Press Release
For immediate release

28 June 2017

IRR

South African Institute of Race Relations

The power of ideas

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Murders of police officers have decreased over the past 20 years

The rate at which police officers are being murdered has fallen significantly over the past twenty years, according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations (IRR).

Viewed by decade (1995-2004 and 2005-2014), more than double the number of police officers were murdered in the first decade after apartheid than between 2005 and 2014.

The *Survey* found that:

- Between 1995 and 2004, 1 970 police officers were killed. The figure decreased to 945 between 2005 and 2014, or by 52%.

- The rate of police murders fell from 252 per 100 000 in 1994 to 51 in 2014, or by 80%.

IRR crime analyst Kerwin Lebone said: "The police's primary role in the pre-1994 era was regarded as that of defending the government of the day and police were thus a legitimate target for political attacks."

He added, however, that it was a concern that such a significant proportion (46%) were killed while attending to a complaint, possibility indicating a sloppy attitude among officers when approaching potential crime scenes.

Despite the huge drop in police murders, South Africa remains a relatively dangerous country in which to conduct police work.

Lebone cited the comparative incidence of police murders in countries that kept records – such as the United Kingdom (less than four murders per year), Germany (six per year), and France (five per year) – which were far below South Africa's rate. Even the United States reported only 50 police murders per year – a modest figure in contrast, particularly given that the population of the United States far exceeded South Africa's.

The IRR surmises that police murders fell as overall levels of murder fell, private security took over the first responder role in many areas, and communities increasingly came to catch their own criminals and hand these over to the police.

The first *Survey* was published in 1946. Click here for more information.

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