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OPEN LETTER

TO: THE ACTING MINISTER OF POLICE, PARLIAMENT, THE CIVILIAN SECRETARIAT FOR POLICE SERVICE, AND THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON POLICE

Withdraw the Firearm Control Amendment Bill provisions removing self-defence as a lawful motivation for firearm ownership

Minister, Members of Parliament, Members of the Civilian Secretariat, and Members of the Portfolio Committee,

Before government removes self-defence as a lawful motivation for firearm ownership, South Africans are entitled to an answer to a simple question: How will this make them safer?

Civil Society South Africa calls on government to withdraw the provisions of the Firearm Control Amendment Bill that seek to remove self-defence as a lawful motivation for firearm ownership.

We make this call because government has failed to demonstrate that licensed firearm owners are driving South Africa's violent crime crisis, and it has failed to show how restricting lawful firearm ownership for self-defence will reduce violent crime.

The burden of proof does not rest with citizens. It rests with those seeking to restrict their ability to protect themselves and their families.

South Africa is confronting a crisis of violent crime, organised criminality, illegal firearms trafficking, extortion, gang activity, corruption, and chronic weaknesses within the criminal justice system.

According to the Global Organized Crime Index, South Africa ranks among the most criminalised countries in the world. Organised criminal networks, illicit markets, corruption, extortion, illegal firearms trafficking, and criminal enterprises continue to exploit weaknesses within public institutions and law enforcement structures.

These are the realities that place communities at risk.

Yet the proposed amendments focus not on violent criminals, but on law-abiding citizens who comply with the law, undergo competency testing, submit to background checks, and meet extensive licensing requirements.



- Government has not demonstrated that licensed firearm owners are responsible for South Africa's murder rate.
- It has not demonstrated that they are driving armed robbery, vehicle hijacking, extortion, gang violence, illegal mining, or organised crime.
- Most importantly, it has not demonstrated that South Africans will be safer if self-defence is removed as a lawful motivation for firearm ownership.

At the same time, South Africans are being asked to place their trust exclusively in institutions that face serious and well-documented challenges.

Parliamentary disclosures have revealed that approximately 3 400 SAPS firearms were lost or stolen between 2019 and 2024. Only 559 were recovered. Thousands of state-owned firearms therefore remain unaccounted for.

These are not civilian firearms. They are firearms that were under the custody and control of the State.

South Africans are entitled to ask why government seeks to restrict law-abiding citizens before addressing the loss of thousands of firearms from its own custody. The broader criminal justice picture is equally concerning.

Research published by the Institute for Security Studies indicates that SAPS' murder detection rate stands at only 11%. The challenge facing South Africa is not merely the prevalence of violent crime, but the limited ability of the criminal justice system to consistently identify, apprehend, prosecute, and convict violent offenders.

These realities point to the central challenge confronting South Africa. The problem is not lawful firearm ownership, but rather the State's ongoing struggle to combat criminality effectively.

Whether one examines organised crime, extortion, gang activity, illegal mining, illicit firearms trafficking, corruption, or violent crime, the same conclusion emerges repeatedly: South Africa does not suffer from a surplus of lawful firearm owners. It suffers from a shortage of effective consequences for violent criminals.

In response, ordinary South Africans increasingly rely on private security companies, neighbourhood watches, farm watches, community patrols, emergency response services, and lawful self-defence measures as part of a broader strategy to protect themselves and their families.

They do not make these investments because they reject the authority of the State. They make them because they fear becoming victims.



- No police service in the world can guarantee that an officer will arrive before a violent attack unfolds.
- No emergency response system can guarantee intervention before a home invasion, farm attack, armed robbery, hijacking, or other violent crime takes place.

When seconds matter, citizens are often left to rely on their own actions until help arrives.

That reality is uncomfortable, but it is real.

For that reason, self-defence remains a universally recognised principle grounded in the protection of life. The right to life loses meaning if citizens are denied practical means of defending it. The right to security becomes hollow if government insists that citizens remain dependent on assistance that may arrive only after violence has already occurred.

If government believes these provisions are necessary, it should present the evidence.

- It should publish the studies, assessments, and analyses relied upon in formulating the proposal.
- It should explain precisely how removing self-defence as a lawful motivation for firearm ownership will reduce violent crime.
- It should demonstrate why restricting law-abiding citizens should take priority over addressing illegal firearms, organised crime, low conviction rates, and weaknesses within the criminal justice system.

South Africans deserve transparency.

They deserve evidence-based policymaking.

Most of all, they deserve public policy that focuses on violent criminals rather than those who obey the law.

We therefore call on government to withdraw the provisions of the Firearm Control Amendment Bill that remove self-defence as a lawful motivation for firearm ownership.

Until compelling evidence is presented, these proposals remain an answer in search of a problem.

The responsibility of government is not to make citizens more vulnerable. It is to make them safer.

Civil Society South Africa