



## **MEDIA STATEMENT:**

### **POLICE ACT KEY TO ENSURING COPS FIREARM FIT**

*29 July 2014:* Gun Free South Africa calls for the South African Police Service (SAPS) Act to include a consolidated section dealing specifically with police and firearms in response to the Police Minister's disclosure that a quarter of the police officers required to carry a firearm are not competent to do so. In a written reply to a parliamentary question, Mr Nhleko reported that by 14 July 2014, 39,333 of 155,534 SAPS members (25%) required to carry a firearm did not have the competency to do so.

Says Adele Kirsten from Gun Free South Africa, "South Africa's police force is armed; so firearms are a central tool in police officers' daily work. As such it is imperative that the law spell out in detail the principles of firearm use in policing. These include conditions relating to possession and the carrying and use of firearms and ammunition, when on and off duty".

As a starting point, the SAPS Act must clearly articulate which categories of officers will and won't be armed. It must also include provisions to certify that officers to be armed are fit and proper for this responsibility; South Africa's Firearms Control Act certifies civilian gun owners, but the SAPS Act must extend this by requiring background checks and lifestyle audits of police officers to ensure no involvement in criminal activity, including fraud and corruption.

Comprehensive training in firearm use and handling is also critical. Minister Nhleko promised in his budget vote speech on 21 July 2014 that SA's police force would be demilitarised. The only way this will be realised is if practical training for officers emphasises that lethal force is an option of last resort, proportionate to the situation and relating specifically to self-defence or in the defence of others.

In this regard police officers must be given adequate and regular accredited training in firearm use, as well as non-lethal weapon use, non-violent restraint and conflict resolution strategies to ensure that police have the skills and expertise to undertake policing work.

As required by SA's Firearms Control Act (2000), Gun Free South Africa urges that police officers' firearm licences are regularly renewed, which would include training, testing and a review of whether officers remain fit and proper; this would ensure that any officer found to have misused or abused their firearm, whether deliberately or negligently, has this firearm removed immediately.

Finally, we urge that police officers not be allowed to take their service pistols home; which would reduce the risk of loss and theft, gun use in domestic violence as well as police suicides.

The Police Minister has a golden opportunity to significantly impact on safety of all South Africans by reviewing the SAPS Act. In the meantime we call on him to disarm the 25% of police officers who do not have the competency to carry a firearm.

***Ends***