



Media Statement: 4 Key Factors for a Successful Firearms Amnesty in SA

23 July 2018: Gun Free South Africa welcomes Police Minister Bheki Cele's announcement to parliament of his intention to declare a 6-month national firearms amnesty under Section 139 of the Firearms Control Act starting 1 September 2018.

The primary objective of an amnesty is to remove illegal guns.

Globally, amnesties are recognised as an effective mechanism to reduce the availability of illegal, unwanted and obsolete guns in circulation, and the associated risk of gun-related violence.

There are 4 vital factors which determine how successful the proposed 2018-19 amnesty will be in mopping up illegal guns in South Africa.

The most successful amnesties are those in which:

1. No questions are asked (called a blanket amnesty).
2. Guns are handed in at the neutral venues, rather than at police stations.
3. Guns are immobilised at point of hand-in to reduce the risk that they will leak back into communities.
4. There is clear and regular communication with stakeholders.

South Africa has already held two very successful national firearms amnesties, which collected over 40,000 illegal guns in 2005 and 2010.

However, the 2016 case of Christiaan Prinsloo – a police officer who sold 2,400 guns handed in to the police for destruction to gangsters on the Cape Flats – means that the public has little (if any) trust that the police will destroy guns surrendered in the 2018-19 amnesty.

As such, in addition to immobilising guns at the point of hand-in, government must urgently comply with its international commitments, particularly the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (called the UN PoA). Adopted by consensus by UN Member States – including South Africa – in 2001, the UN PoA obliges countries to destroy surplus firearms, which includes surrendered, confiscated and obsolete weapons held by the police, defence force and other state departments to minimise the risk that these guns will be diverted into communities.

Permanently destroying guns is the only way to guarantee that guns under state control can never be recycled, that is leaked back into communities to be used again and again to perpetrate violent crimes.

A blanket amnesty using neutral venues in which guns are immobilised at hand-in will allow the public to witness what is done with guns that are surrendered, thereby helping forge a partnership between the police and civil society to permanently remove guns from our communities.

This is particularly important following the recent ruling by the Constitutional Court that gun licence renewals are constitutional. The ConCourt judgement means that gun owners who have failed to

renew their firearm licences, and who are therefore in illegal possession, must surrender their guns to the police.

Which is where the fourth component of a successful amnesty – clear and regular communication – comes in. Unless key stakeholders, including gun owners and police officers at station level know exactly what the conditions of the amnesty are through effective communication, there is the risk of uncertainty and second guessing, which could undermine the potential this amnesty has of contributing to a safer, more secure, South Africa.

Additional information on the 4 key conditions of a successful amnesty:

1. An amnesty in which no questions are asked, otherwise referred to as a **blanket amnesty**, has been shown to be the most effective at removing illegal guns: identifying information of the firearm or firearm part handed in is recorded; this information is used to remove the gun from the firearms register, and also see if it is linked to any crimes, but no identifying information of the person handing in the gun is recorded.
2. **Neutral venues** such as municipal recreation centres, religious venues or NGO buildings that are accessible and located within communities are favoured over police stations; this because police stations are often regarded with suspicion and fear by residents. In addition, neutral venues will help counter strong public perception, backed by evidence, that weapons handed in during an amnesty are not secure in SAPS 13 stores.
3. Rendering the **weapon inoperative** through smashing or crushing it or using an angle grinder to destroy key components in front of the person handing the weapon in would significantly increase trust that the gun will be destroyed.
4. **Regular and clear communication to key stakeholders** is a final factor contributing to the success of an amnesty. There is strong evidence to suggest that people wait until the last minute before acting on the call to hand-in weapons and that extensive public education and awareness raising is needed to keep the issue in the foreground. Partnering with civil society organisations who can help communicate the amnesty message, including religious groupings and NGOs, can significantly improve the success of an amnesty. For instance, as an official partner to the 2010 firearms amnesty, Gun free SA led a successful mass awareness-raising campaign to promote the amnesty, enlisting the pro-bono assistance of advertising agency Young & Rubicam (Y&R) to develop creative ways to communicate the amnesty message. Following the South African Football Association's (SAFA) establishment of the Senzo Meyiwa Gun Control Committee and subsequent calls by SAFA and the Committee for a national firearms amnesty after Meyiwa's death in October 2014, SAFA through the Senzo Meyiwa Gun Control Committee would be a logical and powerful ally to partner with during the 2018-19 amnesty.

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