

Cyril Ramaphosa addresses heroes of healthcare at Denosa event

In a heartfelt address to the 9th National Congress of the Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (Denosa) on Tuesday, 25 March 2025 President Cyril Ramaphosa expressed his deep gratitude for the critical role that nurses played during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Source: Reuters. SA President Cyril Ramaphosa.

This marks the first time the President has addressed Denosa since the outbreak, underscoring the profound and lasting impact that healthcare workers had in combating the virus. His acknowledgment serves as a reminder of the dedication, resilience, and tireless efforts of nurses, who stood at the forefront of the battle to safeguard public health during an unprecedented global crisis.

“We lost a number of nurses and healthcare workers, brave men and women who were at the frontline of the pandemic. Brave is not an adequate word to describe them. Many of you faced the danger of being infected and death, but you still went on to care for those who were affected,” Ramaphosa said.

He encouraged attendees to observe a moment of silence in honour of the brave nurses and healthcare professionals, who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving on the front lines.

“For you who are in the profession, nursing is a calling. It requires a strength of character and commitment to service that is rare.”

Nursing equity struggles

The President highlighted the long history of struggle for equity in the nursing profession, particularly among black nurses during apartheid, who fought tirelessly for their rights amid systemic inequalities.

“Black nurses were expected to only care for black patients in black-only hospitals. The hospitals and clinics assigned to serve the country’s majority were under-resourced and chronically underfunded.

“Black nurses had unfavourable working conditions, were paid less than their white counterparts, and had

fewer opportunities for advancement.”

He reiterated his statements made during this year’s State of the Nation Address (Sona), that government will allocate resources to the health sector, build hospitals and clinics, and strengthen the healthcare system.

“This is the commitment that we’re going to achieve, and this is what we’re going to do.”

The President also took the time to commend Denosa for its nearly three decades of advocacy and service and emphasised the organisation’s pivotal role in shaping nursing policy in South Africa.

“We all appreciate the difficult balance that must be struck between advocacy and activism, on the one hand and fulfilling the rights of patients to treatment and care, on the other hand,” he said.

Ramaphosa outlined key strategic priorities for the next five years, including driving inclusive growth, reducing poverty, and building a capable, ethical developmental State.

He underscored the integral role of nurses in achieving these goals, particularly in contributing to a capable State.

Meanwhile, despite a recent uptick in nursing registrations, he raised concerns about declining training numbers due in part to accreditation delays.

President Ramaphosa urged Denosa to engage proactively in policy development to ensure that the nursing profession evolves alongside the changing landscape of healthcare.

“In an environment where South Africa has a shortage of nurses, we are encouraged that the issue of South African nurses being recruited in large numbers by other countries is also on the agenda.”

Nurses driving NHI

Meanwhile, he said the support of Denosa will be pivotal as the country prepares for the National Health Insurance (NHI).

He is of the view that the NHI will bring the country closer to its aspiration of being a society where the human dignity of all is upheld at all times.

“The right to dignity matters most when people are sick and need help, and when they are most vulnerable. Our nurses will be the backbone of the NHI.”

He urged the union to be at the forefront of discussions around skilling and training, health systems strengthening, and other crucial matters.

The President called on the union to continue its leadership in advocating for nursing, while addressing the broader health needs of communities.

“I’d like to thank you all once again for being frontline soldiers of our people’s health... you... are the ones who take your heart and full dedication to serving the people of South Africa, and we’re eternally grateful for that,” he added.

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