SAGA MEDIA STATEMENT

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Police Minister Cele’s statement on 17 April at the destruction of some 30 039 seized and surrendered firearms that “It would be better if one day we don’t have private citizens having guns at all. It’s a tall order going forward but it would be better if one day, only the armed forces namely police and soldiers having [access to] guns”, was nothing new, however, it illustrates how remote he is from reality. With the violent crime rate what it is, it is irrational and unreasonable to deny good law-abiding citizens’ the means to defend themselves and others against violent home and business invasions and attacks in general. Not only is his statement irrational, it also seriously interferes with citizens’ constitutional rights to life, bodily integrity and property. To have rights but without the means to enforce such rights is useless, bearing in mind that, when a violent attack is imminent, most people do not have body guards present to protect them, neither are police officers on the scene and you do not have the luxury to apply for an interdict. Ordinary people remain the first, and often only, responders to crime. And while we have so often stated that one should avoid crime hot-spots, thereby preventing crime, it is totally unreasonable to expect citizens not to enjoy life, travel around and generally carrying on with their lives.

Hunting, sport shooting and collecting of firearms and ammunition are internationally and nationally recognised activities in which free people participate. And while the greater majority of these people neither commit nor contribute to crime, their rights should not be interfered with.

The minister continued: “It’s important to say that we are looking at the next batch [to be destructed] and we are trying to squeeze in the time for that so that we don’t keep these guns in the crime market for very long.”. SAGA fully agrees that for the police to keep these seized and surrendered firearms constitutes a serious risk since these firearms may (will?) sooner or later find their way to criminals. It must be borne in mind, though, that all confiscated firearms need to be inspected by or on behalf of the South African Heritage Resources Agency to ensure that no firearms of heritage value are destroyed.

The minister must concern himself and his police officials with their primary function – crime fighting, including removing illegally possessed firearms from society. When all crime is reduced to acceptable levels, many may stop carrying firearms for self-defence (and the minister would have achieved his goal) while hunters, sportsmen and collectors can continue to participate in
their lawful activities without being concerned about irresponsible political threats. This is a win-win situation, excepting for criminals.