



MEDIA STATEMENT

PROOF: SOUTH AFRICA'S FIREARMS CONTROL ACT HAS SAVED THOUSANDS OF LIVES

Saturday 26 April 2014: University of Oxford, United Kingdom: Evidence that South Africa's Firearms Control Act (2000) has saved thousands of lives is being presented today at the University of Oxford. The research, which was published in the March 2014 edition of the reputable *American Journal of Public Health*, shows that over 4,500 lives were saved from gun violence in five SA cities between 2001 and 2005.

Lead researcher and specialist scientist, Dr Richard Matzopoulos, is presenting his findings at the South African Democracy Conference at the University of Oxford (24-26 April), attended by well-known academics and national and provincial SA government officials, including a key note address by Deputy-President Motlanthe.

The purpose of the research was to assess the impact of South Africa's Firearm Control Act, passed in 2000, on firearm homicide rates in five South African cities (Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria) from 2001 to 2005.

Says Matzopoulos, "after controlling for a range of variables (including victims' age, sex and race as well as factors such the day of the week victims were killed on, the year of death and city population size) we can say there was a statistically significant year-on-year decrease of 13.6 per cent per annum in the number of people shot and killed by firearms during the study period. This decrease was more than five-fold higher than the decrease in homicide by other means and the only plausible explanation is the effect of the Firearms Control Act."

In total, the research suggests that 4,585 lives were saved across the five cities from 2001 to 2005 because of the Firearms Control Act.

According to Claire Taylor, Gun Free South Africa's spokesperson, "The importance of this research internationally cannot be overstated, both for countries that experience high levels of gun violence looking for solutions, as well as countries with low levels of gun violence that are considering loosening gun controls, such as Canada, which recently scrapped its long gun registry in all provinces except Montreal.

Matzopoulos' research comes at an opportune time; the murder trial of Paralympian Oscar Pistorius, who shot and killed his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp on Valentine's Day in 2013, has focused the world's attention on gun control in South Africa. Despite acquiring the 9mm parabellum used to shoot Steenkamp legally for self-defence, Pistorius allegedly flouted a number of laws around gun ownership and use, which have led to him facing additional charges of reckless and negligent gun use.

Says Taylor, "While Pistorius legally acquired and continued to keep his gun despite a number of alleged reckless incidents; the Firearms Control Act contains two important provisions that have helped keep guns out of the wrong hands. The first is strict criteria for gun ownership, which raises the bar for who is allowed to own a gun. Secondly, the law allows a licensed gun owner to be

declared unfit to own a gun if he is negligent or reckless with it, as Pistorius allegedly was before he shot and killed Steenkamp.

Despite the significant number of lives saved since the Firearms Control Act was passed, latest data (from 2009) shows that 18 people are still shot dead and between 18 and 72 experience gun violence every day in South Africa. This figure may well have increased recently with several trauma surgeons reporting a spike in gun-related injuries coinciding with various reports of poor enforcement of the Firearms Control Act, dating to 2011.

“South Africa’s Firearms Control Act is one of the most comprehensive pieces of gun control legislation in the world. It has already saved thousands of lives. But a law is only as good as its implementation. And the cost of failing to implement the Firearms Control Act is people’s lives,” says Taylor.

Note to editors

- Dr Richard Matzopoulos, from the School of Public Health and Family Medicine (University of Cape Town), and the Burden of Disease Research Unit (South African Medical Research Council, is presenting his paper ‘Firearm and non-firearm homicide in five South African cities: a retrospective population based study’ on Saturday, 26 April as part of the 20 years of South African Democracy Conference taking place at the at the University of Oxford from 24-26 April. See <http://southafrica1994-2014.com/> for more information.
- Dr Matzopoulos’ paper is based on research published in the American Journal of Public Health: March 2014, Vol. 104, No. 3, pp. 455-460, read more at: <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2013.310650>
- Latest mortuary data shows that 6,428 people were shot and killed in South Africa in 2009¹, i.e. 18 people were shot and killed a day. This is half the number of people shot 10 years ago; in 1998, 12,298 people were shot and killed, averaging 34 people a day².

Gun Free South Africa is working towards making South Africa a safer more secure country by reducing gun violence

Ends

¹ *The Injury Mortality Survey: A national study of injury mortality levels and causes in South Africa in 2009*, which is due for official release in 2014; researchers released this information after Oscar Pistorius shot Reeva Steenkamp on 14 February 2013, following media interest in firearm-related data.

² R. Chetty, *Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa* (Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre, 2000).