



**MEDIA STATEMENT**  
**National Firearms Amnesty ends 31 January**  
**Police and gun owners failure to act risks safety of South Africa**

*26 January 2021:* The safety of all who live in South Africa will continue to be at risk of gun violence because neither the police nor gun owners have acted expediently on the national firearms amnesty, which ends on 31 January.

The police have done very little to publicise and encourage the public to take advantage of the 6-month amnesty, which started on 1 August 2020. Even the initial commitment made by the Minister of Police to report monthly on gun hand-ins as a way of building public trust in the police has been ignored, despite repeated requests by Gun Free SA to give updates.

At the same time, thousands of gun owners have failed to show that they are responsible. In 2020 the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA) upheld firearm licence renewals as a cornerstone of gun control. Under the 23 July ruling, any gun owner who failed to renew his firearm licence before it expired is in illegal possession and could potentially face 15 years in prison.

There are an estimated 450,000+ firearms for which licences have expired due to non-renewal. To allow gun owners with expired firearm licences an opportunity to bring themselves under the law, the Minister of Police declared an amnesty from 1 August 2020 to 31 January 2021. Under the amnesty gun owners in unlawful possession can apply for amnesty from prosecution by handing their firearms in to the police, either for destruction or while they apply for a new firearm licence (as an expired licence cannot be renewed).

As of 13 January, 23,399 firearms had been handed in during the 2020-21 firearms amnesty. While the majority of these (20,260) are guns with expired licences, this is just 5% of the 450,000+ firearms for which licences have expired. In its judgement the SCA warns that "there is a real risk that some or many of these firearms, which are now illegally in the possession of their owners, may be stolen or lost and end up in the hands of criminals who may injure or kill others."

Latest crime statistics show that civilians are the largest source of illegal guns in South Africa, reporting the loss or theft of 8,007 guns in 2019-20, an average of 24 guns a day (police reported losing 2 a day in this time).

While there is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have limited gun hand-ins, South Africa is facing an epidemic of gun violence that cannot be ignored. Research from the Western Cape shows that even during COVID-19 level 4 and 5 lockdowns, gun violence reduced only slightly compared to other violence-related deaths and injuries.

For gun violence to occur, there must be a gun. The 2020-21 national firearms amnesty is a key moment to make South Africa safer by reducing the number of unwanted, unlawful and illegal guns in our communities.

South Africa's experience of holding amnesties confirms they are effective at recovering guns: Over 150,000 firearms and 2,1 million rounds of ammunition were recovered in SA's past four amnesties (1994, 2005, 2010 and 2019-20). Almost half of the guns recovered in the 2005, 2010 and 2019-20 amnesties were illegally-held (69,575/46,8%).

SAPS and gun owners are failing South Africa by not supporting the 2020-21 amnesty. We call on both to aim for safety in the last few days of the amnesty: The SAPS must advertise and mobilise gun owners to hand their guns in, and gun owners must do the right thing and comply with the law by handing unwanted, unlawful and illegal guns in to the police, either for destruction or while applying for a new licence.

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**For more detailed information:**

- Summary of Supreme Court of Appeal ruling and its implications for firearm licence renewals: <https://www.gfsa.org.za/component/jdownloads/send/14-gun-policy-briefs/197-briefing-2-of-2020-implications-of-supreme-court-of-appeal-judgement-upholding-firearm-licence-renewals>
- SAPS' 13 January 2021 media release on the number of guns handed in during the 2020-21 amnesty: <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspeechdetail.php?nid=30379>
- Report tracking the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on mortality rates in the Western Cape see: [www.westerncape.gov.za/files/20200629\\_violent\\_crime\\_during\\_lockdown\\_-\\_report\\_final\\_with\\_recommendations\\_1.pdf](http://www.westerncape.gov.za/files/20200629_violent_crime_during_lockdown_-_report_final_with_recommendations_1.pdf)
- Report tracking the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on admission rates at Groote Schuur Hospital in the Western Cape see: [www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/13183](http://www.samj.org.za/index.php/samj/article/view/13183)

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