and ensure that no person is left undocumented because the law has been made unavailable to them. The answer to undocumented migration is not harassment and violence; it is a functional, accessible, and humane documentation system. No human being is illegal;
- Political leaders and parties to immediately cease using anti-immigration rhetoric for electoral gain and to actively counter the disinformation fuelling Afrophobia;
- The South African Human Rights Commission and oversight bodies to independently investigate reported violations and ensure victims have access to justice, regardless of documentation status;
- Civil society and media to invest in public education and awareness campaigns that counter Afrophobic narratives;
- SADC Heads of State to place the Afrophobia crisis and the protection of migrants on the agenda of the August 2026 Summit, and to adopt concrete regional commitments as an outcome.

SAMIN stands firmly on the side of human dignity, the rule of law, and the unity of our continent. We urge all leaders, in South Africa and across the region, to choose solidarity over scapegoating and to act with the urgency this moment demands.

Issued by:

The Southern Africa Migration Network (SAMIN)

secretariat@samin.org.za | www.samin.org.za

Date: 02 June 2026

Cell: Secretariat +27846875946 ; +27836872282