



MEDIA STATEMENT:

CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON GUN LICENCES AND FORENSIC AUDIT OF CENTRAL FIREARMS REGISTRY

1 July 2014: Gun Free South Africa urges the newly appointed Minister of Police, Mr Nhleko, to place a moratorium on the issuing of any new firearm licenses and to conduct a forensic audit of all firearm licences issued since 2010. The arrest of three police officers from the Central Firearms Registry for allegedly issuing fake gun licences including to 28s gang kingpin Ralph Stanfield is yet another example of the unreliability of the firearms control management system. Fraud and corruption in the gun licensing process allows guns to leak into the illegal pool of weapons; once there they are extremely difficult to mop up, and being robust commodities, are used repeatedly to commit crime. The cost of this breakdown in the integrity of the system is in lives lost and those who are injured and survive – it is too great a cost.

The purpose of the Firearms Control Act (2000) is to establish a comprehensive and effective system of firearms control. This means knowing who owns what weapon for which purpose.

Firearm licences are the cornerstone of the Firearms Control Act. The firearms licensing process ensures that any potential firearm licence holder is subjected to background checks to affirm that the individual is a 'fit and proper person' to possess a gun, as well as training on understanding the law regarding the responsibilities of gun ownership.

Under the previous Police Minister's watch South Africa has seen a consistent erosion of firearms control. In November 2010 the Minister admitted to the "malfunctioning" of the CFR which had resulted in a backlog of firearm licence applications. He promised to turn the CFR into a "functional unit" that would deal with the backlog by July 2011. This has not happened.

The South African Police Service reports that between November 2010 and August 2011 the CFR processed 1,048,341 firearm applications i.e. the CFR processed over 1 million applications in 9 months.

In mid 2013, eighteen police officers, including the head of the Central Firearms Registry, were suspended with immediate effect for alleged involvement in fraud relating to firearm licences.

At the same time, the Minister of Police established a Committee of Enquiry to investigate "unscrupulous dealers in firearms and illegally-operating firearms training institutions", with the Committee given 6 weeks to complete its work.

When Gun Free SA called for a firearm licence moratorium and forensic audit in 2013, the Minister responded that "*placing a moratorium during the investigation, would be unnecessary because if there are any unscrupulous practices currently taking place; the Committee would be able to uncover them right away.*"

A year later we are still waiting for the Committee's findings and recommendations. In the meantime fraud and corruption in the firearms licensing system continues; leaking guns into the illegal pool of weapons in South Africa. While the Firearms Control Act has a number of controls to keep licensed gun owners accountable, once guns fall into the illegal pool they are extremely difficult to mop up. Being robust commodities that are highly coveted by people who shouldn't have them, guns are used repeatedly to kill, injure and threaten.

Police Commissioner Riah Phiyega describes the arrest of three police officers at the CFR as "*just the tip of the iceberg in a probe into fake gun licences*". GFSA has publicly expressed concern about endemic fraud and corruption in the firearms control management system. We repeat our call for a moratorium on firearm licensing and a forensic audit of the CFR. It is the only way we can be sure that licensed gun owners are in fact fit and proper for the responsibility of owning a lethal weapon.

**18 people are shot and killed every day in South Africa.
Gun Free South Africa is working towards a safer,
more secure South Africa, by reducing gun violence.**

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