



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
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Mr M C Ramaphosa
President of The Republic of South Africa
P O Box 15
Cape Town
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Dear President Ramaphosa,

The brutal shooting of three-year-old Emilio Hutchinson in what was supposed to be the safety of his home in Helenvale, Nelson Mandela Bay this week is yet another indictment on the leadership of the South African Police Service (SAPS) at the hands of your government. More shocking than this tragic and unnecessary death, is the lack of action on your part to address the spiralling crime rate in South Africa, despite numerous pleas from communities across the country, desperate for government to rescue them from the grips of violent and deadly crime.

In Nelson Mandela Bay alone, Democratic Alliance public representatives have now twice written to Minister Bheki Cele requesting the deployment of national specialised units to tackle the rise of gangsterism and related crime, which is terrorising the metro's northern areas. To date, no tangible interventions have been implemented, and little Emilio's death at the hand of wanton criminality is a heartbreaking reminder to communities that this government has all but abandoned their plight.

Since the beginning of this year, a reported 45 people have been killed in the Northern Areas. In 2023 alone, there were 78 murders per 100 000 people, and the murder rate increased by 37%. Between 2021 and 2023, more than 88% of all gang violence in Nelson Mandela Bay occurred in the Northern Areas. Over this period, 361 gang-related shooting incidents were reported, 319 of which were reported in the Northern Areas. This resulted in 180 individuals being killed, of which 22 were children.

Nationally, between April and December 2023, 871 children were murdered, many of whom caught in the crossfires of gang-related violence and crime that is on the increase in communities across the country. The inability of the SAPS to tackle successive crime waves in South Africa and ensure the safety of all citizens as per the Bill of Rights, should be of utmost concern to you and your government. Despite each and every pledge and promise made throughout the duration of your term as President, neither you nor Minister Cele have made any progress in addressing South Africa's status as one of the world's crime capitals.

Mr President, two things have become abundantly clear to each and every South African. Firstly, that your police minister is incompetent and indifferent to the scourge of South Africa's increasing crime rate. Secondly, that your indecision and paralysis render you complicit in the nightmare that millions of South Africans face every day when they are not even safe in their own homes. How many more children must die at the hands of your government, at your indifference to the slaughter of South Africans at the hands of criminals, before you find the courage to act?

Mr President, your model of policing is not working. It is time to stop trying to enforce the law by clinging to centralised power, and realise that the only way that we are going to win the war on crime, is by embracing policies and approaches informed by local crime fighting requirements, and by taking local circumstances into consideration when devising crime fighting strategies. Your government's outdated model of centralised policing, and your vehement refusal to abandon it, is the very reason why our crime statistics tick up further each and every year, and why South Africans have lost faith in your leadership as they are forced to live in terror. International best practice has shown time and again that policing functions best when it is devolved to the lowest possible level of government. You can no longer turn a blind eye to the overwhelming evidence.

Aside from the urgent need for policing devolution, the spike in gender-based violence, child kidnapping and child murder in South Africa now requires urgent attention, and a far more specialised approach. I am thus urging you to take make the following pronouncements as a matter of urgency to prevent any further tragedies, and to ensure that no family should ever endure the heartbreak of the loss of a child at the hands of gangsters and criminals:

1. In consultation with your Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, establish specialised courts to deal with crimes committed against women and children, including abuse, kidnapping, trafficking, and murder.
2. Urgently establish specialised units within the SAPS to focus on crimes affecting women, children and minors, bolstering investigative and forensic capacity to target the surge in kidnappings, trafficking, and murder.
3. Urgently establish dedicated capacity and resources within the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to prioritise and fast track the prosecution of those facing charges of gender-based violence, child abuse, trafficking, and murder.

Mr President, the longer you and your government turn a blind eye to this growing threat to our families and children, their wellbeing, and their lives, the more grotesque the betrayal of your oath to uphold the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. Every South African has the right to live in a safe environment, and you disregard this oath when you do not act against your police minister, and when you do not consider the glaring evidence which shows that your policing strategy is simply not working. It is incumbent on you to put politics aside, and for once embrace policies that may go against your party's interests, but act in favour of the interests of South Africa's women and children.

You owe it to each and every citizen to do this, to ensure that we will never again suffer the heartbreak endured by Emilio Hutchinson's tragic and untimely death.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Steenhuisen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'S'.

John Steenhuisen MP
Leader of the Official Opposition
Parliament of RSA