



MEDIA STATEMENT

SA study over 25 years shows gun control – including firearm amnesties – save lives, poor enforcement kills, offers solution to rising gun crime

23 October 2019: As the world marks global disarmament week (24-30 October), Gun Free SA welcomes parliament’s announcement today that a national firearms amnesty – the fourth in South Africa’s history – will be held later this year.

According to a comprehensive report on gun control in South Africa over 25 years, which is being launched this week to commemorate disarmament week, gun control saves lives. Firearm amnesties are an important component of effective gun control.

Says Gun Free SA’s researcher, Claire Taylor, “The chance of being shot is not random. For someone to be shot, there must be a gun. When guns are controlled and less available, fewer shootings happen and lives are saved. By recovering both legal and illegally held guns, amnesties reduce gun availability and thus the risk of shootings.”

As shown in the table below, the three amnesties held in South Africa recovered a total of over 120,000 firearms and 1.8 million rounds of ammunition.

Number of firearms and ammunition surrendered in South Africa’s three firearm amnesties				
Year	Firearms		Ammunition rounds	
	Legally held	Illegally held	Legally held	Illegally held
16 December 1994 (24 hours) ¹	900 firearms		7,000 rounds	
1 January to 30 June 2005 (6 months) ²	45,727	33,246	821,527	608,794
11 January to 11 April 2010 (4 months) ³	30,442	11,887	321,155	129,234
Total	122,202		1,887,710	

The report documenting the history and impact of gun control in South Africa over 25 years, [Gun control and violence: South Africa’s story](#) (also available online as a [summarised booklet](#)), identifies five key interventions that reduced the availability of guns in the years 2000 to 2010:

1. **Stricter regulations**, particularly the Firearms Control Act (2000), which raised the bar for gun ownership

¹ Kirsten, Adèle. 2008. A nation without guns: The story of Gun Free South Africa. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

² Kirsten, Adèle. 2007. Simpler, better, faster. Review of the 2005 Firearms Amnesty. ISS Paper 134. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

³ SAPS 2009-2010 Annual Report.

2. **Capacity building** to support the implementation of the Firearms Control Act, including appointing and training new staff and acquiring new IT and logistical equipment
3. **Addressing illegal and criminal guns and gun use** by way of audits to identify obsolete guns for destruction, national firearm amnesties, and intelligence driven operations such as Operation Sethunya to recover and destroy illegally held guns
4. **Awareness raising** to inform members of the public of provisions in the Firearms Control Act as well as campaigns to recover and destroy unwanted and illegally held guns, such as guns in deceased estates
5. **Regional and sector cooperation**, including agreements to standardise the trade, storage, possession and use of guns as well as operations to recover and destroy guns and other small arms (such as Operation Rachel which destroyed over 19,000 firearms in Mozambique)

In the 10 years that firearms were strictly controlled and less available in South Africa (2000-2010), guns stopped being the leading cause of murder and gun-related deaths almost halved, from 34 people shot and killed a day to 18.

However, from 2011 gun violence began increasing due to various breakdowns in South Africa's firearms control management system. This included fraud and corruption, deliberate leakage of guns from secure stores into the illegal market, inappropriate target-setting, under-resourcing and poor planning.

As a result guns have become increasingly available. As gun availability increased so has gun violence.

The latest national crime statistics (2019) show that guns are again the leading cause of murder (47% of murders in 2018-19 were from gunshots and 31% were knife-related).

Says Taylor, "*Gun control and violence: South Africa's story* is a map to reducing gun violence in South Africa and halving crime in the country in the next 10 years. It identifies tried and tested gun control interventions, including firearm amnesties, that saved lives in the past. These same interventions can again save lives."

As we mark disarmament week, Gun Free SA urges government to put in place conditions to recover as many illegally held guns as possible, to create the opportunity for the voluntary surrender of legally-held guns, to ensure safe storage of all recovered and surrendered firearms, and finally to make provision for the destruction of all these weapons as soon as possible.

Additional information:

- Gun Free SA doesn't have information on the conditions of the proposed firearms amnesty, but supports it in principle.
- Copies of *Gun control and violence: South Africa's story*, which traces the history and impact of gun control over 25 years, are available online:
 - For a [summary booklet](#) of the report

- For the [full report](#), including references and detailed bibliography
- Gun Free SA youth facilitators are undertaking a range of activities to support disarmament week. In Alexandra a community dialogue under the banner *Reason to Disarm*, is aimed at raising awareness of the risks of having a gun and looking at ways in which people in Alex can help build a safer community. One way is to pledge to report illegal guns and encourage gun owners of illegal and unwanted guns to hand them in for destruction. Several interventions are also planned for schools in which learners are encouraged to explore alternatives to toy guns. In addition community radio stations such as Alex FM will discuss the topic of disarmament throughout the week, encouraging community members to pledge their support for making Alex a safer place.
- For additional information on global disarmament week (marked annually from 24 to 30 October), see www.un.org/en/events/disarmamentweek/index.shtml

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