

Law must prevail and key corridors protected: The time to act is now

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The South African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF) strongly condemns the wanton destruction of the country's key infrastructure, goods and property and the senseless loss of lives over the past week. We respect South Africa's law and the Constitution, but it is time to take action. It is time for us to work together, make plans, implement those plans and ensure that our supply chains continue to operate.



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SAAFF's membership comprises freight forwarders, who are the architects of the supply chain. For the economy to function and for people to be able to survive and prosper, supply chains need to function unimpeded.

The closure of the Port of Durban and parts of the N2, N3 and N4 over recent days as a result of the senseless looting and destruction of trucks, their cargo, shopping malls, distribution centres and beyond has severely impacted our supply chains. This has massive short-term consequences and even more devastating long-term ones for everyone in this country.

But the impact of the past few days will reverberate far beyond South Africa's borders. According to The Federation of East and Southern African Road Transport Association's (FESARTA) CEO Mike Fitzmaurice: "What has happened in South Africa in this last week has also impacted hugely on other landlocked countries in the SADC region, who rely heavily on South Africa for imports of fuel, groceries, pharmaceuticals, mining equipment/spares, vehicle spares, tyres and much more. Those countries that have used South Africa as a transit route for exports through the Port of Durban will now turn to alternate routes for exports such as Walvis Bay, Beira, and Dar es Salaam."

Fitzmaurice continues: "This does not bode well for South Africa's Global image. We are likely to see some large-scale disinvestment in the country, as we did have in the apartheid era. We can expect to see further downgrades to our junk status by the likes Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's in the short term and the Rand is likely to breach the R15 to the dollar very soon."

What we can do

As part of a collective from the private sector, SAAFF is appealing to all key stakeholders to play an active role in restoring South Africa's crucial trade lanes along the main transport corridors of the N2, N3 and N4. There is an urgent need to protect our commercial ports as key national areas of interest since they are the main arteries funnelling essential goods into our country.

At this critical junction, it is vital for cargo to move, as further delays will not only deplete supplies, but will create further congestions, imbalances, and ultimately cost for all involved – especially the end-consumer, who can ill-afford it at this critical moment. The ensuing shortage of goods will only worsen an already compromised food security situation.

South Africa's transport corridors need to be preserved: They are of huge importance, especially for increasing trade between countries and cities along and around the corridors and accelerating regional development and regional integration through their effects on commodity markets, the labour market and tourism.

Trade creates the circulation of cash in our economy and as a result helps to drive economic prosperity, job creation and long-term stability.

For supply chains to operate, the national highway corridors and our harbours need to be able to move cargo safely and securely.

As industries and communities, we need to come together to take action. SAAFF, together with other role-players in the extended community, is busy formulating a seven-point plan to restore normality and enable supply chains to continue functioning.

The plan focuses on securing the N2, N3, N4 and our harbours. Cargo needs to move. Balance needs to be restored to the import and export of cargo: fluidity needs to be factored back into the system. Essential cargo needs to be prioritised. Our plan addresses these elements.

SAAFF's role is to guide our members, share verified, good information and bring solutions to the table that are relevant for supply chain architects. To do this, we need to work together with all role-players in the supply chain.

We call on communities to come forward with any footage, drone footage or contacts of the looting and criminal activities that will help in identifying those involved. The perpetrators and instigators of these criminal acts need to be brought to book.

If supply chains are stopped, there will be massive blockages in parts of the supply chain, bringing about enormous unintended, incalculable consequences.

Hard lessons were learned during lockdown 5 and we do not need a repeat of regulations that attempt to impose artificial restrictions on the natural flow of cargo, such as the ill-fated attempt to define "intended destinations".

South Africa needs all key stakeholders to come together to alleviate the dire situation. The supply chain is a living organism, which cannot handle any stoppages. Like our country, it relies on the constant and unhindered functioning of all its inter-linked components'.

The time to act is now! Together!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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