

Media Advisory



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SAGA Answers Gun Free South Africa on SONA claim

Responding to media enquiries around claims made by GFSA, SAGA's board has issued the following statement:

SAGA has studied the undated Media Release of Gun Free South Africa – 'Gun violence is South Africa's ground zero: Gun Free South Africa's response to SONA 2017'. We are of the view that there is good reason to question the legitimacy of GFSA's most recent statements.

We view most seriously the death by criminal activity of even one person and empathize with the emotional trauma that accompanies the loss of a loved one. GFSA uses emotion to frame unfettered and inaccurate rhetoric, in what should be a rational and unemotional discourse, this is certainly unhelpful and counterproductive.

To illustrate our concern with GFSA's tactics, we refer to the second paragraph of GFSA's statement, that offers only one statistic (that of six police officers allegedly killed in Cape Town in one week). Other than that, the paragraph is a compendium of opinion liberally sprinkled with descriptions of criminal mayhem, and appears to be designed to transport the reader into a state of anxiety about violence and guns.

GFSA proclaims: 'No-one is immune from gun violence' and asserts that 'Firearm violence is a leading cause of death in South Africa.' The distinction between 'a leading cause' and 'the leading cause' begs closer inspection. In fact, over the years 2012 to 2014 gunshot trailed behind death by stabbing and motor accident - by an average over the 3 years of 37%. This fails to place it in the category of 'leading'.

The group appears to be oblivious to the fact that the many forms of violence so graphically described in the paragraph in question, could have been equally effectively perpetrated with a hammer, axe, knife, motorcar or baseball bat. It would surely have been more accurate to say 'No one is immune from any form of violence.' In fact, all of the events described by GFSA are exactly that – criminal activity.

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Saga is a non-party political, independent, non-profit association. We protect the right of responsible citizens to own and use firearms for sport, self-defense, recreation or other legitimate purposes.

Relying on figures from 2009 to make a point regarding the cost of firearm related deaths to the nation's economy, GFSA quotes a value of 'R26 billion'. Notwithstanding the source of this statistic, in our estimation, the cost to the nation would have been no less had these deaths in 2009 resulted from stabbing. Moreover, it is almost irrelevant to use single statistics that are 8 years old. SAGA has reservations about other so-called facts and figures offered by GFSA, which are proving to be inaccurate, or at the very least based on inaccurate data.

GFSA makes a sweeping statement about there being 'too many guns in circulation.' What exactly does it mean by 'in circulation'? If 'in circulation' means in criminal hands, then SAGA agrees wholeheartedly. Even one unlicensed gun in criminal hands is one too many.

In our view, GFSA has in its haste to attack all ownership of guns (it could now not easily step back from its very name), impaired its ability to be taken seriously in this debate. A gun can no more be blamed for a person's death than a hammer, or a knife. And criminals, apart from having absolutely no regard for the rule of law, if denied access to a gun, will simply use another means to achieve their aims.

A more plausible approach for GFSA, instead of unrealistically seeking to make South Africa 'gun free' may have been to call for action in addressing all criminal activity with various weapons. Driving legal firearms out of the community will never stop criminals from harming innocent people but it will expose lawful gun owners to criminal attack.

ENDS/

Further information is available from saga@saga.org.za or on 031-562-9951