

MEDIA RELEASE	PSA: Law skewed in favour of criminals with police officers becoming victims
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South Africa is under siege as the state of lawlessness has reached the point of instability. Anarchy is reigning as criminals wag their guns and shooting orgies kill innocent people. Women are gangraped and terrorised. Nurses are kidnapped in hospitals, raped, and left to die. Foreigners cross South Africa's borders as they please, with some committing atrocious criminality. Illegal mining is rampant and there is a blatant war against law enforcement officers.

Shockingly, these acts of criminality often no longer shock South Africans who have become numb and incapable of empathy. People are robbed in public whilst onlookers watch and even record the incidents without offering help to the victims. The best of us lack conviction, whilst criminals terrorise law abiding citizens.

The rule of law is the foundation of a country's stability. No country can be at peace with itself without law and order. South Africans are increasingly resorting to violence to resolve disputes. An eye for an eye can, however, only create a society of the blind where law enforcement officers are under siege and the nation is living in fear. The burning question is: If police officers are targeted, who will be our guardians? Who will guard the guardians?

Between April and June 2023, a shocking 31 police officers were killed in the line of duty, almost double the number during the same period in 2022. In a more recent report covering October to December 2023, it was indicated that 22 police officers were killed, with ten of those deaths occurring whilst the officers were on duty and 12 whilst they were not on duty. These cases underscore the courage and commitment of South African police officers to keep communities safe. Their deaths remind us that no officer should die for carrying out a duty. These statistics further highlight the violence directed at public servants tasked with protecting others. The police tracked down and apprehended 12 police killers during that period, with two police killers being sentenced to four life terms in prison. These sentences will, however, not relief the agony of these officers' families of living without a breadwinner and parent.

Gun violence is rife in South Africa. On average, 18 people are shot and killed every day. Illegal guns have become easily accessible. Police are soft targets for their guns, the tools of trade issued to them to perform their duties.

These statistics highlight the dangers faced by police officers in South Africa and the need for continued efforts to ensure their safety and well-being. Police officers play a vital role in maintaining law and order in communities. Their dedication and bravery must be appreciated as they selflessly respond to emergency situations and work tirelessly to prevent crime. Their work is physically demanding and emotionally challenging, as they often

encounter traumatic and distressing situations. Despite these challenges, police officers continue to serve with courage, compassion, and integrity.

Armchair critiques and human rights activists are quick to criticise police officers when using lethal force in responding to criminals. The reality is, however, that police officers are becoming victims of criminality. The lack of compassion and recognition for police officers who make the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty is a disturbing trend. There may be widespread outrage and sympathy for victims of police brutality, but the same level of empathy and support is rarely extended to law enforcement officers who are killed or injured whilst serving communities. There is no outcry when police officers are brutally killed in the line of duty. Some non-governmental organizations and analysts are vocal when police officers respond to criminals with force but silent when police officers are killed. This disparity in compassion is unjust and contributes to a broader narrative that devalues the lives and sacrifices of those who serve in law enforcement. It is essential to acknowledge and honour the bravery and dedication of police officers who work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

The reality is that violent crime is rife. Criminals are deadly and have no mercy when they attack police officers and shoot to kill. If police officers do not retaliate with force, the state will lose the war on crime. The use of lethal force by police is highly regulated and police officers undergo serious investigations by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate when they kill criminals. Judging by the level of scrutiny that police officers are subjected to, it would appear that the law is skewed in favour of criminals. Police officers face the risk of losing their jobs if found to have unjustifiably used lethal force.

Facing a dangerous criminal or in crossfire, the risk of death is too high for a police officer to take time gauging if lethal force is appropriate or not. Police officers must be allowed to protect themselves and others from harm by use of lethal force against criminals. They must, by all means necessary, defend themselves when they are at risk of serious harm or death. The PSA shares the view that the use of lethal force must be proportionate to the threat posed. Police must respond to fire with fire. Public servants cannot continue to die helplessly at the hands of ruthless criminals.

Communities must support and collaborate with the police to keep neighbourhoods safe. Criminals must know that they have no ally or refuge in communities. Support for police officers to protect themselves by all means necessary must not be misconstrued as a promotion of police brutality. It is essential to address the systemic issues that contribute to police brutality and to ensure that police officers are held accountable for their actions.

Police officers do not have the privilege or the luxury to work from home. Police stations operate around the clock. Natural disasters or war are not calamitous enough to give police officers reason to stay at home, instead they are expected to be at the frontline. Criminals do not take a holiday, and the police must be in shadow of death to save lives and secure property.

The aspiration of all police officers is the protection of their family. Whilst combating crime, chasing dangerous criminals, and ensuring the protection of property and preservation of life, police officers worry about the safety of their families. So risky is their jobs that the vengeance of criminals is often directed towards them and their families. Police officers are further burdened with worries that should they die in the line of duty, will their families be safe and will the welfare of their children and spouses be guaranteed. Police officers are amongst the lowest paid of public servants despite their job being dangerous. Measures to compensate for the risks that police officers take in the line of duty must not be limited to safety training. There should be tangible benefits that accrue to them and their beneficiaries.

Strategies must also be put in place at an operational level to strengthen the safety of police officers. These must include the use of intelligence-led policing strategies to gather intelligence and analysis to ensure that police officers are deployed with sufficient manpower and adequate equipment to respond appropriately to a criminal incident. Criminals must know that police officers are always fully prepared and equipped to do their job. High-risk operation protocols must be utilised, and police officers must be trained regularly to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Specialised units, such as the Tactical Response Team, must be deployed for high-risk operations to minimise the risk of officer fatalities.

South Africa must restore law and order before lawlessness destroys the pillars of our democracy, annihilates the moral fibre of society, and collapses the sinews that hold the nation together. Society depends on police officers for safety. They are the guardians of peace, law, and order. We place the hope for a better future in the hands of law enforcement officers. It is a challenging task, but we keep trust in these public servants through whose courage and service the war on crime can be won.

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