



by Pumulani Ncube

## Dear (pre-1994) South African Citizen

We have never been formally introduced and yet we meet each other on a daily basis, be it on the dusty streets of Soweto or the in air-conditioned coffee shops in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg.

Without really knowing me you have baptised me with a lot of names that equate me to a visitor from outer space. In true African tradition, I'll highlight to you that it is not what you call me that matters but what I respond to. I'll formally introduce myself as being an African - your brother, we share a mother in mother Africa.

Including you, South Africa, there are 52 of us in the family that we call the African continent. We have grown up under separate influences in the form of our fathers (colonisers) who thought it necessary to look after us in separate blocks that were later divided to form the borders that make up the 52 African States.

Each day that I see a special insert on migrants on one of the television channels or when I see a trainload of people being deported to yet another Africa country I'm reminded of an article entitled "Is there anybody there?", written by your president as part of his weekly newsletters (ANC Today, Volume 5 No 40). The article quotes the UK Sunday Herald Online of 2 October 2005 based on an article by Elizabeth Nash entitled "Spain's borders strengthened after African refugees storm European frontier".

The gist of article is that "African refugees have been tramping north and hammering on the doors of Europe for years desperate

to flee poverty, war and oppression to reach the promised land of plenty and freedom". Thousands of young strong men literally stormed the barbed wire razor wire perimeter of the Spanish frontier.

South Africa is currently faced with a similar problem of desperate immigrants and, like Spain and the United States, it has also put a fence across some of its borders. Incidentally the Spanish wall is purportedly six metres high, making it higher than the infamous Berlin wall. How long will it be till these young men storm your borders?

Your country is now part of the global economy, meaning that you are susceptible to global trends. All great economies will attract a variety of migrants attracted by the "bright lights of the city". For example Mexico is known to be a huge exporter of labour to the United States. When Mexican president Felipe Calderon was inaugurated last year he vowed to take 100 actions in his first 100 days in office, and many of these steps were designed to cure Mexico's long tradition of illegal immigration to the US. The Mexican president did admit though that it would take him more than his six years in office to fix the problem.

A point to note is that the US-bound migrants include not only

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poor and poorly educated, unskilled labourers but also middle class entrepreneurs, college graduates and professionals many of whom actually have jobs in Mexico but, by global standards, the salaries don't match their talent and experience. The same could be said of migrants coming into South Africa and those leaving South Africa.

Outside of the much sought after skilled and entrepreneurial

immigrants who you seek to attract to South Africa there is another set of immigrants who do the menial jobs that ordinarily the citizens of a country are reluctant to do for whatever reason. These immigrants often move illegally and are prepared to do the jobs that the locals are not prepared to even consider, such as brick-laying, cleaning the streets and washing dishes in restaurants.

Your president is on record as saying that it's all fair and fine to have double digit growth rates but what does it mean to the South African economy when its neighbours are experiencing double digit compression in their economy. Wouldn't the solution be to try and ensure South Africa's neighbours have stable economies? Part of the solution of helping those economies includes absorbing some of their skilled professionals into the South African economy. Absorbing these professionals ensures that the skilled fathers and mothers remain closer to home, where at least they will keep an eye on their families as opposed to going all the way to London where coming home is a problem and the result is dysfunctional families who will further destabilise the region.

I also notice that you have a very conservative policy regarding the intake of skilled immigrants into your country. According to research done by the Centre for Development and Enterprise last year, your quota for the intake of special skills was pegged at 47 000 and only 194 of these were taken. Last year Italy's quota was increased from 170 000 to 520 000, Australia's quota is 130 000 and that of the United States is 65 000. Whilst your country is trying its hardest to make it as difficult as possible to attract these skills, the rest of the world is stealing talent from right under your noses.

Statistics show that without immigrants Europe is in a bind as it is running out of workers as the population ages and fewer babies are born. In 2003, there were 1.48 births for each European woman, less than the 2.1 needed to hold the population steady. The Europeans will do whatever it takes to attract skills and yet sadly I think your immigration policy is being clouded with the need to keep away illegal blue collar immigrants. South Africa and the rest of the continent should be proud that we have education systems that are able to produce skills that can compete with the best skills on a global basis. The downside is that our economies are not producing enough opportunities for them to be absorbed into Africa and we haven't grown the economy to a sophisticated level whereby we can match those salaries offered in the rest of the world.

You are probably sitting there and asking what is it that South Africa can do to resolve this seemingly ambiguous problem of a shortage of skills whilst you have significant unemployment levels at blue collar levels. To a certain extent, the fate of South Africa is linked to the stability and the well being of the region as a whole. South Africa, being the youngest and most prosperous democracy, needs to take a big brother role and ensure the economic stability of the region.

South Africa needs to look closer at its immigration policy. As a son of Africa I would rather lose the skills of an African to another African state than for these skills to go overseas. What can the 51 brothers do to help address the issue of skills migrating to other countries?

We need to remind ourselves that people flee their countries due to wars, oppression and poverty. We need to ensure that these evils are eradicated from our continent and, in instances where these evils do not exist, we need to produce skills that are relevant to grow our economies.

South Africa, my dear brother, until and unless we find a solu-

tion to the migration issues we will be faced with the dilemma that your president highlighted by quoting TS Eliot in his 2005 newsletter. "When the rich close their ears to the cries of the poor, contrary to their own interests, indicating that that we have yet to learn what is well known, all humanity will have to answer the question - by whom and by what means, was this disastrous outcome designed." The deprived of the African continent will not cower like dogs or flutter like bats when confronted by all the evils in their countries they will hammer upon the doors of the rich nations for a third . . . a fourth time. Sadly South Africa is viewed as one of those rich nations.

**Yours sincerely**  
**The Global African Diaspora**

*PS: I have addressed this letter to pre-1994 citizens as citizens attaining their citizenship after that do not qualify for certain benefits under some clauses of the BEE Codes and Affirmative Action laws. [ceo](#)*