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MEDIA 24

Firearm ownership

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THERE has been much to say about the South African Police Services (SAPS) and its April 1 firearm amnesty, which was, then wasn't.

We need to remember some earlier issues concerning firearms and our organs of state. In 2009, the Western Cape High Court declared on August 31, that the failure by the state to establish guidelines for the compensation of those who handed in their firearms is "unlawful and inconsistent with the Constitution".

Strangely enough, Judge Azhar Cachalia sat in the appeal of this compensation case despite having commissioned the Firearms Control Act (FCA).

In 2010, Dianne Kohler Barnard of the DA stated that 4 000 new pistols ordered by the SAPS were "mostly to replace lost and stolen firearms".

In 2011, the media stated that according to a "report by the auditor-general, an estimated 82 000 weapons belonging to the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the navy are unaccounted for".

In 2012, the SAPS threatened legal gun owners with incarceration if they did not comply with the new FCA. Tens of thousands of law-abiding firearm owners handed in their guns with the hope of being compensated for doing so as stipulated in the act. They were disappointed.

Now, expired licence holders are being intimidated. SAPS is treating an administrative issue (expired licences) as a criminal offence.

Yet three firearm-related court cases are on the cards, which should give clarity on policies regarding firearm owners and this issue.