



Media Statement: What does Reeva Steenkamp's death tell us about gun violence in SA? Know the Law. Use the Law. Save a Life

14 February 2014: A year ago today Reeva Steenkamp was shot and killed by Oscar Pistorius. Apart from being celebrities, Reeva and Oscar's story is not unique: A man legally buys a gun to protect himself and those he loves from a stranger intruder; instead he uses his licensed gun to kill the person he loves. In 1999, 34% of women murdered by their intimate partner were killed with a gun; in 2009 this figure dropped to 17%. At the same time, the percentage of women killed in other ways (e.g. strangled, stabbed or beaten) remained the same. The researchers at the Medical Research Council assert that the single most important intervention that contributed to halving the number of women shot and killed by their intimate partner was the implementation of the Firearms Control Act (2000).

The Firearms Control Act (2000) protects women from being threatened, injured or killed by a gun owned by their intimate partner. The law limits who can own what gun for which purpose. It excludes anyone who is not 'fit and proper'.

The Firearms Control Act also allows the police to remove a gun from a legal gun owner if he is not 'fit and proper', for example if he:

- Points his gun to threaten or intimidate someone.
- Misuses his gun, for example, by shooting it negligently.
- Handles or shoots his gun while drunk or on drugs.
- Fails to store his gun in a safe.

For the police to take action, someone (the person being threatened or a family member, friend or neighbour) must make a written complaint at their closest police station, detailing why the gun owner is a risk or how he has abused his gun. By law, the police are required to take action after receiving such a complaint.

The two additional charges laid against Pistorius for the negligent use of a firearm (shooting through the sunroof of a moving car, and accidentally shooting a gun at a restaurant) indicate that he may have flouted the law, and if found guilty, that he was not 'fit and proper' to be granted the responsibility of gun ownership.

Gun Free South Africa urges all South Africans to use the law to make our country safe from gun violence: If you know anyone who owns a gun and shouldn't, because he is a threat to the people he loves, we urge you to take action by reporting it to your closest police station.

Gun violence can be prevented. Know the Law. Use the Law. Save a Life.

Notes:

- The research data on intimate femicide (defined as the killing of a female person by an intimate partner i.e. her current or ex-husband or boyfriend, same sex partner or a rejected would-be lover) is taken from Abrahams N, Mathews S, Martin LJ, Lombard C, Jewkes R (2013) Intimate Partner Femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009. *PLoS Med* 10(4): e1001412.doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001412.
- The male gender 'he' is used throughout when referring to gun owners as the majority of gun owners both in South Africa and across the world are male.

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