

Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations
The power of ideas

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Winning the war on crime – a new report from the IRR

The IRR has released a report titled “Winning the War on Crime in South Africa: A new Approach Community Policing”. The report sought to explore the crime-prevention options open to a society in which the police had proved unable to offer adequate safety and security.

IRR analysts have shown that despite declining by approximately 50% since 1994 South Africa’s murder rate remains significantly higher than that of a series of most other societies. The rate remains almost seven times higher than that in the United States of America and ten times higher than that in India. The murder rate has also broken its long term pattern of decline and is again increasing. Numbers of residential robberies and business robberies have spiked since 2003. The number of residential robberies have increased with 130% between 2003 and 2016 whereas business robberies have increased with 258% during the same period. Research shows that amidst such high crime levels confidence in the South African Police Service (SAPS) is very low. Just less than half of South Africans report seeing the police as corrupt while 59% have described the police as ‘lazy’. Approximately 80% of South Africans believe the police are unable to respond crimes on time.

Amidst high crime rates, and low levels of popular confidence in the police, the IRR explored three alternative crime prevention strategies open to citizens:

- The first was private security services. These are very effective in some specialised areas but may create an artificial sense of security in others while being more expensive than the great majority of South Africans can easily afford.
- The second was vigilantism. The IRR report suggests that vigilante violence may be far more prevalent than previous research suggests. For obvious reasons such lawless responses to lawlessness could not be endorsed.
- The third was a new approach to community policing. This would see communities established organised crime prevention groups which would then work towards very close co-operation with private security providers and the police. The IRR was of the view that such initiatives where probably the best response open to communities wishing to take back their streets from criminals.

The IRR made a special point of welcoming the appointment of the new acting commissioner of the SAPS Lieutenant-General Khomotso Phahlane. IRR CEO, Dr Frans Cronje, said, “the early evidence is that General Phahlane has what it takes to start turning the SAPS around. But his task is an immense one and he will need a great degree of help and support in doing so”.

The IRR’s proposals has been presented to the police. They will also be made available to political and government leaders. The report is available from www.irr.org.za .

In the interests of community safety the civil rights groups Afriforum generously made available a grant to the IRR which was used to research the report.

Ends.
