

**Remarks by Minister of Police, E.N. Mthethwa
at the National Destruction of Firearms,
Vereeniging, Gauteng**

15 January 2010

National Police Commissioner, B. Cele,

Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Police, Ms S. Chikunga,

All Deputy National Commissioners present,

All Provincial Commissioners present,

All Divisional Commissioners present,

Business Against Crime South Africa representative, Dr G. Wright,

Gun Free South Africa representative, Ms N. Jaynes,

SA Hunters and Game Conservation Association rep., G. Nell,

Members of the media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Constitution of our country guarantees every person the right to life and the right to security, which includes among other things, the right to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources.

The Constitution further guarantees that adequate protection of such rights is fundamental to the well-being, social and economic development of every person. The increased availability and abuse of firearms and ammunition has contributed significantly to the high and unacceptable levels of violent crimes in our society.

The duty we are about to discharge today, the destruction of firearms, certainly takes us one step closer to this objective. It will contribute in the reduction, proliferations and availability of illegal firearms. The fundamental aim of Government is therefore to build a society where citizens will enjoy a dignified and improved quality of life. The proliferation of arms in our society stands in direct opposite of this goal.

This Constitutional perspective, supported by our commitment as the Police Force, is what informs our presence here today. We are not only reaffirming our theme for the Firearms Amnesty: *Together We Can Do More Against Crime. Awulethe Umshini Wakho – Surrender Your Firearm* but today's destruction, means we are here to *vuvuzela* and *shisa* these *mshinis*.

Today South Africa will be safer because the Force has removed from circulation some of the illegal firearms, which would have been in the hands of criminals. Today our businesses have been spared from another robbery. Today our homes have been spared from break-ins. Today our schools have been spared from intimidation by criminal elements intent on disrupting normal schooling. And today, another innocent life has been spared.

Today, South Africans will witness the destruction of **80 611** firearms; the breakdown is as follows: Gauteng **67 286**, Free State **1 424**, Limpopo **5 200**, Mpumalanga **2 606** and North West **4 095**. The other outstanding provinces will finalise their destruction operations within the next three months. A total of **517 252** firearms have been destroyed during the period 2005 - 2009 (five years).

We regard these as remarkable achievements and remain confident that through various seizure operations we will be embarking on, the Force will continue to destroy volumes of firearms during the year and succeeding years.

We hold a firm view that responsible gun ownership does not cause crime. It is the merciless scoundrels who rob and kill innocent citizens; in the process disarm the law-abiding citizens of their legal firearms. These however, instantly become illegal once they are in the hands of criminals as they have neither rightful ownership nor mandate to utilize them.

When we launched the Firearms Amnesty this past Monday in Pretoria, we emphasized that through this Amnesty, Government is also advocating for responsible gun ownership. It further seeks to ensure that those who may have inherited legal firearms, but wish to surrender them, can do so. It needs to be clearly understood that the war we are waging is towards the criminals, not law-abiding citizens.

As the police leadership, we note that firearms control in our country is an issue we need to be sensitive about, in order to ensure proper

control mechanisms. It is for this reason that the implementation of the Firearms Control legislation in South Africa forms the foundation for effective control of firearms.

As we emphasized before, the Force will tighten the screws on the control of the sources of some of these illegal firearms. These range from stolen firearms from members of the public, firearms illegally smuggled into the country, firearms possessed by the private security and those lost by members of the Force.

One of the critical focus areas is around the borderline control areas. To this end, from October last year following Government's decision to deploy the Army into the borderlines, a comprehensive strategy to deal with the flow of these illegal firearms is being developed. We will further capacitate members of the Force through re-skilling, to ensure that they are not easily disarmed and robbed by criminals. Equally, we will ensure that our storage facilities at police stations are properly monitored and protected.

Our constant engagement with various independent organizations and stakeholders, as witnessed by the presence of Gun Free South Africa, South African Hunters and Game Conservation Association as well Business Against Crime South Africa here; is further testimony of our open-engagement approach. Your presence and continued support of this process heartens us, and we are keen to continue with these partnerships as we work towards the same vision.

We are here today to convey and emphasize the message that, only law-abiding citizens can be in possession of firearms. Equally, Government is intent on ensuring that we disarm criminals of firearms. There is neither Constitutional right nor privilege that guarantees criminals to possess firearms.

We remain confident that the reduction and eradication of the illegal pool and criminal use of firearms paves the way for an operational crime combating approach. This approach includes detailed analysis of control dysfunctions, the detection of the origin of illegal firearms, linking of cases and criminality, procedural and focussed organised crime interventions as well as effective cross-border operations.

It further needs to be borne in mind that, the Firearms Amnesty does not imply that for the next three months our members will be solely-focusing on firearms collection. Our operations, including seizure, searches, roadblocks, visible policing will still be intensified. If criminals think they have seen more of our vengeance, they have not seen anything yet!

The number of firearms you witness today did not come as a result of firearms flowing from above like manna. It is through hard work, dedication and selfless commitment from police. When police mount anti-crime operations in search of these firearms, they do not loud-hail to criminals to surrender these weapons. In an *imaginary world*, we would have been content if we used such methods, and criminals heeded our calls and refrained from crime.

However, in *realistic world* we face and deal with each day, police sacrifice their lives in search of these illegal firearms. Often times they get shot injured and in the process, some lose their lives. It is therefore distressing to us as police leadership to learn each day about the loss of a member, while in their quest to save citizens' lives. One death is one too many. We say enough is enough!

One of the fundamental and positive aspects about our democracy is that, government has *mercy* on its citizens. Naturally as citizens when urged and granted periods to comply with certain regulations, these could vary from tax returns to firearms amnesties, we often miss the deadlines. We need to ascertain citizens that the Firearm Amnesty will not be an annual occurrence.

We urge citizens to utilize the Amnesty period because post the 11th of April 2010, we will leave no stone unturned. We will hunt like a hungry lion prowling towards an antelope, with fierce aggression. Therefore all those who hear our *voice of mercy* we urge you to comply because we will have no mercy on any criminal. This is our commitment and we are not apologetic.

The confidence we express in the transparent and efficient execution of this Amnesty by our members, remains unshakable. We are certain that from Thohoyandou police station to KwaMashu police station, right across Kimberley and even the remotest stations such as Lusikisiki, the process will be flawless.

We draw our confidence from the monitoring systems we have put in place, which comprises of various stakeholders so that we can maintain transparency in the whole process.

The increased availability and abuse of these firearms and ammunition has contributed significantly to the high levels of violent crime in our society. Many crimes ranging from incidents to settle domestic disputes to armed robbery and murder are committed by people who legally or illegally possess firearms. Each year many licensed firearms are lost or stolen, thereby contributing to the proliferation of guns that are in the hands of criminals.

If we are to rid our society of the kind of violence we experience, it is important to move towards changing the negative psychic in criminals. We are certain that as we destroy and crush these illegal firearms, we will be crushing their missions and plans.

We are intent on depriving them of their *mshinis* while at the same time ensuring that those who may have committed criminal acts, that their deeds are accordingly punished.

It is indeed a responsibility of every South African to assist Government in our endeavours to create a safe environment for all.

“Awulethe Umshini Wakho – Surrender Your Firearms.”

I thank you.