

Perspectives on KwaZulu-Natal

Volume Two - Number Four - June 2002

South Africans should mobilise against crime

South Africans need to mobilise against crime because although we are winning some battles, the war is not over yet. This is according to former national police commissioner George Fivaz who recently addressed the annual conference of the KwaZulu-Natal branch of the Security Association of South Africa.

Fivaz said that South Africa has had a crime problem for many decades, but information about crime has only recently become available. "Unfortunately it would be totally unrealistic to assume that the situation is going to improve drastically overnight because the root causes of crime are intact," said Fivaz. These causes included unemployment, homelessness, poverty, lower levels of education and a culture of violence.

Nevertheless, Fivaz said that a number of serious crimes have been stabilised and "the rampant runaway crime wave of the early 1990s has been stopped". He regarded the current challenge as bringing down the crimes that have stabilised at a high level.

Fivaz warned that fraud, corruption and white-collar crime, in particular, were very serious issues in South Africa especially as the government was attempting to revitalise the economy.

In addition, syndicates have become more versatile and have set up networks throughout South Africa and the continent. To illustrate the capabilities of syndicates Fivaz said that some vehicles that were stolen in South Africa were recovered within a week or two in Australia.

Deputy police commissioner in KwaZulu-Natal Hamilton Ngidi told the conference that the objective of stabilising crime had been achieved by the police and that the service was aiming to achieve the normalisation of policing this year.

He said that in order to stabilise crime the police identified policing areas where more than 50% of the crime reported in South Africa occurred. In KwaZulu-Natal 41 police stations were identified and Operation Crackdown was implemented in those areas with a "resounding success", according to Ngidi. As a result of the drop in crime, the stations were reduced to 21.

However, Ngidi said that the successes of the police have resulted in thousands of arrests, which in turn had resulted in jails "bursting at the seams". Courts have also been unable to address backlogs. Ngidi said that an integrated criminal justice system cluster committee was looking at ways to address these issues. Solutions included the operation of courts over the weekends.

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Ngidi emphasised the need for the police to adopt an intelligence driven approach to policing. He said that a current focus on organised crime had resulted in the investigation of 35 organised crime threats in KwaZulu-Natal.

Ngidi said factors that contributed to the crime rate included the proliferation of firearms and the use of alcohol and drugs. A significant number of crimes were committed over weekends, during holiday periods and during drunken brawls.

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