By: Prof J A de Villiers
Afrika Leadership Development Institute

Introduction
Under the old regime, it is said, we had a police state where freedom was suppressed but we had very little serious crime. Now, under the new regime everyone, including criminals, are free to do what they like, one is hardly aware of a police presence, but we all live in constant fear of our lives. Under the old regime the struggle objective was to make the country ungovernable, now it is ungovernable in terms of the crime situation!

The past month has seen the crime situation reach a watershed and become a focal point for all law abiding citizens of South Africa. At first the government, and especially the SAPD declared that the high levels of crime were public perceptions, created by the media. Then the murder of the KwaZulu Natal historian, David Rattray, and the reaction by FNB bank set the cat among the pigeons and the President had to react in his State of the Nation speech in Parliament. Whilst some use statistics to prove that the situation is not out of control, a researcher such as Boyane Tshehla (Head of the Institute of Security Studies’ Crime and Justice Division) says: “The statistics become irrelevant”. This was in reference to four reported violent crimes within 24 hours in the Western Cape. The role and meaning of statistics and the perceptions can be debated ‘ad nauseam’, but one thing is certain: if things don’t improve soon, South Africa is on a slippery slope towards anarchy and we will all suffer the consequences.

The public has become extremely cynical concerning the commitment of the state in cutting the crime rate and many people even believe that much of the criminal activity actually originates within the SAPS, the SANDF, Metro police forces and security firms. It is furthermore an unfortunate fact that many of the automatic weapons used in serious crimes originate from these sources.

Whilst the debate rages on in Parliament and the media, this paper will attempt to analyse what some of the causes and possible remedies are for crime in South Africa.

Defining Crime
The word ‘crime’ is an emotionally loaded and wide-ranging term. It can range from something as innocuous as the selling of pirate copies of DVD’s to rape, torture and eventual murder of a person. Violence has become so insidious in our country, that when you mention the word ‘crime’, people only think of armed robbery, murder, rape and other forms of crime where victims are left in pain and trauma. In order to better explain what crime is, we can simplify the issue by defining three broad types of crime, namely:

• Economic crime – Fraud, corruption, bribery, unlawful use of assets, pilfering of inventory (euphemistically called shrinkage), money laundering, copying and selling of pirated material. Often this type of crime is called ‘white collar’ crime because people in business suits, who are in managerial positions, perpetrate it. It is mostly ‘victimless’ in the sense that the organisation and civil society is hurt, but no persons are normally left traumatised. For most organisations, such as IMFO, this type of crime represents a major challenge, as it detrimentally affects the functioning and performance of Municipalities throughout South Africa.

• Violent crime – Robbery, highjacking, holding people at ransom, murder, rape and serious bodily harm. Because of the horror and trauma involved in this type of crime, it is abhorred in any civilised country and the degree to which it occurs is a direct indication of the level of barbaric behaviour still present in a country. Although individual trauma is mainly at stake, it obviously affects the operation of organisations as well.

• Non-violent crime – House breaking, theft, pilfering, shoplifting, prostitution and abuse of drugs or alcohol. Unfortunately many of these crimes can become violent or serious when the perpetrator is confronted or the initial situation changes.

One may be inclined to only be concerned about the middle group of crimes and to see for instance non-violent crime such as prostitution and abuse of drugs or drunken driving as being ‘not so serious’. As we all know there are inter-linkages and what starts off as no real crime, but rather bad habits and even non-ethical behaviour, can turn into something as serious as murder or a road death. This already indicates that within social and economic systems, what may not seem to indicate a serious aberration can in fact become very harmful to the system.

Whilst we have an exemplary Constitution and fine laws, the key problem remains that of effectively policing the laws and ensuring that criminals are effectively caught, prosecuted and punished.

The key questions most of us ask are:

• What is the effect of crime on South Africa – is it just...
the ‘haves’ who are making a lot of noise and isn’t crime actually a stimulant to the economy? (Recently an e-mail that attempts to prove that the State is a major beneficiary of crime, has been circulating).

