Remarks by Minister of Police, E.N. Mthethwa to the members of the National Press Club on Firearms Amnesty and *"Operation Duty Calls"* Festive Season Crime-Fighting,

Sheraton Hotel, Pretoria

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Deputy Minister of Police, Fikile Mbalula,

National Police Commissioner, Bheki Cele,

Secretary of Police, Ms Jenni Irish-Qhobosheane,

Divisional Commissioner, Arno Lamoer,

Chairperson of the National Press Club, Yusuf Abramjee,

Executive Members of the National Press Club,

Members of the Media,

Compliments of the New Year to all South Africans from the leadership of police and we look forward to a successful, safe and secure 2010.

Once again, we extend our appreciation to the National Press Club for hosting us this morning, as we officially launch the Firearms Amnesty for 2010 as well as share with you on last year's *"Operation Duty Calls"* Festive Season Crime-Fighting operations.

"Operation Duty Calls" **Festive Season Crime-Fighting**
During last year's festive season, we embarked on various policing operations countrywide, interacting with our communities, business and various organised structures with an objective of intensifying our fight against crime. Some of these operations are still in full force as we speak.

To this end, the Department is collating and finalising the provincial reports and these will then be presented to the National Commissioner in due course. However what we have seen through the interim reports thus far, is that the festive season anti-crime operations were overwhelming successes.

We have experienced significant declines in various crimes including cash-in-transits, armed robberies, house robberies/break-ins and business robberies, particularly mall robberies. Aggravated robbery and theft of motor vehicle decreased significantly during this festive period compared to figures for the corresponding previous period. The decreases in carjacking and theft of motor vehicle, but particularly street/public robbery, can in all probability be attributed to higher police visibility.

In most provinces we visited, communities expressed their support and appreciation of police visibilities at shopping malls, taxi ranks, roadblocks and the so-called *crime hot spots.*

To a large extent, police continue to receive qualitative tip-offs from communities, through initiatives such as Crimeline. These valuable tip-offs have helped our Intelligence to follow on some of the leads and ultimately apprehend the perpetrators.

When we commenced with these operations, our message to the criminals at the time was clear: their plans would not prosper and police were determined to ensure that they failed in their endeavours. We further declared that we would not soften our tough approach on criminals. At the same time, we called upon all members of the Force to re-double their efforts in fighting these scoundrels.

Our members clearly heard and heeded this call with utmost dedication. It is also evident the message that police will fight crime aggressively filtered through to these heartless scoundrels. But as expected, there were those hard-core ones who thought we were joking; a few minorities whom we dealt a heavy blow in their criminal missions. Sadly, for not heeding our call to refrain from crime, they are either arrested or dead.

The operations we undertook, particularly to the following provinces; Western Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape provided us with valuable insights on some of the key challenges facing our communities in relation to their safety. They even brought us closer to the issues facing police, on the ground.
The fundamental aspect towards the success of these operations is that they were not natural or unsystematic occurrences influenced by

sheer luck. These were achieved through partnerships, effective strategies, proper planning, focused and intelligence-led approaches.

There were of course some people within the society who heavily criticized us when we said: we will have no mercy against criminals. We will not retreat from this stance and our desired objectives are beginning to bear results, as evidenced through these operations. What you saw during this period was an actual sting of the police on criminals, and we were intent to ensuring that they will felt the bite.

We are proud of the members of the Force who worked tirelessly during this period. Their dedication towards the safekeeping of our society is a shining example of the kind of officers we expect, and are working towards sustaining within the Force. While most of you were enjoying quality time with friends and relatives, these dedicated men and women in blue, carried their duties with vigour, determination and pride.

What is even pleasing is that the operations were executed within the boundaries of the law. Their disciplined yet assertive approach ensured that criminals were apprehended. We mention this point because there were isolated incidents last year where some of our members were alleged to have been trigger-happy in their duties.

Even the often notorious and whirlwind Hillbrow heeded our call, albeit a few isolated incidents such as the little 10 year-old girl who was injured during the New Year festivities. But all in all, we were

satisfied with the good behaviour of the citizens across the country during this period.

We reiterated at the time and are still firm, that this new approach in the fight against crime is not a *"war talk crusade"* but a pragmatic approach, in partnership with various stakeholders.

If these criminals think we will now round-up our operations because they were focused only towards the festive season, we have some bad news for them. We want to emphasize that this will not just be a festive season occurrence, but continuous operations, searches and ongoing engagements in our efforts of fighting crime.

We want to assure South Africans going forward, that we have taken positive lessons from these operations. We will regroup, prioritise and ensure we sustain the momentum in the fight against crime. Again we are not merely blowing praises on ourselves as police; instead cautiously remain aware that the tasks are still daunting.

We do, however derive encouragement in our efforts through the positive and constructive feedback we receive from our stakeholders: communities, business, community police forums, organised civil society and importantly, from various media organisations.

Therefore our message to the Force even today remains unchanged: do not compromise our society's safety by being courteous with criminals when the only language they speak is that of distressing our

society. Be assertive and offensive in your approach. The days of being *"nice and soft"* with criminals are over!

