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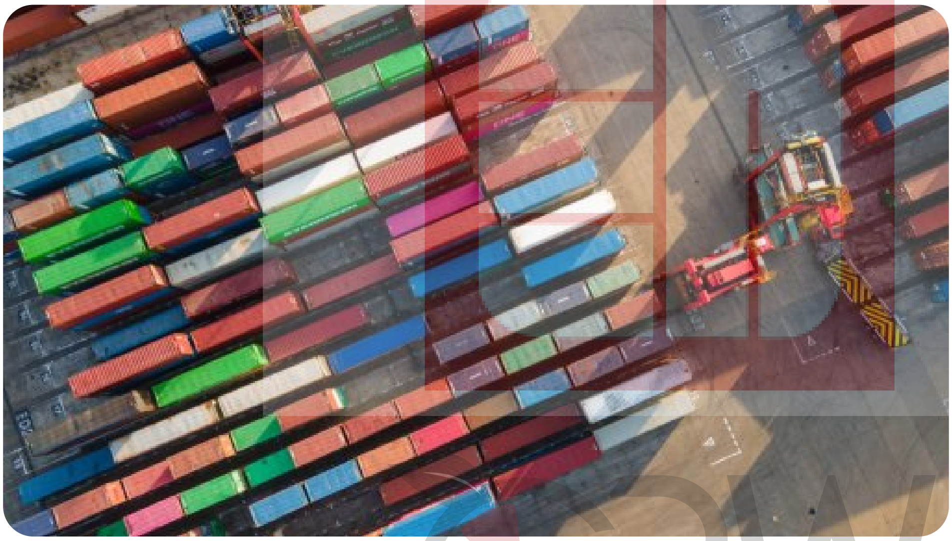
South African exports to US face new 12.5% tariff, but with exemptions

24TH JULY 2026 BY: TERENCE CREAMER - CREAMER MEDIA EDITOR



The US has, from July 24, imposed new tariffs of 12.5% on South African products for the country's "failure to impose and effectively enforce a prohibition on the importation of goods produced with forced labour".

South Africa was one of 60 countries on which tariffs of between 10% and 12.5% were imposed following a United States Trade Representative (USTR) investigation under Section 301(b) of the Trade Act of 1974.

The investigation was initiated on March 12 after the US Supreme Court's decision to invalidate President **Donald Trump**'s so-called

'Liberation Day' tariffs, which were imposed in 2025 under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

Until July 24, South African exports not specifically exempted from tariffs by the US had been subjected to a 10% tariff, while Section 232 tariffs of 25% were also being applied to certain steel and aluminium exports, as well as automobiles and components.

The USTR said trading partners that had made commitments to adopt, and effectively enforce, forced-labour import prohibitions would face a 10% tariff, while trading partners that had failed to adopt a forced-labour import prohibition would face a 12.5% tariff rate.

It imposed a 10% tariff on Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, and the UK.

South Africa's Department of Trade, Industry and Competition participated in a public hearing on July 9 in Washington DC hosted by the Office of the USTR regarding its Section 301 investigations.

At the hearings, it argued that South Africa had laws that prohibited forced labour, as well as a legal framework to enforce the prohibition on the importation of goods produced using forced labour.

South Africa, thus, requested that the US consider exempting the country from the 12.5% tariff, or that exports to the US such as platinum-group and precious metals, vehicles, catamarans, citrus, seafood, wine and nuts, among others, be exempted from any proposed action.

Several products did indeed remain exempted under the new Section 301 tariff regime, including platinum and other precious metals, various citrus products and other fruits, fruit juices and nuts.

This was in line with exemptions granted by the USTR for various raw materials, as well as products that cannot be grown or produced in sufficient quantities in the US.
