

## **US Developments Should Worry for SA**

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31 January 2025

Following United States President Donald Trump's recent move to freeze foreign aid, Health Minister, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi spoke about the magnitude of South Africa's fight against HIV and the United States's contribution to it.

"We are running the world's biggest HIV counselling and testing campaign and at least 5.5 million people are on ARVs, and no other country comes close to that."

On 20 January 2025, Trump declared an Executive Order on Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid, suspending foreign aid for 90 days.

Trump says the US foreign aid industry is currently misaligned with the interests and values of the country, saying it disrupts world peace.

In a statement issued by Department Spokesperson, Tammy Bruce on 26 January, Secretary of State, Marco Rubio is quoted as saying, "Every dollar we spend, every program we fund, and every policy we pursue must be justified with the answer to three simple questions: Does it make America safer? Does it make America stronger? Does it make America more prosperous?"

Although federal Judge Loren L. Ali Khan has temporarily stopped the move to freeze foreign aid, these statements and intentions remain critical for South Africa. SA supports the highest number of people living with HIV, at 13% of the population.

South Africa spends at least R44.4 billion on critical HIV prevention, treatment, and care, a portion of this money comes from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). PEPFAR is an HIV/AIDS response programme funded by the U.S. government and implemented by various agencies. It is the largest globally. PEPFAR contributes roughly R8.5 billion to South Africa's HIV fight.

"The total amount spent on this campaign is R44.4 billion and PEPFAR contributes 17%," said Minister Motsoaledi during an ANC lekgotla. This money is important because it helps fund projects combating HIV, but the larger scope of the aid from the U.S. helps with health infrastructure, children's health, and clean water, among other things.

South Africa appears already not on track to meet the 95-95-95 HIV goals by 2025 and will have to find the money to ensure that HIV projects continue to operate. Clinics must be able to provide medication for patients.

Today, several NGOs funded through PEPFAR, as well as the important Wits Reproductive Health and HIV Institute (Wits RHI) dealing with research, 'vaccinable' diseases, etc., have closed their doors following the 'stop-work' order from the U.S.

Trump's order has the potential to derail efforts to eradicate HIV by 2030. If this decision is implemented, NGOs and the Wits RHI stay closed, South Africa could see a repeat of its HIV/AIDS history when many people needlessly died due to government policy. Under ex-President Thabo Mbeki, the government took a

neoliberal and denialist approach to the pandemic, reducing it to only an issue of food.

The government must make alternative plans to cushion the blow by funding the healthcare infrastructure which has allowed South Africans some HIV relief, should Trump forge ahead with the freeze on aid.

*This article was submitted on 29 January 2025. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online ([www.Karibu.org.za](http://www.Karibu.org.za)), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.*