



## Media Statement

### **Guns are 85% more lethal than other suicide means. Be responsible: Hand in your gun during Teen Suicide Prevention Week**

*16 February 2014:* Guns are 85% more lethal than any other means used to commit suicide. Gun Free South Africa urges gun owners to be responsible during Teen Suicide Prevention Week (16-22 February 2014) and hand in their guns to the police for destruction. Says Gun Free South Africa's spokesperson, Adèle Kirsten, "There are different ways to help prevent suicides, but one step is clear; reducing a suicidal person's access to a lethal weapon helps save lives."

Just a week ago a double tragedy rocked St Alban's College in Pretoria when a Matric pupil shot and killed himself; after which his mother, apparently unable to deal with her son's death and using the same firearm, shot herself. If there hadn't been a gun in the family home it's likely that both these deaths could have been prevented. This is so even if the gun was stored in a safe as required by law; as most teenagers know their parents' hiding places so would know where to find the safe's keys.

Guns are lethal. They're quick. And they're irreversible. Once the trigger is pulled, death usually follows within minutes.

Firearms account for 14% of suicides in South Africa, with youth aged 15-29 years being most at risk for suicide (youth make up 36% of suicide victims, followed by adults aged 30-44 at 33%). There are four male suicides for every female suicide. Latest research in America shows that people living in homes with guns are three times more likely to die from suicide compared to those living in homes without guns.

While efforts to prevent suicide usually focus on the why people commit suicide, the how people attempt – the means they use – plays a crucial role in whether they live or die.

Over 70% of suicide attempts occur impulsively, during a crisis. Putting time and distance between a suicidal person and a gun may save a life. "We urge gun owners to proactively prevent teen suicides by handing their guns in to the police for destruction," says Kirsten, noting that in the USA nine out of ten people who survive an attempt do not go on to die by suicide later.

#### Notes

- Data showing that guns are 85% more lethal than other suicide means; 70% of suicide attempts occur impulsively; and nine out of ten people who survive an attempt do not go on to die by suicide later: Harvard Injury Control Research Center, National Violent Injury Statistics System (NVISS). 2001 suicide data summary, available at: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/nviss/documents/Suicide%20Summary%202001.pdf>
- Latest US research showing that people living in homes with guns are three times more likely to die from suicide compared to those living in homes without guns available from [bit.ly/1fRUN8c](http://bit.ly/1fRUN8c) Annals of Internal Medicine, online January 20, 2014.
- Suicide data for South Africa is available from: A Profile of Fatal Injuries in South Africa 2008: Annual Report for South Africa based on the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System - NIMSS. MRC-UNISA Crime, Violence & Injury Lead Programme, November 2009.

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