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Citizens have the right to protect themselves

“The murder on Sunday morning of John Viedge of the farm Highlands, outside Nqanarhu (Maclear), is condemned in the strongest terms. This murder once again highlights the vulnerability of the farming community and the cowardice of criminals, who will even resort to murder to achieve their objectives,” says Uys van der Westhuijzen, chair of Agri SA’s Centre of Excellence: Rural Safety.

The Constitution describes the right to life and dignity as one of the most important human rights, and the National Development Plan also confirms the right to personal safety. “For this reason, all citizens should have the right to protect themselves in a legal manner,” says Van der Westhuijzen.

In a country with one of the highest murder figures in the world, it is unthinkable that communities cannot exercise their right to life by protecting themselves, which will be the case if the police succeed in amending the Firearms Control Act by scrapping the right to self-defence.

Recent crime statistics released by the police not only indicate an increase in the murder figure for the fourth quarter, but also confirm that home robberies remain rife. Home robberies are the crimes most feared by the farming community and fellow citizens and to which they are most exposed. “Criminals will use any weapon conceivable to achieve their objectives; therefore, it is important that citizens are able to defend themselves.”

Law-biding citizens may not be deprived of the opportunity to own a legal firearm to protect themselves and their families against violent crime when their lives are threatened. “We believe that all citizens will make themselves heard and strongly oppose the scrapping of section 13 of the Firearms Control Act. We hope the police will heed what the majority of South Africans have to say in this regard,” Van der Westhuijzen says.

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