



## **RESPONSE**

September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### **Crime Statistics 2011 – 2012**

On 20<sup>th</sup> September, Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa released the crime statistics for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. Despite a certain cynicism about their value (and the often-quoted quip of British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, popularised by Mark Twain, about 'lies, damned lies and statistics'), statistics do provide an opportunity to discern trends and offer strategies for ways forward, especially with regard to pressing social pathologies such as crime. The extent of the pathology is summed up in the chilling fact that two children are murdered in South Africa every day, while a further two are victims of attempted murder.

This batch of statistics shows that 5 990 cases were reported to police stations around the country everyday; and that a 2.6% overall decline in crime was recorded. The Minister spoke of this as 'a mixed bag with marginal downward trends.' As was the case last year, there is a basic downward trend in the figures of the four major categories of contact crime. The **murder** rate is at its lowest in five years, having decreased by 2.1% compared to the year before. Despite this decline, 15 609 people were killed during the period under review, which equates to 43 murders a day, about 4.5 times higher than the global average. **Attempted murder** was down by 4.1%.

**Sexual offences** were down by 2.5%. This category is one of the most contested since it is an area where there is usually chronic under-reporting. This was especially true in the area of rape where a decrease of 1.9% was recorded, but where research shows that probably only 1 in 13 women report instances of rape, 1 in 25 where the rape was perpetrated by a partner. The Minister noted that the number of rapes remained unacceptably high and hoped that reporting would increase as public trust in the police grew. Alongside the issue of under-reporting, the category 'sexual offences' is also very broad, ranging from the keeping of brothels to rape, which often blurs the full extent and impact of specific sexual offences. There has long been a call for disaggregation of these statistics so as to get a better idea of details with regard to specific crime patterns and thus open the way for more focused and appropriate responses.

**Aggravated robbery** showed a worryingly lower downward trend than in the previous three years, registering a drop of only 1.4%. Also showing a smaller drop was home robberies (burglaries accompanied by personal threats or violence), which decreased by 1.9%, while burglaries without violence or threat decreased by only 2%. Carjacking showed a decline of 10.8% and cash-in-transit robberies and bank heists also declined. Some other forms of theft, such as theft from vehicles, had increased, as had crimes targeting small businesses. This is worrying for several reasons, not least that the decline in the number of entrepreneurs opening businesses is related to issues of safety and that the increased cost to business of fighting crime equates to fewer job opportunities and therefore continues to stall the fight against poverty. Also on the upward trend was drug-related crime, which had a sharp increase of 15.6%.

As the Minister correctly remarked, statistics in this area are always disappointing. While the continuing decline in most major crime categories must be welcomed, on the whole these figures suggest a worrying slowing down of the overall rate of decline when compared with the previous three years.

The Minister made no response to the repeated call for more regular reports, and not just annual ones; critics argue that since the figures are out of date after six months, strategies to fight crime are therefore also dated and ineffective.

It also has to be acknowledged that severe problems in the leadership of the SAPS, especially the corruption and mismanagement charges brought against former commissioners Jackie Selebi and Bheki Cele, and the suspension of crime intelligence head Richard Mdluli, must be a source of demotivation among the rank and file; and that this must affect their proper functioning as well as the desire and confidence of the public to co-operate with the police in fighting crime. It has long been recognised that partnerships with the public, civil society and academic institutions are critical if more substantial gains are to be made into the fight against crime.

In the final analysis, while acknowledging the small gains made, it must be asked whether these are an adequate achievement for a department with an annual budget of R62.46 billion; and whether this is satisfactory stewardship of such a large sum of public money. Along the same lines, it remains a problem that out of every 1 000 cases reported to the police, only 300 reach court.

In the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching it is an expectation that state organs will be good stewards of the public monies entrusted to them, and that citizens have the right to expect a solid return on their contributions to the public purse.

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