



STATEMENT

Underperformance and corruption at Central Firearms Registry fuels gun violence epidemic in SA

Functional Central Firearms Registry key to dealing with illegal guns in SA

Cape Town, 11 July 2023: Against the backdrop of a protracted policing crisis around effectiveness and leadership, allegations of underperformance and corruption have for years dogged the Central Firearms Registry (CFR), the police unit responsible for firearms management, including firearm-related recordkeeping. Globally accurate and efficient recordkeeping, which tracks firearms from cradle to grave, is recognised as a cornerstone to effectively manage legal gun stocks and ensure they don't leak into criminal hands; and is a requirement under several international small arms control instruments which SA has signed onto.

The most high-profile example of weapons mismanagement and corruption is that of Chris Prinsloo, a former senior police official removed 2000+ guns awaiting destruction in police stores from the central database, distributing them to criminals. [Prinsloo Guns](#) have been implicated in the murder of 1,066 people, including 187 children in the Western Cape alone.

“Recognising that although most gun crime is committed with illegal guns, almost all illegal guns were once legal. This means we must close the taps from which these legal guns are leaking into the illegal pool, and this requires tightening controls over legal weapons stocks through effective recordkeeping,” says Claire Taylor, researcher at Gun Free South Africa and co-author of the report [The State of the Central Firearms Registry in South Africa: Challenges and Opportunities](#).

Taylor was speaking at a Roundtable discussion co-hosted by APCOF and GFSA to launch a research paper exploring the feasibility of outsourcing SA's Central Firearms Registry. This included several possibilities ranging from privatisation of the record-keeping system, to devolving the responsibility for registering firearms to local level structures and locating the registration system as an independent authority that reports to the police.

Several other speakers including Oswald Reddy, Western Cape Ombudsman for Police discussed the role that the police and communities can play to reduce gun-related violence. Annelize van Wyk, vice-chair of APCOF and previously chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Police recalls the police's view that managing firearms control was seen primarily as an administrative function. She emphasised that “the CFR is a crime-fighting tool that can reduce gun violence”.

Considering the historical and systemic problems undermining the functioning of the CFR, the way in which firearms are managed must change. This is underscored by the 31 daily gun deaths in SA. While global examples don't show any single solution to effectively manage the CFR, transparency and accountability are central to improving effectiveness and building public trust.

Immediate steps need to be taken:

1. An advisory group of IT and firearms control experts that reports quarterly to Parliament must be established to ensure that a 'comprehensive and expensive' three-year contract awarded to Providence Software Solutions to put in place a registry system for the police, isn't a repeat of past mistakes in which a R343m contract with Waymark Infotech amounted to 'wasteful and fruitless' expenditure.
2. Within a year all government departments have reported to parliament on the number of firearms in their possession, including loss and theft.
3. South Africa is a signatory to various global and regional firearms-related instruments. These put a legal, political and moral obligation on the state to put systems in place to mark and trace legal firearms stocks to prevent diversion. There are global initiatives to support weapons and ammunition management initiatives, which our government must explore.

GFSA is eager to engage the police on the research to address failures in SAPS' firearms and ammunition management system, which allowed Prinsloo and others to leak guns from police stores, undetected, for years.

The African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum works to build good working relationships between the police and the community

Gun Free South Africa is helping build a safer country by reducing gun violence