



MEDIA STATEMENT

Don't Groom For Violence! Support a toy gun free festive season

2 December 2019: Gun Free South Africa and Sonke Gender Justice have partnered on a campaign to encourage parents and caregivers, friends and family to support a toy gun free festive season.

The campaign, **Don't Groom For Violence!**, is being held within the context of a national gun violence emergency.

2019 national crime statistics show that guns are the leading cause of murder in South Africa (47% of murders in 2018/19 were from gunshots and 31% were knife-related). In Gauteng gunshots have overtaken motor vehicle accidents to become the leading cause of death,¹ which means the province now has the death profile of a country at war.

According to Suleiman Henry, senior trainer at Sonke Gender Justice, "Toys are an instrument of socialization, every toy given to a child carries the message that we approve of that toy. When we buy toys that imitate real weapons, children are encouraged to play at violence, so normalising violence. Instead of being socialised into violence, boys should be encouraged to embrace their caring side. We want to raise boys that say no to violence, who are considerate fathers and supportive partners."

Nonhlanhla Skosana, community mobilisation and education manager at Sonke Gender Justice explains the purpose of the campaign, "**Don't Groom For Violence!** supports a longer term vision of a safer, more peaceful and just South Africa. By encouraging gifts that are fun and educational rather than toys of war, death and intimidation, children and their family and friends can actually begin to experience what it would be like to live in a country free from violence, even in play."

According to Mary-Ann Nobeke, Gun Free South Africa's youth coordinator, "Toy guns are not fun. They are dangerous, and can cause injuries, even death."

A just published national long-term study from the USA shows that airguns (also called non-powder, paintball or BB guns) cause some of the most serious eye injuries treated, which can result in partial or complete blindness.² About 7% of the children injured by non-powder guns in the USA needed to be admitted to hospital.

Another risk is that children mistake a real gun for a toy. According to another US study, nearly 60% of children aged between 7-17 can't tell the difference between toy guns and real firearms.³ The

¹ A media statement from Gauteng Department of Health (issued 5 November 2019) reports that for 2018/2019 financial year, "state mortuaries recorded 2416 gunshot deaths followed by motor vehicle accidents and stabbings at 1695 and 1295 respectively."

² Jones, Margaret, Sandhya Kistangari, and Gary A. Smith. 2019. Nonpowder Firearm Injuries to Children Treated in Emergency Departments. *Pediatrics*, Volume 144, Issue 5, 1 November.

³ Fraser Doh, Kiesha. 2018. A comparison of parental firearm storage patterns and children's access to firearms. Presentation to the American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition, 5 November.

study is relevant given that police officers in South Africa often recover toy guns from criminals who've used these fake guns to commit crimes.

South Africa's Firearms Control Act (2000) does not recognise airguns as being real firearms. As such their sale and use are unregulated, and they are freely sold in shops and supermarkets.

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