200 liquor stores looted, along with SAB and Heineken facilities

South Africa's liquor industry, including the South African Liquor Brandowners Association (Salba), the National Liquor Traders (NLT) and the Beer Association of South Africa (Basa) is urging government to declare a State of Emergency as more than 200 liquor shops have been looted in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng during the ongoing protests.

A general view of a burning warehouse in Durban, after protests erupted. 14 July 2021. Reuters/Rogan Ward

After the ransacking of hundreds of retail stores, the warehouses of liquor companies and distributors had become a target of looting and vandalism.

Basa confirms that Heineken's Pinetown warehouse was looted on Sunday, with all office equipment, IT equipment, batteries and tyres from trucks stolen. Crates, empty bottles and stock were also taken. Heineken's preliminary estimation of losses suffered is in the millions of rands.

Furthermore, two SAB depots in KwaZulu-Natal were also looted and set alight on Tuesday, and there is a fear that the other three remaining SAB facilities in the province will also be targeted, says Basa. Courier companies carrying alcohol and raw material such as malt for export have also been attacked.

"Our big concern is that the focus is now shifting to our primary production sites (breweries and distilleries) where high volume pre-production alcohol is stored. Any attack on these sites poses a serious safety risk for our security personnel on site, as well as looters and surrounding communities," says Salba CEO Kurt Moore.

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Lack of govt security support

The last few days have seen the country in turmoil with thousands of businesses and jobs being destroyed by crowds of

looters and multiple incidents of arson and vandalism.

"The mass looting, threat to lives and livelihoods and destruction of property has reached proportions that require the rapid and effective deployment of SANDF troops to assist business owners. Many of these are small and medium enterprises and are unable to protect their employees, businesses and livelihoods alone," says Moore.

Moore adds that the lack of police presence and SANDF support and visibility has resulted in more than 200 of Salba's members' stores being deliberately targeted and looted. Millions of rands worth of stock at warehouses and retail premises across Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng has been stolen and stores damaged.

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Basa says the destruction of scores of liquor outlets, depots, warehouses, distribution centres and specialised manufacturing facilities is threatening the total collapse of the alcohol industry, which is already on its knees due to the four alcohol bans that have been enforced over the past 16 months.

"While private security companies have tried to protect these facilities they have been overwhelmed by the number of looters and have received very little support from the SANDF and South African Police Service (SAPS), due to their own lack of capacity on the ground. It is estimated that the attacks on the Heineken and SAB facilities have resulted in losses amounting to millions of rands," the Beer Association said.

Beleaguered alcohol industry crippled further by looting
13 Jul 2021

Convenor of the National Liquor Traders, Lucky Ntimane said the industry believed that many of these attacks were politically orchestrated as well as coordinated by organised crime which served to grow the illicit alcohol sector. "If the destruction continues unabated, the liquor industry will reach a point of no return and more than 200,000 people will be out of work."

The industry urged the president to "take the necessary steps to stabilise the country, mobilise the necessary resources to restore law and order in the affected areas and prevent further violence, loss of life and economic destruction".