



23 August 2021

**FIREARM-RELATED CONCERNS:  
CENTRAL FIREARMS REGISTER (CFR) VERITAS BUILDING, APPLICATIONS, BACKLOGS AND  
MODERNISATION, FIREARM AMNESTIES AND LOST/STOLEN SAPS-OWNED FIREARMS**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

The control of firearms remains a contentious issue in South Africa. With the inception of the Firearms Control Act, 2000 (Act 60 of 2000) (“the Act”) in 2003, it promised an effective way of firearm control, administered by the South African Police Service (SAPS). The Central Firearm Register (CFR) was established to process and monitor firearm ownership through applications and renewals. However, the CFR has been plagued by challenges, which lead to a near collapse of the information technology system behind the CFR. A Turnaround Strategy was adopted to address service delivery challenges and allegations of fraud and corruption within the system.

The ineffectiveness of firearm control can hamper the success of an amnesty process and, as such, the operational status of the CFR should be established. Various aspects influence the success of an amnesty, including the conditions of the amnesty and public trust in the police to effectively deal with the surrendered firearms. Furthermore, the National Commissioner has instituted a moratorium placed on the intake of firearms, based on an interim High Court order that emanated from challenges around the renewal of firearm licenses.

This paper provides an overview of key issues related to the Veritas building that houses the CFR, the modernisation of the CFR, the firearm amnesties and lost/stolen SAPS-owned firearms. The paper is in preparation of the Portfolio Committee on Police’s meeting on 24 August 2021.

**2. CENTRAL FIREARM REGISTRY AND VERITAS BUILDING**

**2.1. Veritas building**

During the oversight visit to the Veritas building (in which the CFR is housed), the Portfolio Committee on Police was shocked by the state of disrepair of the building and the lack of filing space available



(leading to firearm applications stacked in corridors and boardrooms). During the visit, the SAPS explained that the Veritas building had been disqualified for human occupation about two years prior. Various Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) Unit reports noted that the building is structurally unsafe. Despite these deficiencies, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure continued to renew the lease, thus forcing the SAPS to remain in the building to avoid expenditure irregularities. The SAPS noted that they were meant to relocate to the Telkom Towers building, but that this has not realised. The Committee expressed extreme dissatisfaction with this situation and recommended the following:

- CFR personnel working in the Veritas building must be relocated to another building as a matter of urgency.
- The SAPS must conduct an investigation into possible corruption associated with the continued renewal of the Veritas lease.
- The establishment of a Ministerial intervention to address the challenges between the SAPS and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure in facility management.

**To date, no responses were received on these recommendations.**

According to a written response from the SAPS, dated 11 August 2021, the lease of the Veritas building was R12 704 788.70 (R12.7 million) in 2019 and increased to R17 748 248.57 (R17.7 million) in 2020/21.

## 2.2. Central Firearms Register backlog

The CFR has been struggling to keep up with firearm applications since the inception of the FCA. In terms of all firearm-related applications administered, the SAPS had received 433 918 applications, of which 91 784 have been finalised, which is 21.15% of the total. To date, the SAPS has 342 134 firearm application in process of which the majority is competency certificates. Of the total, 176 317 applications have been in the process for less than two years (223 125 less than 120 days and 82 637 between 121 and 240 days) and 4 028 applications more than two years (241 + days).

According to the SAPS, an allocation of R30 million, additional to the baseline allocation, was made to finalise firearm licence activities. It should be noted that the SAPS recently indicated (written response dated 11 August 2021) that the budget allocation for the CFR is R30 million, which includes firearm destruction and the printing of firearm licences. Does this mean that the operational cost of the CFR is R60 million?

