



Response

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Crime Statistics: April 2015 – March 2016

On 1st September 2016, Police Minister Nathi Nhleko released the crime statistics for the period April 2015 – March 2016. Overall, 2.1 million charges were laid, with 1.7m of these related to serious crimes. The Minister pointed out that in three of the four broad categories (property related crimes, other serious crimes, and crimes heavily dependent on police action for detection) there were decreases. However, in the area of contact crimes there was an increase. This category includes murder, attempted murder, assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, sexual crimes, and robbery with aggravating circumstances.

Murder was up for the fourth successive year, this year by 4.9%. The country seems to be moving back to the high levels of murder witnessed in the 2006 period. 18 673 murders were committed in the 2015/16 period, which means an increase from roughly 33 murders per 100 000 last year to 34 per 100 000 in 2016. It equates to 51 people murdered in South Africa every day during this period, as opposed to 49 in 2014/2015. The global average is 6.2 per 100 000. A high percentage (59%) of murders were committed indoors, very often amongst people known to each other, and often linked to domestic violence and/or the use of alcohol. It was pointed out that these subjective, unpredictable, random, expedient-type crimes were hard to police and thus to prevent. On the other hand, it is true to say that, this notwithstanding, a growing percentage of murders is linked to robberies and other theft crimes, which are usually organised and can thus be reduced by good criminal intelligence. Residential robberies were up 2.7% and non-residential robberies up by 2.8%. One of the most shocking increases was for car hijackings, which increased by 14.3%. Also on the increase were the number of violent protests, up from 2 289 to 3 542. The Minister spoke of crime in this category as being 'quite stubborn.' Spokespersons for all parties emphasised the debilitating effect of this surge in violence as inducing a culture of fear.

Anine Kriegler and Mark Shaw, in their study on violence and crime, point to inequality as a key source of the anger, frustration, violence and antisocial behaviour. They write: "You find the same situation arising in new democracies around the world. Wherever there is inequality, you find this happening. In South Africa, the only way to fix this is to have a huge scale, nationwide programme to create jobs, and create job access by legitimate means." Commentators have added to this the prevalence of 'perverted masculinities' and an inherited culture which sees violence as an accepted, indeed as a natural, means of solving conflict. Commentators also underline that any future strategy to decrease violence must be aimed at children at risk, and specifically at improving those conditions which push children into anti-social and eventually criminal behaviour. This must include strengthening and supporting families, and recruiting more social workers and teachers.

NGOs working in the area of sexual violence, and especially of rape counselling, have again called for rape to be treated as a separate category in future reports. Reporting of sexual offences decreased

by 3.2%. Seven of the nine provinces reflected this decrease. However, the Institute for Security Studies cautioned against too positive a reading of these statistics, since it claims that its own research shows that only one in 13 rapes is recorded and that more generally in this area only 46% of victims report to the police. It also said that there was no indication of how many assaults were instances of domestic violence.

The whole ambit of violent crime centered around armed robberies, car hijackings and the like can be reduced. It is true also of the area of stolen goods. These crimes result from planning, are usually carried out by syndicates or networks, and very often involve repeat offenders. These crimes are organised and a greater will to tackle them would be a positive first step. The more diligent use of crime intelligence, with proper forensic support, could go a long way to bucking the present trend. Greater co-operation between branches of the police and allied organisations would enhance the fight against crime considerably. Johan Burger of the Institute for Security Studies has noted that crime intelligence is in shambles, and that it is important for a crime intelligence unit to be able to identify, infiltrate and neutralise the syndicates behind organised crimes such as robberies, business robberies and hi-jackings. He went on to say that, should the police be able to break these syndicates, there would be a noticeable decrease in murders. He also mentioned that the police had implemented a turnaround strategy for crime intelligence, but that it would take time before the benefits of that strategy would be seen.

It was encouraging that Lt. General Phahlane, the Acting National Police Commissioner, claimed that the internal tensions and ‘political’ fallout around the situation of Commissioner Riah Phiyega, and presumably the deflection of energy and focus that it occasioned, has been resolved. If this is so, we can hope for focused leadership in the fight against crime. It is worth remembering also that Minister in the Presidency Jeff Radebe announced in June that crime statistics will now be released quarterly in order better to track crime trends in the country. This move, which NGOs have long called for, “would allow government to respond to crime trends more rapidly and contribute to the national development plan’s aim to build safer communities.”

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