



## INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

### MEDIA RELEASE

#### **INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE WARNS AGAINST INFLATED ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION FIGURES AND UNLAWFUL VIGILANTISM**

**Cape Town, 22 August 2025** — The Chief Executive Officer of the Inclusive Society Institute (ISI), Daryl Swanepoel, has called for a more evidence-based and orderly approach to the national debate on illegal immigration, warning against inflated figures and unlawful interference in state functions. He was attending a media and stakeholder briefing by the Parliamentary Social Services Cluster Media and Stakeholder Briefing, held on Thursday at Parliament's Good Hope Chamber in Cape Town under the theme *"Ensuring open access and provision of quality social services to the people."*

"What we urgently need to determine is the actual quantum of the illegal immigration problem in the country," Swanepoel said. "Figures of between 8 and 13 million are bandied around as fact, even by senior politicians. But empirical studies from both Stats SA and the HSRC suggest the real figure is somewhere between 2 and 4 million illegal immigrants. There is a huge difference between a 2 million problem and a 13 million problem."

Inflating the numbers in an already emotionally charged environment fuels unnecessary fear, stokes resentment and risks inciting hostility towards foreign nationals. It distracts from evidence-based policymaking and undermines social cohesion at a time when calm and rational debate is most needed.

Swanepoel further warned against the dangerous precedent of civic groups or individuals taking enforcement into their own hands. "Let me be clear," he stated, "civil society organisations and for that matter politicians, have no business in enforcing the laws of this country. That is the function of government officials. Civil society must drive their issues through the correct channels, whether by raising concerns with government and Parliament or through protest action. But they must under no circumstances interfere with the functioning of our healthcare facilities, schools or any other functions of the state."

He later added a cautionary note to government, arguing that how it responds to unlawful actions sets an important precedent. "The authorities should not entertain discussions with organisations that are acting illegally. Firstly, because it legitimises illegal activity, and secondly, because it encourages future illegal activity. It suggests that if one wants to get the attention of government, the best way is to break the law, which is an unacceptable message to send."

Addressing illegal immigration requires sober, evidence-based policy decisions and stronger institutional capacity, not populist interventions that undermine service delivery or the rule of law.

## BACKGROUND

Swanepoel's statement was issued in response to discussions at the Parliamentary Social Services Cluster Media and Stakeholder Briefing, held earlier today at the Good Hope Chamber in Cape Town under the theme *"Ensuring open access and provision of quality social services to the people."*

During the briefing, which Swanepoel attended, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Health, addressed concerns raised by civic groups such as Operation Dudula regarding the use of healthcare facilities by undocumented foreign nationals.

Dr Dhlomo reaffirmed that Section 27 of the Constitution guarantees access to healthcare for all, and that the National Health Insurance (NHI) policy provides emergency medical treatment to undocumented persons in line with South Africa's obligations under international law. While recognising the strain on public resources, he urged continued engagement with concerned organisations, noting that Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi was already in dialogue with Operation Dudula's leadership.

He also highlighted the urgent need for legislative clarity, calling on the Department of Home Affairs to accelerate reforms to the Immigration Act, citizenship laws, and the Refugees Act to provide certainty on eligibility for state healthcare while safeguarding vulnerable South Africans without documentation.

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