According to the SAPS, as at 15 May 2021, there were 319 307 outstanding firearm-related renewal application, of which 46 111 are first time renewals and 273 196 are multiple renewals. In terms of the number of firearms in circulation, the SAPS reported the following:

**Table 1: Firearms in circulation, with type and ownership**

Type	Total owners	Total firearms
Individuals	1 614 291	2 718 300
Non-official institutions	10 072	164 249
Official institutions	438	116 719
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 624 802</b>	<b>2 999 268</b>

*Source: SAPS (2021)*



As on 15 May 2021, there were almost 3 million (2 999 268) legally registered/owned firearms in circulation in South Africa, of which the majority is privately owned (2 718 300), representing 90.6% of all firearms. The figures also point out that the majority of firearm owners own more than one firearm.

### 2.3. CFR Modernisation

The modernisation of the CFR includes two separate actions. First, the digital migration of the filing system and, second, the development and implementation of an e-filing system.

The CFR Action Plan has as its goal the digital migration of the filing system that involves a digitalised filing system by establishing an **Enterprise Content Management (ECM)** contract and developing and implementing an e-filing system for the CFR. According to a previous presentation by the SAPS (15 May 2021), this system will cost approximately R80 million and coupled therewith is the development of an e-filing system also to the cost of R80 million. Thus, a combined total of R160 million.

However, the modernisation to enable **new and enhanced systems and controls** includes the following key actions:

- Procure (New Firearms Control System) **e-Solution** system that allows for electronic submission and processing of applications
- Conduct a piloting of the e-Solution System
- Deployment of the e-Solution system at all levels.

The e-Solution, or **Firearms Control System (FCS)**, must support all the functions to process firearm-related applications at the CFR and will replace the Enhanced Firearms Registry System (EFRS). Over the medium-term, the cost estimate is **R569 266 883.74** and will be finalised in November 2024.

**Note!** The cost estimate of R62 million for both the development of the e-filing system and the acquisition of the digital system presented by the SAPS on 24 August 2021 (slide 4), is significantly less than the R569 million and R160 million presented to the Portfolio Committee on Police during the oversight visit to the CFR on 15 May 2021. **The SAPS must provide the Committee with a true reflection of the estimated costs associated with the development and implementation of the digitalisation of the CFR.**

### 3. FIREARM AMNESTIES

Between December 2019 and January 2021, South Africa had two six-month period firearm amnesties, the first running from 01 December 2019 to 31 May 2020. Towards the end of this period, the Minister of Police approached Parliament to approve an extension (new amnesty). The time-frame for approval led to a two-month period (June and July 2020) during which there was no amnesty in place. The second amnesty only commenced on 01 August 2020 and ended on 31 January 2021. Thereafter, there was a proposal for another amnesty which did not realise.

**Table 1: Timeline of 2019/20 and 2020/21 amnesties**

2019/20	2020	2020/21	2021/22
01 Dec 2019 to 31 May 2020	No amnesty in June and July 2020	01 Aug 2020 to 31 Jan 2021	Proposals were made to declare another amnesty but did not realise



According to the SAPS, **165 715 firearms** were surrendered during the 2019/20 and 2020/21 amnesties of which 20 439 firearms were destroyed to date (12.3%). From the total number of surrendered firearms, SAPS received 105 121 licence applications for the surrendered firearms. Thus, from the firearms surrender, 63.4% of owners re-applied for licences. As such, only approximately 60 594 firearms were surrendered from owners whom do not want their firearms back. The SAPS originally did not want to accept applications on surrendered firearms, but was compelled to do so because of an order in the North Gauteng High Court on 11 November 2020. The court compelled the SAPS to comply with section 139 of the FCA and accept applications from anyone wanting to surrender a firearm.

#### Comments and questions

The SAPS should explain why no firearms received in the 2020/21 amnesties in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, Northern Cape and Western Cape provinces were destroyed.

The SAPS should further explain slide 7 regarding *firing test and specimens received at FSL*, as the figures are not clear.

#### 4. STOLEN/LOST AND RECOVERED FIREARMS

During the 2020/21, 566 SAPS-owned firearms were reported lost or stolen, which is less compared to the previous financial year in which 605 SAPS-owned firearms were reported lost/stolen. The table below shows that over a five-year period (2016/17 to 2020/21), 3 405 SAPS-owned firearms were reported lost/stolen.

