

Auckland/Oslo, 20.08.2021

President Cyril Ramaphosa
Union Buildings
Private Bag X1000,
Pretoria,
0001

South Africa

Alcohol sales at petrol stations

Dear President Ramaphosa,

The Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA) is a network of non-governmental organisations and people who advocate for effective alcohol policies, free from commercial interests. GAPA has regional alliances in West, East and Southern Africa; Asia and the Pacific; Europe; Caribbean; Latin America; and the United States.

We have followed with interest the debate around issuing alcohol licences at petrol stations in South Africa and wanted to take this opportunity to voice our concern. With the serious challenges related both to alcohol problems and road traffic deaths and injuries, allowing petrol stations to become additional alcohol outlets is the wrong signal to send.

Drink-driving is a significant public health problem worldwide, and South Africa is no exception in this regard. Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death among people aged 15-29 years. Road users who are impaired by alcohol have a significantly higher risk of being involved in a crash. According to WHO (2018) South Africa's road traffic death rate is 39.7 per 100,000 each year, double the global rate – and 52% of fatally injured drivers have alcohol levels ≥ 0.05 . Drivers under the influence of alcohol not only affect themselves but also, in many cases, innocent people who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Road crashes also have considerable economic costs to the South African government. The Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) reported the cost of R176bn for 2019.

GAPA has collaborated with the World Health Organisation and other international partners in the development of the SAFER initiative to recommend the 5 most cost-effective interventions to reduce alcohol related harm. These interventions have strong evidence base behind them.

The SAFER measures are:

- **Strengthen restrictions on alcohol availability**
- **Advance and enforce drink driving counter measures**
- **Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions and treatment**
- **Enforce bans or comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship, and promotion**
- **Raise prices on alcohol through excise taxes and pricing policies**

In this context it is very fitting that the two first measures are strongly related to the present debate going on in South Africa. Easy availability of alcohol along the roadside and at places where drivers

need to stop, i.e. petrol stations, can easily lead to increase in alcohol consumption among this group, and with fatal consequences. Currently, South Africa has 5000 petrol stations. Awarding licenses to this sector therefore could translate into 5000 additional alcohol outlets, some of which are in residential areas.

It has been interesting to see the sharp decline in emergency room admissions in South Africa during the period of COVID-19 related alcohol bans. Part of this is related to reduction in road traffic accidents. This is a fitting illustration of the effects of reduced availability, and it illustrates the need for South Africa to move forward with the drafted alcohol legislation, including a ban on alcohol licenses for petrol stations as proposed in the Department of Trade and Industry's 2017 Liquor Amendment Bill.

In the wake of the passing of this legislation, a moratorium should be put in place on issuing alcohol licenses for petrol stations. Alcohol is already very easily available in South Africa and stepping up alcohol availability with a new sector, so closely linked to the vulnerability of road traffic users is not a step in the right direction for promoting public health, shifting the negative norm of heavy drinking and reducing the economic and social costs of alcohol attributable harm on citizens and the government.

We strongly request that you as the President of South Africa take steps to move forward and support all provinces in making necessary regulations and impose a moratorium on liquor licences at petrol stations and expedite the process to pass necessary legislation to reduce alcohol harm in your country, including along South African roads.

GAPA wish you success with this endeavour and look forward to supporting any initiatives on this from you side.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of Global Alcohol Policy Alliance



Sally Casswell
Chair



Øystein Bakke
Secretary