

CRIME STATS and FARM ATTACKS

The recently released crime statistics by the Minister of Police once again sent shockwaves through the country. With the exception of a few categories, all crimes travelled the upward spiral. What is particularly disconcerting is the significant increase in violent and sexual crime. Despite some loyalist ruling party die-hards' remarks that the "ANC's crime fighting was bearing fruit", SAGA sees nothing of this. In fact the impression we get is that crime is out of control and unless government and every citizen join hands in combating crime, it will continue to escalate.

The reinstating of specialist units in SAPS to address violent crime, sexual crime and drug-related crime is a positive sign. SAGA is of the opinion that despite serious commitment and dedication by many police officers to lawfully make a difference, government has failed miserably in achieving outcome #3 of the Delivery Agreement of 2010 which states that "*all people in South Africa are and feel safe*". A major factor causing most people to feel unsafe is the average increase of 8.82% in all forms of robbery (so-called common robbery has not been added), the unacceptably high rate of rape and other sexual offences and housebreaking with intent to commit an offence. Violence in our society is further sadly reflected in the fact that murder, the final most crime, is up by 1.84% to a staggering 19,016. Regarding violent crime the minister allegedly said "*most violent crimes committed in SA was done with a gun and that poor enforcement of gun control laws was leaking guns from the legal to the illegal pool and driving South Africa's year-on-year increase in violent crime*".

It is noted that the number of reported cases of illegal possession of a firearm is up by 9.22% from 14,772 to 16,134. SAGA has previously asked for a breakdown in statistics so that no one is left in doubt as to what is meant by "most crimes .. is done with a gun". It is further unfortunate that neither the Minister nor the acting National Commissioner alluded to the various sources of firearms that contribute to the illegal pool. A contributor to Paratus, a firearm-related e-magazine, calculates that the police (excluding other state departments) lose about eight times more firearms than civilians. Traditionally government and others used to label the licensed firearm owner as the primary source from which guns are dumped into the illicit pool. However, the theft of thousands of firearms from the SAPS storage in Silverton a few years ago and the many earlier and subsequent cases involving theft from police stations and military bases are still fresh in our memory and largely negate that notion. Add to this the untold number of official firearms that have been lost and one soon realises the significant contribution made by the state to violent crime.

DefenceWeb reported on 23 October that the Minister responded to a parliamentary question by the DA that "*No less than 3 500 policemen and women are uncertified to carry firearms and a "startling" 11 000 do not have competency certificates*". Sources that are conveniently omitted include firearm smuggling, especially military weapons, from across our porous borders and arms caches that have still not been disclosed. SAGA is particularly concerned about the apparent ease with which police and military weapons are obtained by criminals. This is eminently clear from the organised attacks on cash in transit vehicles, shopping malls, automatic teller machines, airports and the like. Since civilians may generally not possess automatic weapons and the possession of semi-automatic rifles is strictly regulated, the source could be only the state, arms caches or smuggling.

While efficient enforcement of the Firearms Control Act will significantly reduce the number of firearms in the illicit pool, this will address a symptom only. On the one hand the Act regulates the legitimate possession of firearms and on the other it seeks to eliminate illegal possession. If we look at the might with which the police recently clamped down on people who had failed to renew their licenses and their unwillingness to help those in their predicament, excepting to say to them they must surrender their firearms to the police, questions could certainly be asked about how service-orientated the police really are and their ability and willingness to address “real” (as opposed to technical) illicit possession.

Since no reference was made to farm attacks during the minister’s statement, we noted the statement by the Freedom Front+ on 26 October 2017 stating that *“the figures for farm attacks and murders increased drastically for the 2016/2017 year under report. Farm murders increased with 27,5% and farm attacks with 22,9%. In the year under report, there were 74 farm murders (58 in 2015/2016) and 638 farm attacks (519 in 2015/2016)”*.

SAGA understands that law abiding citizens get frustrated and despondent and generally feel helpless, hence we were not surprised to hear the call that we all should show support to the victims of farm attacks by wearing black clothing on 30 October 2017. We understand and support this call. However, we have heard of more radical statements, some of which call for civil disobedience and even violence. SAGA does not support these calls. All people have the inalienable right to defend themselves, others and even their property within the ambit of the law against unlawful and violent attacks and to use force concomitant to the attack. We must be part of the solution and not be seen to contribute to the problem.

SAGA members remain committed to responsible and safe possession and use of firearms, thus contributing to a safer society.