Statement to the Press: Inner City Churches and the RESPOND Network on the Humanitarian Response to Repatriating Foreign Nationals and the Threat of the 30 June National Shutdown Cape Town, 23 June 2026. Issued on 24 June 2026

We come before you today not as politicians, not as activists for any single cause, but as faith leaders and humanitarian workers who have spent recent weeks doing what we are called to do: to love our neighbour as ourselves.

We have witnessed with deep sadness scenes that should trouble the conscience of our nation and continent. Mothers and children have exposed themselves to the bitter cold and rain of a Cape Town winter, sitting outside the Zimbabwean Consulate while waiting for processing by the Department of Home Affairs and assistance from the Zimbabwean Embassy, which has arranged transport for those seeking to return home where they believe they will be safe.

Working together through the RESPOND Network, a coalition of several church denominations and Christian non-profits working in solidarity during times of disaster, we the churches in the inner city, have stood alongside the Zimbabwean Consulate and the Department of Home Affairs as hundreds of Zimbabwean men, women and children have queued, slept outside, and waited — sometimes for days — to be processed and repatriated.

Till today, 7 busses carried those seeking voluntary repatriation, and more are still waiting. Nationally, the picture is larger still: thousands of Malawians, and Mozambicans have fled their homes and sought voluntary repatriation in recent weeks, fearing for their safety.

In these moments, we have sought simply to be present—to offer prayer, comfort, food, and other necessities, especially to children and mothers. We affirm the dignity of every human being and reject all forms of violence, intimidation, and hatred.

We are saddened that circumstances have brought people to such desperation. No person should feel compelled to seek safety in this manner because of fear. Whatever our differences and frustrations, we must never lose our humanity. As faith leaders we believe Ubuntu cannot be postponed.

We acknowledge that many South Africans are burdened by poverty, unemployment, crime, and feelings of marginalisation. We want to speak directly to the many South Africans, especially young South Africans between 18 and 29, who feel locked out of opportunity in their own country. Your anger is not imagined. Youth unemployment in South Africa is a

national emergency. The feeling that the system has failed you, that promises have gone unmet for thirty years, that you have been left behind while others seem to "get ahead" — that feeling is real, and it deserves to be taken seriously by everyone in this country, including by us, we also take it seriously.

For that reason, we are not asking you to stop being angry. We are asking you to redirect that anger to where it actually belongs: to policy failure, to corruption, to a political class that has, in recent National and Provincial Elections and in this municipal election year, found it easier to let you blame your neighbour than to answer for its own record.

We say this plainly: what we are witnessing is not an abstraction or a political talking point. It is suffering; human suffering on both sides the citizen and foreign national. A suffering happening in real time, on our streets.

This suffering brings us profound sadness to reflect on the reality of our continent. Despite the deep-seated historical challenges that Africa has endured—and continues to face—Africans remain the most vulnerable. It is a tragedy of our times that instead of standing united to build one another up, we continue to see situations where brother turns on brother, and sister turns on sister.

Even though, we say again, we are not asking South African citizens to stop being angry. Citizens have a constitutional right to protest and to express their concerns. We urge those who intend to march or demonstrate to do so peacefully, within the framework of the law, and in ways that uphold the dignity and safety of all people. Freedom of expression and the Right to Protest must never become opportunities for intimidation, violence, or vigilantism.

We call upon the South African Police Service and all law enforcement agencies to fulfil their constitutional responsibility by maintaining law and order, protecting all residents from intimidation, threats and harm, and ensuring that peaceful demonstrations do not descend into lawlessness or attacks upon vulnerable communities.

We express our deep concern regarding the inefficiencies and administrative failures that have characterised the processing of immigration and permit applications by the Department of Home Affairs. Delays and systemic failures have left many individuals in legal uncertainty and have contributed significantly to the tensions we are witnessing today. Good governance and efficient administration are essential to social cohesion and public trust. We call upon the Department of Home Affairs to perform optimally, efficiently, and

transparently, ensuring that documentation processes are handled with the dignity and speed that human lives deserve.

We are equally concerned by employers who choose to exploit foreign nationals by employing them without proper documentation, often under unfair and insecure conditions. Such practices undermine the rule of law, foster resentment, and expose vulnerable workers to exploitation. Accountability must extend beyond migrants themselves to those who profit from irregular systems.

We also express disappointment that regional bodies and governments within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have not done enough to foster conditions of peace, justice, economic opportunity, and African solidarity. Our continent's future cannot be built upon division, displacement, and the exportation of poverty. We long for an Africa where governments cooperate for the flourishing of all its peoples and where migration is not driven by desperation but undertaken in dignity and hope.

As churches, we are reminded that whenever we pray: "God bless Africa, guide her leaders, guard her children, and give her peace," and the Anthem Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika; we express a profound longing for an Africa healed of conflict, liberated from historic and systemic injustices, and delivered from poverty, violence, and suffering. We pray for an Africa in which leaders serve the common good, children are protected, and neighbours are not made enemies. **We then ask churches this Sunday to light a candle and pray for Africa.**

Our Christian faith calls us to recognise that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, accountability, and human dignity.

We therefore call upon all parties—government departments, employers, political movements, law enforcement agencies, diplomatic missions, and ordinary citizens—to uphold the law, protect the vulnerable, and seek the common good.

May this difficult moment become an opportunity not for division, but for repentance, reform, and renewed commitment to the dream of a peaceful and prosperous Africa, for Africa where children will no longer suffer the cycle of poverty and trauma.

God Bless Africa!
Rev Sikawu Makubalo Central Methodist Church
Rev Riaan de Villiers Grote Kerk Cape Town
Rev Annie Kirk St George’s Cathedral Anglican Church