##### SAPS-owned firearms reported lost/stolen over the past five financial years

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total
760	800	607	672	566	<b>3 405</b>

During the 2020/21 financial year, 424 SAPS-owned firearms reported lost or stolen were recovered, which is less than the target of 482. The table below shows that over a five-year period (2016/17 to 2020/21), 1 674 identifiable SAPS-owned firearms reported lost/stolen were recovered.

##### SAPS-owned firearms reported lost/stolen recover over the past five financial years

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total
71	358	362	459	424	<b>1 674</b>

The two tables above show that over the past five financial years, less than half of the reported lost/stolen SAPS-owned firearms have been recovered.

**In terms of all other firearms (not SAPS-owned), the following:**

##### Number of lost/stolen firearms recovered over the past five financial years

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
17 260	18 592	7 141	4 204	2 160



During 2020/21, the SAPS recovered 2 160 stolen/lost firearms, which is 2 065 less than the set increased target of 4 225. The table above shows that the number of lost/stolen firearms has decreased significantly over the past five financial years, from 17 260 recoveries to 2 160 in 2020/21.

**Note:** The SAPS should indicate the number of firearms reported lost/stolen during 2020/21. The performance indicator should not only reflect a number, but a number as percentage of the total number of firearms lost/stolen.

## 5. MAY 2021 OVERSIGHT VISIT

The Portfolio Committee on Police conducted an oversight visit to the Gauteng Province on 15 May 2021 to assess the status of the Central Firearm Registry (CFR) and the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL): Biology Division, both located in Pretoria.

### **The Committee recommended the following regarding the CFR and firearms control:**

- 1) The CFR personnel working in the Veritas building must be relocated to another building as a matter of urgency.
- 2) The SAPS must conduct an investigation into possible corruption associated with the continued renewal of the Veritas lease despite the building being declared unfit for occupation. The Committee further recommends that the Departments should institute disciplinary procedures (consequence management) for individuals who signed off on the lease.
- 3) The SAPS should address the efficiency of their facility management strategy and should appear before the Committee to explain the challenges faced with its cooperation with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure.
- 4) A Ministerial intervention to address the challenges between the SAPS and the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure in facility management.
- 5) The SAPS should fast track the modernisation of the CFR into a digital system, allowing online applications and renewals of firearm-related licences.
- 6) The SAPS should present the envisaged features of the digital CFR platform as soon as the tender is awarded.
- 7) There must be no further task teams to assess the challenges at the CFR, but rather that the challenges already identified and having persisted for more than a decade should be addressed.
- 8) The SAPS provide it with monthly progress reports to the backlog in firearm-related applications.

**As part of the oversight report, the Committee requested the follow information:**



- The SAPS should provide the name and contact details of the owner of the Veritas building as well as the name of the responsible employee at the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure.
- The SAPS should provide written responses to all questions asked during the engagements.
- The SAPS should provide detailed information on all firearms that are currently in circulation and registered on its database.

**Note:** The SAPS has not provided the requested information on the owner of the Veritas Building. The written responses were received on 17 August 2021 (The Minister signed the response on 11 August 2021). During a Portfolio Committee on Police meeting on 18 August 2021, the Chairperson expressed dissatisfaction on the significant delay in receiving the requested information, which took more than three months to reach the Committee and noted that the delay negatively impacts on the Committee's ability to do conduct oversight effectively.

## 6. REFERENCES

Parliament RSA (2021). *Report of the Portfolio Committee on Police on its oversight visit to the Central Firearm Registry (CFR) and Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) Biology Section, Pretoria (Gauteng Province) on 15 May 2021, dated 29 May 2021*. Published in the Announcements, Tablings and Committee Reports (ATC) (No 102 - 2021) dated 05 August 2021.

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SAPS (2021). *Responses to outstanding questions: Portfolio Committee on Police: Oversight Visit: 15 May 2021, dated 11 August 2021*.

SAPS (2021). *Firearm Amnesties and Central Firearms Register Action Plan* dated 24 August 2021.