



# YOUNG GUNS

## GUNS IN AMERICA,

as part of the constitution's blatant 'right to bear arms', has historically played an important role in the freedom the country has for centuries fought for. However, all forms of gun violence have spiralled out of control in this great country and President Obama has added to his list of undertakings stricter gun laws to protect the citizens: from stringent background checks, to outlawing automatic weapons, the Obama administration is aiming high against the National Rifle Association (NRA) to curb the spread of arms. So what's happening across the pond in SA where gun violence reigns with large numbers of people affected by gun rage.

## GUN CONTROL IN SA

With firearms so copiously in the media, yet again, since the mass shooting in Connecticut late last year, the 'Dark Knight' cinema tragedy in Colorado and now closer to home a much smaller event but with a significant impact – the sports star Oscar Pistorius who shot his girlfriend, model Reeva Steenkamp, in his Pretoria home. The questions around gun control in SA are highlighted anew in the same way as it has been in the US as it is so perfectly representative of a much larger problem. SA has for decades lived in fear and citizens have, in an attempt to take back control, armed themselves inside the feigned prisons they live in. The difference between say pro-gun groups in America and South African gun free associations is that members have zero influence in preventing Parliament from gun restrictions. And not only that, but in general the average man on the street in SA is furious over the constant rise in violent crime crippling the country. Former ANC member Andrew Feinstein wrote a book last year called *Shadow World* where he exposes the true underbelly of guns across the world, but more specifically in SA. According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu the book

## Daniel Scheffler takes a look at what's been happening locally and in the world

'peels back the veil of secrecy behind which the global arms trade undermines accountable democracy, socioeconomic development, and human rights, causing suffering across the world'. Then again unfortunately a book may be essential reading but action on top of the book is what is critical right now. Gunpolicy.org have released figures showing there are just less than six million licensed firearms in SA. With a population of roughly 50 million that means 12% of the population (given that it's one gun per person) own a gun – well those are the ones actually registered and that is where the problem lies. SA's Firearms Control Act came into effect in 2000 and requires rigorous checks including psychological testing and references from a spouse and co-workers. The latest bill, that very recently came into fruition, give the South African police the right to arrest anyone carrying a dangerous weapon in public.

## DEAD EASY

The greatest problem the country faces is not that the gun license applications are now in back log and therefore heedless behaviour can often overlook imperative particulars. The biggest problem is that illegal guns are dead easy to buy on the streets, they are stolen from retailers and therefore cannot be regulated. So law-abiding citizens are regulated but the criminals are racing across the country committing crimes that are goaded by the illegal weapons they hold.

## TAKE IT BACK

What can possibly be a solution? A campaign of course. A nation-wide campaign that encourages South Africans to

form a treaty against arms; a treaty that can then go global. Not amnesty, because as we have seen that has very little impact if not controlled meticulously. More rigorous effort is necessary for this campaign to work. The borders of the country, the slums of the city and the decay of society needs to be overturned by citizens and the South African military force that is said to be less corrupt than the notorious venal police force. The power cannot be poured into the barrels of criminals' guns as the walls go higher and the electric fences get firmer. MC Saatchi head, Mike Abel, recently said to me, "We are here to stay, and to take it back".

Consider the Landmine Treaty signed in 1997, although not signed by countries like Russia and the US, it has reduced casualties from landmines by almost 70% and reduced the trade of landmines to virtually nothing. Simply by promoting justice, peace and security across the world the Treaty has packed a serious punch when it comes to tragedy surrounding landmines. Illegal gun ownership and trade can benefit from something very similar. And SA can easily steer the Treaty from a place of understanding, since its somewhat successful legislation on gun control.

A government supported advertising agency can very easily use their resources and launch a campaign (avoid using Charlize Theron as that didn't turn out well last time) with the support of say the UN (who met in March with their own Arms Trade Treaty in New York). The youth can spread the message using social media, our very efficient political animals, someone like Helen Zille, will drive the significance to their base and using what media attention SA is now gathering with the 'Blade Runner's' cataclysm will augment the spread – let's hope it goes viral too.

