

South Africa: ANC's anti-immigrant measures impact tourism

G. T. Maqhubela
13 July 2015

Tourist arrivals into South Africa from abroad have plummeted amid the African National Congress (ANC) government's enforcement of xenophobic anti-immigrant policies.

Russian arrivals fell 46.5 percent in the first quarter of this year, according to the Southern African Tourism Services Association (SATSA), the worst figure yet in what has been a general decline.

This follows drops in arrivals from China and India, countries whose tourist traffic to South Africa fell 37.9 percent and 15 percent respectively. According to SATSA CEO David Frost, "This is in stark contrast to the 235 percent increase... [in arrivals] from China achieved between 2009 and 2013."

In May, Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba announced that among plans to tighten up on illegal migration was the expansion of the immigration inspectorate to monitor businesses employing undocumented migrants.

Earlier this year the Department of Home Affairs began enforcing stringent visa guidelines requiring foreign tourists to apply in person at South African consulates. Gigaba said during a visit to India on July 9 that while he expected the visa rules to hurt tourism in the first year, they would not affect the sector in the long run.

A Grant Thornton study for the Tourism Business Council of South Africa notes that 886 million rand in direct spending was lost last year, amid controversy and uncertainty over the new regulations. Grant Thornton estimates that 100,000 tourist arrivals will be lost this year alone.

In June, Tourism Minister Derek Hanekom, in opposition to his cabinet colleague Gigaba, told MPs that a survey would be used to assess the scale of the devastation to tourism. Some 21,000 jobs in the sector

are at risk while 270,000 prospective tourists could be lost as a result of what Hanekom called the "unintended consequences" of the onerous travel regulations.

From June 1, new immigration rules require that the original unabridged birth certificates (including details of both parents) of children prospectively travelling into or out of South Africa, be presented at points of exit and entry. Immigrants with expired residence or work permits must return to their countries of origin to apply for renewals or extensions.

The new rules were passed in the context of the ANC government's xenophobic campaign against foreign nationals. Various ruling-party mouthpieces claim the regulations are aimed at combating terrorism and human trafficking, but even foreigners legally living and working in South Africa have come under scrutiny.

The Institute for Security Studies says the obligations placed on unskilled as well as skilled migrants seeking to live in South Africa are extremely burdensome. For the ISS, this indicates that a "policy decision and political will" are behind the hurdles placed before migrants.

The South African education system is notoriously poor at producing graduates with the skills most in demand. This is a factor which attracts well-educated foreigners from overseas, as well as those from the rest of Africa, into the country. Yet the ANC government invariably scapegoats foreigners, in particular placing blaming on them for South Africa's high unemployment rate.

After an outbreak of xenophobic anti-immigrant violence earlier this year the government launched Operation Fiela (Clean Sweep).

This involved the deployment of the army into areas affected by violence and looting. According to the *Daily Maverick* the army undertook sweeps "in all nine

provinces with 343 operations conducted in 99 cities, towns or townships, with 9,098 arrests.”

The online newspaper quotes the spokesperson of the inter-ministerial committee on migration, Phumla Williams, saying Operation Fiela will continue until March 31, 2016.

Reporting on the anti-immigrant military deployment, *Business Day* commented, “It is now clear that the operation is more about targeting than protecting foreigners and harassing protesters deemed to be dissidents by the state. The arbitrary detentions are patently unlawful.”

Ultimately the ANC government is utilizing xenophobic violence to prepare for a social explosion which is the inevitable outcome of its pro-capitalist, anti-poor policies over 20 years since the start of multiracial democracy.

Having overseen the increase of socioeconomic inequality to a level not seen even during white-minority Apartheid rule, the ANC now serves the ruling elite in the same role previously played by Afrikaner nationalists—as a bulwark against a working-class uprising.

The extension of Operation Fiela is geared towards intimidating the working class as a whole. Today the military targets foreigners inside and outside the country; tomorrow they will target the unemployed and the working poor.

While dismantling race laws, the intolerable face of capitalist domination, South African elites left unchallenged the wealth accumulated by the white elite under Apartheid. This filthy lucre was protected, with the capitalist legal framework left intact on the understanding that the black nationalist elite be allowed a minority stake in the imperialist exploitation of local labour, in which South African capitalists have traditionally served as overseers for the major foreign powers.

This arrangement is now splitting at the seams under the impetus of globalisation, trade liberalisation, competition from China and other cheap-labour platforms, as well as the still-unfolding credit crunch which began in 2008.

The global plutocrats, including the ANC, have no answer to the crisis of capitalism except the increased brutality by which they seek to extract from workers the losses from their financial speculation and

parasitism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact