

SA and Mozambique plan to stamp out weapons smuggling

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POLICE have identified Mozambique as the main source of weapons smuggled into the country and have expressed deep concern at the numbers of AK-47s in South Africa and their use in crime.

Tomorrow Law and Order Minister Hernus Kriel will be host to Mozambican Internal Affairs Minister Colonel Manuel Jose Antonio, who is in South Africa for a meeting on the issue.

"We intend discussing a joint plan to control the smuggling of weapons into South Africa," Mr Kriel told Weekend Argus yesterday.

He declined to discuss what proposals the government would be putting on the table.

"We will be discussing various plans that we have worked out," he said.

But he did suggest that the international community could assist in combating the scourge by buying weapons in Mozambique: "If they really want to make a contribution they should help in buying up weapons," said Mr Kriel.

He added that it was difficult "at this stage" to assess whether the majority of AK-47s in the country were smuggled in or came from long-established arms caches.

Figures in the recently released annual report for 1992 of Police Commissioner General Johann van der Merwe gave an indication of the nature of the AK-47 problem.

"In 1992 there were 127 cases where SA Police members were fired at by people using AK-47 rifles," said General Van der Merwe.

JOINT efforts could soon be made by South Africa and Mozambique to stem the flow of weapons being smuggled into the Republic, reports **CHRIS WHITFIELD** of the Weekend Argus political staff.

"Of all the members who were killed while on duty in 1992, 43 percent were killed by AK-47s, compared with 17 percent in 1991."

Last year 891 AK-47s were seized by police.

But police believe that these are just a small proportion of such weapons in the country.

ANC foreign affairs spokesman Mr Thabo Mbeki said recently that many of the weapons filtering into the country were originally sent by the South African government to support Renamo forces in Mozambique.

The only statistics available on the number of weapons in the region are from Harare, where Press reports quoted military sources as estimating that at least 1.5 million AK-47s had been introduced into Mozambique since the beginning of the civil war in 1975.

In January a police liaison officer said illegal AK-47s could be bought in South Africa for as little as R100, although one in good condition could fetch up to R2 000.