**NEWS ARTICLE**

Transnet strike places spotlight on state of port infrastructure

**18 January 2023:** The South African Association of Freight Forwarders (SAAFF) has warned that ‘normalcy’ may only return to the freight industry in 2023. This follows the 11-day strike at Transnet that began on 6 October 2022, causing South Africa to lose the opportunity to move R65.3 billion worth of goods.1

The protracted strike placed the spotlight on the critical role of efficient ports and railways in South Africa’s economy. “The functioning of our ports has declined relative to ports in other parts of the world and on the African continent. This constrains economic activity,” **President Cyril Ramaphosa** highlighted in early 2022.

“Upgrading our ports is long overdue,” says [Bearings International](http://www.bearings.co.za) GM **Christian Chipamaunga**. “Our ports are something to be proud of as South Africa is known as the hub of Africa. Nowadays there is little faith in the ports that South Africa has to offer for imports and exports. An upgrade is therefore not only necessary but essential.”

Offloading and loading cranes need to be refurbished to be able to deal with larger ships for a quicker turnaround which, in turn, necessitates upgrading storage facilities and ancillary infrastructure.

“Exports from South Africa have seen a decline as our broken infrastructure has forced the rest of Africa to look elsewhere. Many companies in Africa that once relied on South Africa have now switched to other global supply networks,” says Chipamaunga. He warns that South Africa could soon find itself cut off from the rest of the continent.

Celebrating its 65th anniversary last year, BI added four new branches to its countrywide distribution network in 2022 and is looking to add a completely new complementary business unit to the existing four.

“Growth into Africa has been good and sustained, even during Covid-19 due to demand. It is just a matter of how we approach that market. We do not want to grow too quickly, as it must be sustainable growth giving us a solid foundation. I am very positive, however, and believe we will continue to go from strength to strength,” says BI MD **Bart Schoevaerts**.

Designated an essential services provider, BI was able to operate during the lockdown and even continued with its restructuring process. “It was the ideal time to drive change in the business. Although we had grown significantly up to that point, the existing structure was insufficient to support ongoing growth.

“We achieved significant growth in difficult circumstances and against a backdrop of global supply chain disruption by firstly the Covid-19 pandemic and then the conflict in Ukraine,” says Schoevaerts. “All of our products are imported, and we had to contend with issues such as ports being closed in China and no vessel or container availability,” he concludes.

REFERENCE

1. ‘SA will only recover from Transnet strike by 2023, industry warns’ <https://www.news24.com/fin24/economy/sa-will-only-recover-from-transnet-strike-by-2023-industry-warns-20221020>

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**Notes to the Editor**
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