MEDIA STATEMENT – For immediate release

MINISTER MTHETHWA ANNOUNCES MORE PLANS TO IMPROVE FIREARM APPLICATIONS AND CONTROLS

Enactment will allow for renewal of competency firearms certificates

PRETORIA – 14 December 2010. The Ministry of Police's efforts of improving responsible firearm control as well as aspects relating to firearm application and licensing are receiving a priority, both operationally and legislatively.

To this end, the Minister of Police, Nathi Mthethwa announced today that the President of the Republic has signed a Proclamation that will enact and address some of the legislative shortcomings. The Proclamation allows for sections of the Firearms Control Amendment Act dealing with renewals of competency certificates to come into effect as of 10th January 2011. The regulations dealing with these amendments will be published in a Government Gazette and will entail newly-simplified renewal forms. The renewal forms will be available at all police stations by 10 January 2011.

Following an investigation by a Ministerial Task Team at the Central Firearms Registry as publicly outlined last month, certain shortcomings have been identified which require urgent steps to be undertaken. "One of the shortcomings is the fact that the present Firearms Control Act, does not provide for a mechanism for the renewal of competency certificates. Although such a procedure was captured in the Firearms Control Amendment Act, it had not been put into operation. Now this matter will be speedily resolved," stated Minister Mthethwa.

From the 10th January 2011, all persons whose competency certificates are up for renewal must apply at local police station within 90 days of the expiry date. That means between 11 January and 11 April 2011 after which time, if they have not applied for renewal, they will be prosecuted. Given the fact that there are people whose competencies have already expired, this policy announcement is meant to allow such affected people to also make use of this renewal process.

"We do recognize some of the frustrations that certain members of society were faced with; we have tried to accommodate such people. After all it is not government's stance to criminalize law-abiding citizens. We are therefore allowing citizens whose competencies expired in 2010 and who have not applied for new competency certificates, to make use of the renewal process," added the Minister.

This enactment means that in addition to the provisions allowing for a renewal of competency the following will apply:

- All persons in possession of muzzle loading firearms will need to apply for competency certificates and will have 12 months in which to comply.

- Once a person has applied for renewal of their competency certificate and has proof of this application, the old competency certificate will remain valid until the person is issued with the new competency certificate or the new competency certificate is declined.
- Presently a competency certificate is valid for a period of five years, despite the fact that some licenses are valid for ten years. From 10 January 2011 the validity period of a competency certificate shall be the same as the license to which the certificate relates.
- New provision will also extend certain business licensing period in an attempt to alleviate the administrative burden on the Central Firearms Registry and the relicensing process.

The Ministry of Police envisages that this process, will amongst others ensure that firearms control in South Africa and licensing thereof, is both transparent, efficient and importantly, that only law-abiding and responsible citizens are entitled to firearm ownership. In addition the Ministry has also committed itself to addressing all other aspects of the Firearm Control Amendment Act early in 2011.

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