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Plans by the Minister of Police to enact a 6-month amnesty of so-called 'illegal' firearms were thwarted in Parliament on Wednesday when the Chairman of the Police Portfolio Committee pointed out to the Minister that the planned amnesty had to be ratified by Parliament. Parliament goes into recess this week.

Various role players and stakeholders made submissions and asked questions of the Police with perhaps the most telling question being posed to the Deputy Commissioner of Police by the Honourable P Groenewald. Referring to the previous amnesties in which 122 783 firearms were handed in, Groenewald asked how many prosecutions had taken place as a result of the last amnesties. SAPS replied that not a single prosecution resulted from the previous amnesties.

In SAGA's view this current ill-conceived amnesty, as with the recent Internal Directive by CFR Head General Bothma in which SAPS members were instructed to initiate criminal proceedings against lawful firearm owners with expired licences, is another example of poor planning and a lack of leadership around the issue of firearms in SAPS.

Of concern too, is the by now well established lack of capacity of the SAPS to safeguard their own firearms, let alone the logistics of cataloging and storing hundreds of thousands of firearms, many of which may potentially have to be returned to their owners. The most recent example of this is the reported loss of SAPS fire-arms at Peddie in the Eastern Cape, with the most well-known case being the conviction of SAPS Colonel Chris Prinsloo in connection with a large number of surrendered firearms from previous amnesties being sold into the hands of gangsters.

In summary, SAGA does not support the proposed amnesty in its present form. The imminent High Court cases around firearm re-licensing and associated aspects may resolve many of the questions surrounding both the ill-timed SAPS CFR directive and the now delayed amnesty. SAGA Members with questions on expired firearm licences are advised to study our previous advice on this issue, copies of which are available from the SAGA office.

Further information is available from saga@saga.org.za or on 031-562-9951. If it is necessary to contact SAGA after hours in an urgent situation please contact our Media & Communications member on cell phone via WhatsApp to 076-838-5150 or jdeal@saga.org.za.

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