



Dear Fellow South African,

The jacaranda trees are in full bloom across the nation's capital, heralding the start of summer. After a long and difficult winter, the beginning of a new season should fill us with optimism.

When the National State of Disaster was declared in March, our immediate priority was to contain the spread of the virus and provide emergency relief to citizens, communities, workers and businesses.

Over the course of eight months and with the support of our social partners, we rolled out a comprehensive set of measures to limit the social and economic impact of the pandemic.

We massively expanded social protection on a scale that has never been attempted before in this country. We are one of the few countries in the world where the right of access to social security is enshrined in the Constitution, and we can be proud that during this grave crisis we gave practical expression to this right in many ways.

In addition to our existing social grants, which reach more than 17 million people every month, we topped-up the Old Age, Disability and Child Support Grants. We rolled out a Special COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant, which has reached some 6 million people to date. This was done within weeks of the National State of Disaster being declared.

The scale of such an undertaking cannot be understated. To bring this system online there was extensive collaboration between the South African Social Security Agency, the South African Revenue Service, Home Affairs and many others.

We set up a fully automated application and disbursement process, and integrated multiple databases, including the National Population Register and the Unemployment Insurance Fund database. We set up new application channels like WhatsApp and USSD, and created systems with the commercial banks to enable banking detail verification. This is a remarkable achievement in a very short space of time.

Alongside the measures we took to protect and sustain livelihoods, we also supported ailing businesses. We provided relief to small businesses in the form of debt relief, finance, tax payment deferrals and other instruments.

We implemented a COVID-19 Loan Guarantee Scheme to enable businesses to meet their operational expenses during the lockdown, and are currently looking at how this scheme can reach more companies in need.

We provided income protection to workers and relief to business owners through the Temporary Employer Relief Scheme administered by the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

These were all in direct response to an emergency and were by nature temporary. Some are now coming to an end, while others have been extended as the labour market recovers.

The measures we implemented went a long way towards protecting our society from the harsh winds of COVID-19. The additional grants helped to prevent millions of people from falling below the food poverty line.

Had we not intervened to secure livelihoods and save businesses, the living conditions of our people and the circumstances of thousands of businesses would have been considerably worse.

Now we are in a transition from relief to recovery.

The emergency measures we put in place have laid a firm foundation on which to rebuild our economy. As our focus now shifts to the implementation of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, our priority will be to stimulate growth and create jobs.

There has already been progress in a number of areas.

We are seeing new funding commitments for infrastructure development following an infrastructure project roundtable last week. A number of employment programmes under the Presidential Employment Stimulus have started. We are pushing ahead with economic reforms in areas such as energy and telecommunications.

Plans are being converted to action and commitments are being reflected in jobs and opportunities.

It is all the more critical at this time, more so with the festive season approaching, that we do not become the architects of our own undoing.

The greatest vigilance is required from us all to keep the virus at bay.

A resurgence at any scale will not just dramatically reverse our health gains. It will choke the green shoots of economic recovery that have emerged, and take us back from spring to winter.

To prevent a second wave of COVID-19 infections, we must observe the public health guidelines that remain in place.

When we fail to wear a mask at a social gathering, when we attend crowded events, we are not only putting ourselves and others at risk. We are also putting our economic recovery in jeopardy.

Let us all continue to play our part.

The positive actions of wearing a mask, of maintaining social distancing and of regular hand washing helped us overcome the worst effects of the pandemic. They are still our best defence.

Let us remember the sacrifices we all had to make to contain the spread of the virus in the early days.

Even as most social and economic activity has resumed, we must still observe all the health measures. This is absolutely necessary if we are to rebuild our economy and put this crisis behind us.

With best regards,

*Cyril Ramaphosa*

