



**Statement by Hon. Moleboheng Modise Mpya, MP on Proposal on
imposing visa entry requirements on Western State that equally
impose such requirements on South African Citizens**

Mini-Plenary Debate

28 November 2025

Honourable Members,

As we approach the conclusion of this important debate, it is essential that we elevate our discussion from the immediate motion before us to the broader landscape in which visa policy operates. Mobility has become one of the defining issues of contemporary international relations. It sits at the intersection of security, trade, human capital, geopolitics, and global governance. How South Africa navigates this terrain will influence not only the experience of our citizens abroad, but also our standing as a reliable partner in the international system.

Our task today is not to accept or reject a prescription, but to reflect carefully on the overall direction of our foreign policy, our economic

priorities, our regional obligations, and the tools available to us to pursue fairness within a global mobility regime that is often uneven. This is a moment for sober judgement not for rhetoric, not for confrontation, but for principled statecraft. This is a moment for sober judgement not for rhetoric, not for confrontation, but for principled statecraft.

Honourable Members, the debate has highlighted one consistent theme:

South Africa operates in an interdependent world where no policy decision exists in isolation. Visa regimes, especially those involving major Western states, carry implications far beyond border control. They influence investment sentiment, student exchanges, tourism flows, scientific partnerships, and diplomatic cooperation. For this reason, the principle of proportionality must be at the centre of any review.

We must be clear, **reciprocity is a recognised norm in international relations, but it is not an automatic reflex. It is one instrument among many.** The strategic question is not whether we have the right to pursue parity, but whether doing so in any particular instance advances or undermines our broader objectives. This requires assessment, consultation, and diplomatic engagement rather than unilateral or symbolic action.

The experience with our own immigration reforms provides important guidance. We have seen how administrative decisions, even when well-intentioned, can produce unintended economic consequences. The example raised earlier regarding the 2015 unabridged birth certificate requirement is a stark reminder of this. Although introduced for legitimate reasons, it resulted in a measurable decline in tourist arrivals from key markets and placed unnecessary strain on airlines, families, and the hospitality sector. This episode underscores why any proposed change to our visa posture, whether tightening, loosening, or reciprocating; must be preceded by extensive analysis and stakeholder consultation.

Honourable Members, another issue that must guide our thinking is South Africa's role in Africa. Our foreign policy positions us as a champion of continental integration. We have committed ourselves to facilitating the free movement of people, goods and services under the African Continental Free Trade Area; to supporting a single African air market; and to strengthening our regional development community. These commitments require consistency. We gain strategic advantage when other African states see South Africa as a bridge, a hub, and a partner that upholds openness. Any deliberate expansion of visa restrictions must therefore be managed in

a manner that does not inadvertently send a signal of inwardness or undermine the spirit of African mobility that we advocate.

Similarly, our bilateral relationships with major global players cannot be viewed narrowly. Mobility arrangements are rarely isolated decisions; they are deeply rooted in political, economic and security partnerships. Where South Africans face onerous visa requirements abroad, this should indeed be addressed firmly, but in a graduated manner; beginning with diplomatic dialogue, advancing to technical negotiations, and drawing on multilateral and regional frameworks where appropriate. The international system offers many tools before reciprocal measures are even considered.

Honourable Members, fairness is an essential part of this debate, but fairness is best achieved through diplomacy anchored in clarity, evidence and consistency. If we are to consider visa parity measures, they must be based on the specific circumstances of each bilateral relationship. Some Western states maintain visa restrictions due to historical administrative frameworks, others due to domestic political debates, others due to risk profiling. These factors are neither uniform nor permanent. A one-size-fits-all response would not be strategic.

The question must always be: what outcome are we seeking? If the goal is to secure better treatment for South African travellers abroad, then our approach must be one that persuades and negotiates, not one that risks economic loss or diplomatic friction without guarantee of reciprocal benefit. States often adjust visa regimes after structured engagements, data-driven requests, and the demonstration of secure administrative systems. That is a path we can pursue with confidence.

We must also acknowledge that global mobility norms are evolving. The world is witnessing new forms of digital visas, multi-country travel waivers, regional mobility accords, and risk-based entry systems that are replacing older, more rigid models. South Africa must be part of this evolution. By strengthening our own visa-processing capacity, enhancing digital systems, improving turnaround times, and aligning with emerging global best practice, we position ourselves to negotiate from a point of administrative strength rather than frustration.

Honourable Members, another theme emerging from this debate is the need for a whole-of-government approach. Visa policy touches on foreign affairs, home affairs, tourism, investment promotion, security and higher education. Decisions taken in isolation by one area of government can

create friction in another. A structured interdepartmental review of South Africa's global mobility posture supported by data, scenario planning, and international benchmarking, would allow us to consider reciprocity in a more strategic and less reactive manner.

Importantly, this review should involve not only government, but industry stakeholders: tourism bodies, universities, airlines, chambers of commerce, and investor networks. These are the sectors that feel the impact of mobility decisions most directly, and their insights will ensure that any policy adjustment protects both South Africa's global influence and its economic trajectory.

Honourable Members, as we conclude this debate, it is vital to maintain the distinction between asserting fairness and compromising strategic interests. The issue before us requires neither rejection nor unconditional acceptance. What it demands is a structured pathway: a pathway that begins with analysis, progresses to diplomacy, integrates continental commitments, and ensures that South Africa remains a respected and attractive global partner.

Our foreign policy teaches us that influence is exercised not through abrupt gestures, but through consistency, openness, and the careful alignment of

national interests with international norms. If reciprocity becomes necessary in specific bilateral cases, it should be the final step after all avenues of engagement have been exhausted, and it should be implemented in a targeted, evidence-based manner.

In this way, we affirm fairness, protect our economy, safeguard our relationships, and strengthen our voice in a global order that is increasingly defined by how nations manage the movement of people.