Firearms Amnesty (11 January – 11 April 2010)

On the 25th November 2009, following Parliament's declaration of the Firearms Amnesty, through the Constitutional powers vested in the Minister of Police; we announced to the public that the Firearms Amnesty which will take place from 11 January to 11 April 2010. Therefore today marks the official commencement of this process.

What prompted us to declare this Amnesty, amongst other factors is that South Africa has a significant pool of illegal firearms in circulation which contribute to the high rate of serious and violent crime as well as firearm-related crimes. The source of these illegal firearms range from stolen firearms from members of the public to firearms illegally smuggled into the country. It is therefore common in nature that they are owned illegally and the State has little or no knowledge of them.

Specific mindsets and historical conditions drive elements of the crime problem in our country. These are the proliferation of firearms in the hands of civilians, greed, conspicuous consumption and narrow attitudes towards weaker members of society, especially women and children.

Under the theme: *"Together We Can Do More Against Crime. Awulethe Umshini Wakho – Surrender Your Firearm"* this Amnesty is a call-to-action from government to all citizens.

The reduction of the number of firearms in circulation is an important part of the Police's strategy to combat violent crime. The period should therefore not be seen in isolation from government's efforts to reduce the number of illegal firearms in circulation, but as part of our holistic approach which includes, promoting responsible ownership of firearms.

Through this Amnesty, we are also advocating for voluntary surrendering for destruction of licensed firearms through the process prescribed in the Firearms Control Regulations. We therefore emphasize: it is voluntary. In other words, this is a call-to-action to all individuals to surrender such firearms which they may be in possession of but no longer need.

The period will also allow people who missed the cut off date for licensing to license their weapons in terms of the Firearms Control Act (FCA). It has not been our stance to criminalise law-abiding citizens, but we note that missing cut-off dates is often a human error. That is why as Government we are exercising some leniency to citizens. We need to caution though, that this must not create an impression that this will be a given in future.

Within our families, businesses, schools, churches and associations, we all know of whereabouts of firearms and ammunitions. The Amnesty is targeted at such individuals who may have knowledge of whereabouts of firearms and ammunition. Equally, individuals who

inherited firearms but did not apply for a license as well as individuals who sold or disposed of licensed firearms in a legal manner, but are still in possession of firearms, parts or ammunition.

Our approach is also targeted at manufacturers, gunsmiths and firearms dealers with surplus, obsolete and redundant firearms, ammunition and firearms parts. Storage facilities where firearms and ammunition are stored, individuals who store firearms or firearms parts without legal authorization to do so and private security companies with obsolete, redundant or surplus firearms.

The general public including firearm owners, relevant national and local government departments, taxi associations, sporting associations, traditional leaders, business community, community policing, sector policing structures, national religious forum, community-based organization, gun lobby groups, youth and NGOs.

We are aware and cognizant of the fact that there may be entities that will be embarking on a strategy to derail the amnesty processes; one of which may be the discrediting of the safety of firearms in police custody and the effective control of firearms, ammunition and firearm parts surrendered during this period. And as the police leadership, we remain confident in a transparent and effective management of this process by our members.

In order to address these allegations as well as ensure public confidence in the process, we are putting in place comprehensive

monitoring mechanisms to the amnesty process. An integral part of effective monitoring is the introduction of quality control into the entire process of the surrendering of illegal firearms, ammunition and firearm parts. Where we may discover discrepancies, we will not hesitate to deal with those involved: whether the police collaborating with criminals or vice versa.

We also need to emphasize that the decision to declare the Amnesty should not be misinterpreted as implying that the FCA is ineffective. In fact, Section 139 of the FCA, does provide for the declaration of an amnesty to be possible. The purpose of the FCA is to enable the State to remove illegally possessed firearms from society, prevent the proliferation of illegally possessed firearms and provide for the removal of those firearms from society.

One of the prominent concern and question through our engagement with various stakeholders is, what would happen with persons handing in firearms that are proved ballistically that they were used in crime? The implementation of the Integrated Ballistics Identification System (IBIS) testing of firearms, in particular State firearms and starting with Force members will form part of this period. This is aimed at ensuring greater accountability and responsibility over firearms in the hands of State officials and private operators.

Due to the fact that testing is only conducted after the firearm is handed-in, the person who hands in the particular firearm will be questioned by police to determine the facts. If it's indeed found that

the person is in fact the perpetrator, the person will be arrested and taken to court. To those who fail to heed the call and are later found in possession of illegal firearms, the police will through continuous operations, arrest such persons.

Again we need to emphasize that people surrendering firearms will not be compensated. The Amnesty has been declared in the spirit of positively contributing to the reduction of crime through voluntary surrendering of firearms. The firearms and ammunition surrendered during this Amnesty will be destroyed by the State. As the FCA stipulates, these firearms must be destroyed within six months from the date it is forfeited to the State.

Do we, as police leadership, believe this Firearms Amnesty will be a success? Absolutely. However the success of any operation we undertake cannot be achieved by police alone. Community partnerships, business support, inter-governmental participation, whistle-blowing as well as the commitment from members of the Force; will be the main ingredient to influence our success.

As Government we remain confident that our communities will persist in building partnerships further to change our society for better. We shall spare neither strength nor courage until crime has been significantly reduced in our country. We reiterate the call: *"Awulethe Umshini Wakho – Surrender Your Firearms."*

I thank you.