



MEDIA STATEMENT

Welcome declaration of 6 month national firearms amnesty starting 1 December

28 November 2019: Gun Free SA welcomes today's declaration by the Minister of Police that a six month national firearms amnesty – the fourth in South Africa's history – will begin on 1 December.¹

South Africa's experience of holding amnesties confirms just how effective they are at recovering guns, including unwanted, unauthorised and illegal guns.

As shown in the table below, over 120,000 firearms and 1.8 million rounds of ammunition were recovered in SA's past three amnesties. Over one third of the guns and ammunition recovered in the 2005 and 2010 amnesties were illegally-held (45,133 and 738,028 respectively).

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) ²	900 firearms		7,000 rounds	
1 January to 30 June 2005 (6 months) ³	45,727	33,246	821,527	608,794
11 January to 11 April 2010 (4 months) ⁴	30,442	11,887	321,155	129,234
Total	122,202		1,887,710	

The impending amnesty is being held within the context of a national gun violence emergency.

2019 national crime statistics show that guns are the leading cause of murder in South Africa (47% of murders in 2018/19 were from gunshots and 31% were knife-related). In Gauteng gunshots have overtaken motor vehicle accidents to become the leading cause of death in the province.⁵

"If the 2019/20 amnesty is undertaken as part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at recovering and destroying the existing pool of firearms and limiting the flow of new firearms into communities it holds the potential to begin reversing South Africa's gun violence crisis," says Adèle Kirsten, Gun Free South Africa's Director.

¹ South African Government. 2019. Firearms Control Act: Declaration of an amnesty, 27 November. (Online). Available at www.gov.za/documents/firearms-control-act-declaration-amnesty-27-nov-2019-0000.

² Kirsten, Adèle. 2008. A nation without guns: The story of Gun Free South Africa. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

³ Kirsten, Adèle. 2007. Simpler, better, faster. Review of the 2005 Firearms Amnesty. ISS Paper 134. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

⁴ SAPS 2009-2010 Annual Report.

⁵ A media statement from Gauteng Department of Health (issued 5 November 2019) reports that for 2018/2019 financial year, "state mortuaries recorded 2416 gunshot deaths followed by motor vehicle accidents and stabbings at 1695 and 1295 respectively."

One of the biggest concerns Gun Free South Africa and the public at large have is whether the SAPS has systems in place to ensure that guns and ammunition handed in during the 2019/20 firearms amnesty are permanently removed from communities. This concern is based on various incidents in which weapons handed in for destruction were leaked from police stores back onto the streets.

Gun Free South Africa's engagement with SAPs on the 2019/20 amnesty indicates that safeguarding guns and ammunition from point of hand-in through the chain of storage and transport until the moment of destruction is paramount, and that various stockpile management systems have been put in place to protect against leakages.

"To verify the effectiveness of these systems, it is absolutely critical that an official independent observer with monitors in all provinces is appointed to ensure oversight and transparency and to identify problems as soon as possible so that these can quickly be dealt with," says Kirsten.

Monitors must undertake unannounced oversight visits at police stations to check each station's compliance with the amnesty process, verify that firearms and ammunition recorded as handed in are in fact held in police stores and ensure that guns and ammunition handed in are transported to provincial stores and are destroyed.

Ends