

Good morning Pastors, Colin, Angelo and Darryl , Trust you are all well.

Below is a draft letter to our Baptist Churches as a guide to possible practical involvement in some way in the lives of foreigners living among us at this time:

To: All Pastors, Church Leadership Teams, and Congregations **From:** The Executive / National Leadership Council, Baptist Union of Southern Africa (BUSA)

Date: June 19, 2026

Subject: A Pastoral Call to Justice, Mercy, and Social Cohesion Amid National Immigration Shifts.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As a family of churches across Southern Africa, we find ourselves ministering in a complex, highly charged season. The recent legislative shifts—including the implementation of the Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration, and Refugee Protection—have introduced tighter border controls, the "First Safe Country" principle, and structural overhauls to the Department of Home Affairs.

These legal changes are occurring alongside real socio-economic anxieties across our nation. As the Body of Christ, we are called neither to mirror public hostility nor to ignore the laws of the land. Instead, our Baptist distinctives compel us to hold fast to the authority of Scripture, which consistently commands us to show hospitality to the stranger, stand for justice, and protect the inherent dignity of every human being made in the image of God. As our constitutional courts have reminded the nation, *"human dignity has no nationality."*

We are writing to urge our local congregations to proactively step into this space—not as political agents, but as instruments of the Kingdom of God. We suggest a strategic, dual approach to ministering to both documented and undocumented foreign nationals within our communities.

1. Upholding and Protecting Documented Foreigners

Thousands of legal migrant workers, recognized refugees, and asylum seekers with valid permits sit in our pews and live in our neighborhoods. They face immense administrative hurdles, social isolation, and the constant threat of xenophobic prejudice. We encourage our churches to intervene practically:

- **Establish Home Affairs Navigation Desks:** As Home Affairs transitions to the digital Integrated Population Register, many vulnerable legal migrants risk falling into undocumented status simply due to digital literacy barriers or bureaucratic

delays. Local churches can set up basic weekly clinics to help individuals track applications, scan documents, and navigate legal renewals.

- **Launch Economic "Hand-Up" Mentorships:** We must address the roots of economic tension. We encourage skilled craftspeople and business owners within our congregations to establish vocational mentorship programs. By pairing local residents and documented foreign nationals in joint skills-training initiatives (such as carpentry, tailoring, or mechanics), we foster economic collaboration rather than competition.

2. Responding Justly and Humanely to the Undocumented

The issue of undocumented migration requires a delicate balance of national law and Christian compassion. While the state bears the responsibility of border enforcement, the Church's mandate is to ensure that human beings are never stripped of their basic dignity.

- **Maintain Humanitarian Buffer Zones:** Legal status does not negate basic human rights. Our churches must remain safe spaces that provide unconditional, immediate relief—such as food, warm clothing, and emergency aid—to vulnerable families, women, and children, without requiring paperwork before offering a cup of cold water in Christ's name.
- **Actively Combat Exploitation:** Undocumented individuals often fall prey to human trafficking and severe labor exploitation. We must educate our communities on fair labor practices and utilize our voice to whistle-blow against unscrupulous practices that exploit modern-day bondservants.
- **Ensure Dignified Treatment:** Where the law requires repatriation, the Church should advocate locally to ensure the process is carried out safely and humanely, ensuring that families are not violently torn apart and that standard human decency is preserved.

3. Cultivating Social Cohesion in Our Communities

Xenophobia thrives where there is isolation. We urge our churches to intentionally bridge the divide between local residents and foreign nationals by moving through practical phases of community integration:

1. Create Shared Neutral Spaces

Phase 1: Building Trust

Organize community-wide sports tournaments with intentionally mixed teams (locals and foreign nationals playing together, not against each other). Host community film or storytelling nights in church halls to share testimonies of family, faith, and shared resilience.

2. Engage in Collaborative Practical Projects

Phase 2: Working Together

Mobilize your youth and neighborhood to clean up public parks, paint community halls, or establish shared community gardens. In areas facing harsh, arid climates, working together to propagate climate-resilient hedges or grow sustainable food shifts the narrative from competing for resources to co-creating them.

3. Facilitate Structured Dialogue

Phase 3: Healing Divides

Create small, guided "Dialogue Circles" where local residents can safely voice anxieties regarding safety and employment, and foreign nationals can share their experiences of vulnerability. Utilize pulpit exchanges to welcome diverse pastoral voices, reflecting the beautiful tapestry of God's global kingdom.

"The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." — Leviticus 19:34

Let us not grow weary in doing good. We encourage your leadership teams to discuss how these principles can be tailored to your unique local context. For resources, templates, or partnership opportunities with compassionate ministries like the *Deeds of Love Ministry (DOLM)*, please reach out to the Union offices.

May the Lord grant our pastors wisdom, our leaders discernment, and our congregations an abundance of Christ-like love as we serve our communities in these challenging times.

Yours in Christ's Service,

The National Leadership Council *Baptist Union of Southern Africa*

Errol C. Muller

Director Deeds of Love Ministry (DOLM)

0635566433