



## ***RESPONSE***

*October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015*

### **Crime Statistics 2014-2015**

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, Police Minister Nkosinathi Nhleko released the crime statistics covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. An estimated 1.8m crimes were reported in that period; police operations detected 356 919 crimes, of which 266 902 were drug-related; and 1.7m people were arrested.

The statistics paint a dismal picture in terms of personal security. Contact crimes, including murder, attempted murder and aggravated robbery are up by 0.9%. Murder is up by 4.6% bringing the number to 17 805 as opposed to 17 023 the year before. This amounts to 49 people a day or one murder every 30 minutes. The world average for murder rates is 7.6 per 100 000 people, while the South African average comes in at 36.5 per 100 000. 86 police officers were killed in the period, and a total of 1 537 police officers were attacked. 49 murders were committed by children during 2014/15. Attempted murder was up by 3.2%, sitting at 17 537. These statistics are all the more disturbing since they reverse, for the third year running, the decrease in this category that has been evident since 1994. The rise in murders in South Africa is also contrary to the international trend, where murder is showing signs of decreasing. Aggravated robbery was up by 8.5 %. Also on the increase were carjackings, truck hijacking and aggravated business robbery. On average, 207 cases of street robbery were reported daily to the police. Cash in transit robberies were also down for the period under review.

One area in which there was a decrease was that of sexual offences, where there was a drop of 5.4%, from 56 000 cases last year to 53 617 this year. It has to be borne in mind, though, that statistics in this area are often complicated as the numbers of victims who report especially intimate sexual crimes is notoriously unreliable, so the actual figure might well be higher than those given. The Minister pointed out that if these statistics were read in terms of 10 and 5 year periods then the one would observe a 'bigger picture' of overall decreases in many categories of crime, thus suggesting that these statistics should not be read in isolation.

The Minister emphasised in his speech that the crime statistics invite a response not only from the police, but also from the public who have a great role to play in solving crime, and in creating environments which are conducive to alternate forms of conflict resolution and to the restoration of personal and social morality. This is indisputably true, but it does not take away from criticisms levelled at the police. It has been pointed out, for example, by several analysts that crimes such as armed robbery and business robbery are typically crimes committed by organised groups, often consisting of repeat offenders, and usually small in number. Good strategies, judicious use of crime intelligence, and specialised agencies should usually be able to reduce such crimes effectively. Yet these very categories are on the increase.

It has also been pointed out that with a budget of about R80bn, state of the art technology, and more than 194 000 personnel, a much better result should be expected in terms of crime reduction. Nor is one able to ignore the demoralisation of many in the police force and the consequence thereof on effective policing. It is also a matter of concern that the head of the police is facing a board of enquiry with regard to her fitness for office; this must have a damaging effect on the morale of the force and indeed on the overall quality of leadership in an area where bold, decisive and creative direction is paramount.

Other issues also contribute to the ongoing criminal environment. The correctional services emphasis is still largely based on punishment and not by any means sufficiently on rehabilitation; this contributes to the high recidivism rates and the absorption of offenders into the mainstream of criminal activity. One of the most important contributors to the criminal environment is obviously the enduring and growing inequality in our society, with its attendant anger, desperation, and sense of exclusion from even a minimally decent life. As this becomes more evident, with the rich/poor gap evidenced by greater ostentation on the part of the beneficiaries of good fortune, we must expect the desperation and anger to increase, thus adding to the volatility in our country. These problems can be remedied to some degree by greater political will, wiser leadership and the promotion of more strategic policies and resource allocation; however, public officials and political leadership in the security establishments must be held to a stricter level of accountability on multiple levels.

It must be borne in mind that in the period under review the police force incurred civil claims to the tune of R9.5bn due to misconduct. How this plays out in terms of good example and public trust is questionable: especially since R94.3m was for assaults. We also need to remember that when public figures and supposed role models are deemed to be beyond the law, such behaviour legitimises anti-social pathologies and allows for the spread of a sense of being above and beyond the law.

Finally, it was particularly worrying, in light of the recent wave of xenophobia, that for the first time crimes committed by foreigners were highlighted. There seems to have been no good reason to single out non-South Africans in an environment already riddled with suspicion against them.

All South Africans, but especially those who are poor and vulnerable, deserve to know that they can look forward to reasonable security and public safety in a world in which they are forced to battle to uphold their dignity. We need to heed again the insight of Aristotle when he reminded us that 'poverty is the parent of revolution and crime.'

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