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4 November 2019

Mr Joe Maswanganyi

Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Finance

And

Mr Yunus Carrim

Chairperson of the Select Committee on Finance

Parliament of South Africa

By email: awicomb@parliament.gov.za; nmangweni@parliament.gov.za

Dear Chairpersons,

The use of smart technology in policing to more efficiently allocate limited budget

I write to you in response to your call for submissions on Finance Minister Tito Mboweni's medium-term budget policy statement (MTBPS).

During his speech, Minister Mboweni told the story of an economy that is at a critical crossroad. He detailed serious growth and spending challenges and made it clear that the National Treasury will not tolerate wasteful spending any longer.

It is noteworthy that – despite public anger at violent crime – no additional funds were allocated to policing, even though 58 South Africans are now murdered every single day.

Last month the latest round of annual crime statistics revealed that murder, attempted murder, common assault, and assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, have all increased. 6.7 million South Africans are now unemployed, a number that Statistics South Africa confirmed this week is continuing to grow – especially amongst young people. With prices rising and jobs scarce, many turn to crime as an income. Unfortunately, crime continues to pay, even when the economy doesn't.

Crime is taking a knock on the macro-economy, too. South Africa has developed a reputation for its unacceptable levels of violent crime – a reputation that seriously dampens investor sentiment at a time when investment to provide jobs is desperately needed.

In the face of this criminal onslaught, the need for police resources is greater than ever. In an economic slowdown so dire, the national budget will simply not stretch to flooding the streets with police officers.

As the Chairperson of Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Police, Tina Joematt-Petersson, suggested after the release of the latest crime statistics, the South African government needs to shift the way it views policing. She is absolutely right that investing in smart technology to fight crime is a cost-effective and efficient way to fight crime. Because, even when the government can't spend *more*, it can spend *better*.

Smart technologies like intelligent CCTV and gunshot detection technology can act as the eyes and ears for the police, alerting them to the location of crimes without over-relying on expensive manual patrol resources. They can then be easily dispatched to the location, suitably prepared for the severity of the crime and the number of suspects – saving time, resources, and increasing the safety of officers.

But the benefits for resource allocations do not stop with policing – other departments can benefit from crime-fighting technology too. I have seen first-hand what a difference data collected by smart solutions in policing can have on other departments managing tight budgets.

One of the nine health goals outlined in the National Development Plan is to reduce injury, accidents and violence by 50% from 2010 levels. Here, too, investment in crime-fighting technology has an application, in following the distinct patterns that crime follows in a specific area. Analysing data from smart systems will help health departments determine where, and when, their resources are most needed. Hospitals can be better prepared for the type of injuries they can expect, when more doctors need to be on shift, and where first responders are likely to be called to, as a result of sophisticated artificial intelligence systems. A study published in October of this year in Science Direct showed a 52% decrease in shootings in Camden, NJ in the year after installing ShotSpotter.

Gunshots that do not result in injury are nonetheless traumatising, particularly to children – who are themselves at risk of being drawn into patterns of gangsterism and violence. When high gunfire patterns are identified, additional social development resources can be directed to those areas.

Stopping the cycle of violence in its tracks begins here. These are the places where social workers and community centres can make the difference in preventing criminal behaviour and supporting those traumatised by crime. Addressing crime from the ground up with a limited budget will be difficult, but it is not impossible – as long as that budget is used in the right way. The government has the opportunity to leverage technologies to fight crime smartly and efficiently.

I would be very happy to provide further information on the positive budgetary impact of smart technology, as well as engage with you during my next visit to South Africa. Minister Mboweni was correct when he said that “we are all in this together”, and I welcome an opportunity to assist the government in using its limited budget most effectively – but most importantly, saving lives.

I look forward to engaging with you further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Clark', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ralph A. Clark

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