

# GFSA Newsletter

March 2025

## Farewell to GFSA's founding director Adèle Kirsten



*After decades of dedicated service, GFSA's founding director Adèle Kirsten has stepped down from her leadership role. As she transitions to new endeavours, we look back at her remarkable journey and the organisation's impact under her guidance.*

### **A lifetime of activism**

Adele's path to establishing GFSA was rooted in her commitment to nonviolence and social justice. In the turbulent 1980s, she supported conscientious objectors through the End Conscription Campaign and worked with the Wits Vaal Peace Secretariat during South Africa's transition to democracy.

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"Working with Sheena Duncan and Bishop Peter Storey, we realised that the country was awash with guns and perhaps one of the biggest threats to our new democracy," Adèle recalls. This insight led to GFSA's formation in 1995, with Adèle serving as its first Director.

Throughout her tenure, Adèle has witnessed countless, preventable tragedies that underscore the urgent need for gun control. She shares the story of six-year-old Leena van Wyk, caught in gang

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crossfire in Hanover Park, whose case later connected to the Christiaan Prinsloo corruption scandal involving thousands of guns in police stores being sold to gangs. Today, Leeana is part of the [Prinsloo Guns class action lawsuit](#) GFSA has instituted on behalf of affected families against the Minister of Police.

Other memorable tragedies like the Marikana massacre and Reeva Steenkamp's murder all reinforced GFSA's mission. As have the recent wave of mass shootings across South Africa, which, says Adèle, "represent a new trend, now an established pattern signalling the easy availability of guns and ammunition."

### **Policy victories and lasting impact**

Under Adele's leadership, GFSA achieved significant policy changes, most notably the Firearms Control Act of 2000. This legislation led to measurable results: gun deaths nearly halved from 34 daily in 1998 to 18 in 2009, while intimate partner femicides involving firearms decreased significantly during the same period.

GFSA's legal advocacy has also established important precedents, including a Constitutional Court ruling affirming that firearm ownership in South Africa "is not a right but a privilege under the law."

Most recently, GFSA's persistent advocacy resulted in the President's 2025 State of

the Nation Address highlighting gun crime and violence reduction as priorities for overall crime prevention.

*"Lastly and a fitting note on which to end is the promise of the President in the 2025 SONA about needing to prioritise gun crime and violence as the most effective way to reduce overall crime."*

**Adèle Kirsten**

### **Looking forward**

While stepping back from GFSA's day-to-day operations, Adèle will continue contributing to gun violence prevention research with Professor Naeemah Abrahams on the Lancet Commission on Global Gun Violence and Health. She also leaves GFSA with a clear programme focusing on three priorities: Reducing the circulation of guns in society, enforcing the Firearms Control Act and strengthening gun control legislation.

As Adèle transitions to this new chapter, she looks forward to slowing down, "just a little", to do more of what she loves, including exploring new places, "I have been urged by the class action families from Mitchells Plain that visiting places like Lamberts Bay, Yzerfontein and Langebaan Lagoon must be on my priority list!"

[Read the full interview with Adèle Kirsten here.](#)



## New leadership, renewed vision: Dr. Stanley Maphosa joins GFSa as executive director



*Stepping into the role of Executive Director at GFSa is Dr. Stanley Maphosa, who brings with him extensive experience and a clear vision for GFSa's future.*

GFSa's board is thrilled to announce the appointment of Dr. Stanley Maphosa as its new Executive Director effective from January 2025. With over 22 years of experience in strategy, collaboration, programme management, advocacy, science diplomacy, disaster risk reduction, and governance, Dr. Maphosa brings exceptional leadership and a clear vision for a safer South Africa.

Dr. Maphosa's career spans national, Pan-African, and global roles, including leadership positions at World Vision International, the Academy of Science of South Africa, and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. He also established and led S3R Consulting. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Johannesburg and a former lecturer in Anthropology and Development Studies at the University of Zululand and serves as a board member of We Will Speak Out South Africa, patron of the Shekinah Legacy Foundation, and volunteer with Devoted Citizen.

### **Vision for GFSa**

Under Dr. Maphosa's leadership, GFSa will focus on growth, innovation, and collaboration. His vision is to grow the connection between grassroots, community-led advocacy and national, regional, and global efforts to combat gun violence, emphasising its devastating impact on South Africa. This seeks to ensure that GFSa contributes to three critical outcomes: a significant reduction in the number of guns, and consequently, murder rates; the enforcement of current gun control laws; and the amendment of legislation to close loopholes that perpetuate gun violence.

Dr. Maphosa sees gun violence as a man-made disaster – an undeclared epidemic that requires urgent, coordinated action.

His approach also includes innovative ways to empower young people to take active roles in prevention and policy level efforts, fostering corporate and other partnerships for sustainable safety initiatives, and advocating through the principle of *one message, many voices*. By framing gun violence as a cross-cutting issue in sustainable development and disaster risk reduction, he aims to inspire broad-based bold action across all sectors.

*“Adèle’s visionary leadership has made GFSA a cornerstone in the fight against gun violence. Her tireless efforts inspire us to continue advocating for meaningful change with determination and urgency.”*  
Stanley Maphosa

## A message from board chair Palesa Madi

We are excited to welcome Dr. Maphosa to GFSA. His extensive experience and innovative vision will strengthen our collective efforts to reduce gun violence.

We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Adèle for her extraordinary leadership and dedication to this critical cause.

Join us as we embark on this new chapter under Dr. Maphosa’s leadership to create a South Africa free from gun violence.

## President Ramaphosa’s 2025 State of the Nation Address

“We must tackle the scourge of gun violence that has plagued our society for decades. I have asked the Minister and the National Commissioner of Police to prioritise reducing gun-related crime and violence, this includes preventing

the diversion of firearms into the illicit market and recovering illegal firearms in circulation. We know from international evidence and our own experience that this is the most effective way to reduce overall violent crime.” [Watch excerpt here.](#)



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## New research: Guns threaten women's right to safety

A new study and the latest crime stats reveal the extent to which guns contribute to the most extreme form of violence against women – their murder:

- Guns are the leading weapon used to murder women, with the proportion of women shot dead reaching the highest rate ever recorded.
- While women are most at risk of being killed with a legal gun, gun licence applications have increased by 58% since 2016.



Download GFSA's latest briefing [Gun-related femicide in SA over 25 years: A call to action](#) to learn about evidence-based solutions that protect women's right to safety.

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## Firearm Free Zones can protect our right to life

For 25 years, our government has failed to declare public spaces as Firearm Free Zones, leaving venues vulnerable and unable to enforce life-saving restrictions.

The tragic shooting at Solo restaurant – where seven people were shot, three fatally, after a gunman and his bodyguards forced their way in despite the

establishment's gun-free policy – shows the devastating consequences of this inaction.

Without legal backing, venues struggle to enforce their gun restrictions, and perpetrators cannot be held accountable.

Section 140 of the Firearms Control Act gives the Minister of Police the authority to declare spaces where alcohol is sold – such as bars, restaurants, and clubs – as Firearm Free Zones, making it a crime to bring a gun inside.

When will the government act to protect public spaces?



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