• Are there effective ways in which individuals can combat crime – is the building of higher walls and employing more security staff the way to go?
• How can the state and the security forces send out a clear and effective message that enough is enough and that they now have a grip on the crime situation, rather than umpteen vocal statements, which nobody believes anyway?

The Effects of Crime

Now, for the first time, the devastating effects of crime are being recognised. A number of areas where the effects are becoming increasingly evident include:

• Trauma – Hospitalisation of victims of crime must represent a huge cost to the persons involved as well as to the country. In the case of poor families, who cannot afford insurance, the physical losses in themselves leave them traumatised. Furthermore in cases of serious bodily harm, the victims, their families and their friends are left traumatised to such an extent that they start reconsidering the benefits and costs of staying in the country
• Effects on employees in the SAPS – In order to survive police men and women must become tough, very defensive and at times even aggressive; they even have to shoot first and ask questions later. When police officers are killed one often feels that they could have acted more aggressively and so have saved themselves. Obviously this work environment takes its toll in terms of stress and mental effects.
• Increased bureaucracy – Especially in regard to ‘white collar’ crime, the after effects of crime are usually an increase in security measures and improvement of detection systems. This brings about that very specific policies and instructions must be followed and that decision-making is centralised and pulled up to higher levels in an organisation. This results in increased bureaucracy and cost and of course decreased productivity
• Decreased productivity – Productivity, or the ratio of output to input in any organisation is a direct result of people focusing on what they are doing and working smarter, rather than just harder. When people’s minds and their time is taken up by a negative factors, such as combating crime in the workplace, or even worse, crime in their homes, productivity must suffer.
• Investment – South Africa has generally not seen as much fixed foreign investment in the industrial sector as it should have during the first thirteen years of the new government; much of the fixed investment has been in the Western Cape residential market and funds have flowed to the JSE, but a large percentage of these investments can leave the country speedily when the situation deteriorates.
• Loss of income – according to market research by the tourism industry an estimated 125 000 less tourists visited South Africa in 2006 due to crime; this caused a loss of approximately 8 000 jobs in this industry and when one thinks of other industries the total effect of crime can be considerable
• High insurance costs – insurance costs, especially on vehicles, has risen dramatically because of high-jacking and theft
• High cost of keeping people incarcerated – the cost of keeping criminals behind bars is very high; unfortunately in a country with much poverty, many people may find jails more attractive than life on the streets
• High cost of personal protection – most households need to spend a significant part of monthly income on items such as physical deterrents around properties, reaction forces and insurance
• Emigration and the brain drain - Highly skilled people in any country are the first to leave when they do not feel safe anymore, mainly because they find easy employment in other countries.

The Pillars of Crime

To better understand crime and its effects, one should try to analyse why it has been escalating so much. The following five pillars of crime, which are very closely interlinked, are suggested:

• The past
Although ‘apartheid’ had many negative effects and may have caused many people to hate white South Africans, one starts to wonder whether living in the past and continuing to blame it, is not really a part of finding a scapegoat and displacing the ‘onus of responsibility’ so as not to face current reality. Unfortunately, many people justify crime by accepting that it is O K to take from the white man if you are black. It is tragic that when one reads about a really cruel or violent crime, the racial undertone is still visible.
• The present situation
The Constitution has entrenched many rights, but few obligations. For most citizens the rights of criminals seem to be more valued than those of law-abiding citizens. The argument goes that the death penalty is not an effective deterrent to murder, but one wonders whether this is true on a continent where the law of the jungle and survival of the fittest still largely applies.

• Values
The social structure of South Africa has undergone huge changes during the past two to three decades. Due to urbanisation, HIV/AIDS and the pressures of survival, the children in a vast number of families are without school or parent care for a large part of the day, and they become easy targets for criminal activities. Parents often abdicate their educational and developmental task and leave it to the school and other parties. Television adds to the problem because it dulls the child’s senses to violence, such as shooting, and trivialises many wrongdoings.

