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<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2019-11-27-police-minister-calls-on-south-africans-to-make-use-of-upcoming-firearm-amnesty/>

# Police minister calls on South Africans to make use of upcoming firearm amnesty

The latest firearms amnesty will run from December 1 to the end of May 2020

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Police minister Bheki Cele (centre). Picture: ALON SKUY

Police minister Bheki Cele has called on South Africans in possession of a firearm make use of the upcoming amnesty and help make SA safer.

South Africans with illegal firearms or those whose licences have expired have a six month opportunity — from December 1 to end of May 2020 — to turn them in without facing prosecution.

During a media briefing on Thursday morning, Cele made a call for those in possession of an unlicensed gun to make use of the amnesty, warning that police would have no mercy on those who failed to do so.

Cele stressed that the police are strengthening its capacity to recover unlawful weapons.

“We have started already,” explained Cele. “For almost the last two months, we have found about 2,000 firearms.”

While the focus of the amnesty is on recovering illegal firearms, Cele explained that a large number of illegal weapons were initially lawfully owned. The minister said up to 450,000 firearms that were legally owned are now unlawful after the licences expired.

While it is unclear how many illegal firearms are in SA, lobby group Gun Free SA estimates that there are about 4.5-million legal weapons in the country. Up to 27 are lost or stolen every day.

The latest crime statistics show that firearms are still the most common weapon used in serious crimes. Firearms were involved in the murders of more than 7,156 people during 2018/2019 — or close to 20 every day — as well as in 13,360 cases of attempted murder. Crime experts have lamented the growing prevalence of illegal firearms in the country.

This is the fourth such amnesty since 1994.

Firearms by Tiso Blackstar Group - Infogram

According to a gazetted notice holders of unlicensed firearms or ammunition can drop them at any police station in the country, except for 46 of them. A list of those stations has yet to be published by the government.

Applicants will have to surrender their weapons or ammunition to a designated amnesty officer, who must provide a receipt. Gun owners who have failed to renew their licences will also be able to reapply for the weapon they have surrendered. Such an application — which will not apply to illegal weapons — must be made within 14 days of surrendering the firearm.

Cele said ballistic tests will be conducted on all surrendered firearms to check if they were used in any crime. The minister said while there have been objections to the tests, the police are not in a position to either destroy a weapon or return it to an owner without checking whether it may have been used in a crime.

“If the gun is found to have done things it was not supposed to, the gun will be seized and the owner will be questioned,” said Cele.

The amnesty is “part of government’s plan to tackle the proliferation of firearms in our communities and to deal decisively with the excess of illegal firearms and unwanted firearms”, the ministry said earlier.

“Over the last four or five years you are beginning to see this increasing trend of gun deaths to be more prominent,” said Adèle Kirsten of Gun Free SA.

“When you make weapons less available you will have a direct knock-on effect on reducing your gun deaths,” she said, adding that about a third of the weapons surrendered during the past two amnesty periods were illegal firearms.

Kirsten called on the police to communicate clearly and regularly with the public during the amnesty.

“The SAPS needs to demonstrate to the public that they have in place a really comprehensive process of control from the point of surrender to the point of destruction,” she said, pointing to the low levels of trust between the police and the public.

Cele was reluctant to elaborate on the processes once a firearm has been surrendered, but to ensure it does not find its way into the hands of criminals, the minister said weapons should be destroyed as soon as possible after they were surrendered.

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