Criminals have turned our new democracy, and the protection implied by the Constitution, to their own advantage. One gets the idea that very often crime seems to pay because the chances of being caught and convicted are relatively low and the penalties not commensurate with the crime.

Whether we like it or not we have become a rather lawless and undisciplined society and this is evidenced by the lack of respect for the law on the roads as well as within communities. Our current Deputy President is trying to rekindle the fire of moral regeneration, where the former Deputy President left off, after setting a rather dubious example.

In terms of ‘white collar crime’, which is of prime importance to organisations such as IMFO and municipalities, one would like to ensure that people understand what they should and should not do within these organisations. This is where personal, moral and ethical values as well the example set by managers, come in. The Japanese have a saying: ‘A fish rots from the head’, which means that if the leaders are rotten the rest of the organisation will go that way too. Nepotism, a lack of work ethic and corruption occur when the managers in organisations do not set the right example and clamp down on misdemeanours. Codes of conduct as well as regular formative training, should act as the guide to personal decisions that eliminate crime in the workplace.

Unfortunately, there is a general tendency of ‘entitlement or helping myself to the good life because I was previously disadvantaged’; very often employees don’t even see their wrong doings as anything serious. This good life also emphasises material goods and this in turn means that ‘to keep up with the Jones’s’ one needs to earn much more or find alternative ways of financing your wants.

• Lack of strong leadership
One of the most successful anti-crime campaigns was the one initiated and led by Rudolph Giuliani, whilst he was the mayor of New York. He propagated a policy of ‘zero tolerance’ to all crimes and this resulted in the police force clamping down on petty as well as serious crime. As a result the public at large once again reclaimed the city. It is important to realise that a strong, visionary leader, who musters public and police support behind him/her, is essential to make a credible impact that scares and discourages criminals.

The example that leaders set is of extreme importance and it is unfortunate that leader’s in Africa generally appear to be corrupt and intent on enriching themselves. In South Africa we have seen a Parliamentary travel scam, a weapons scandal, a judge receiving a second source of income and much tender rigging and nepotism at municipal level. Unfortunately when caught out these leaders do not contemplate resignation but are rather hailed as heroes.

• Poverty
Whether poverty is a major cause of crime is debatable. Yes, the large gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ can cause resentment and affect people’s perceptions and aspirations negatively. Dr Gatsha Buthelezi is not convinced that poverty is a major cause of the present high crime rate; few violent crimes can be attributed to poverty. Nevertheless, as indicated by the late Dr Anton Rupert, one cannot sleep peacefully when you know that your neighbour is hungry. Job creation and an encouragement of entrepreneurship are essential in lowering the crime rate.

To have any effect on crime we will have to address all these pillars of crime.

Sustainable Systems
When we view South Africa as a whole one can identify it as a complex system in which the many different parts have interrelationships and eventually operate in unison to
create goods, services and wealth. When there is little crime, some of the following will be apparent:
• confidence in the future of the country – a positive mood
• government departments that function effectively and have good service delivery
• growth in the economy, more investment and production; tourism can become one of our most important sources of foreign income
• more jobs created and less need to do crime
• the skills base improves and the ‘brain drain’ declines

In a system there are no single cause and effect outcomes and crime is but one of the many aspects that causes the system to become dysfunctional. There are many other factors such as skills, the attitude of workers, discipline, morality, entrepreneurship and investment that add to positive economic outcomes. Growth and development are both precursors and the positive result of many positive factors in the economy and the only way to go if South Africa wants to be sustainable in the long run.

How to Improve the System

It is very unfortunate that generally there is a poor understanding of social systems and holism, and people generally don’t understand that each one has a contribution to make towards the overall functioning of the system. When people actively participate to improvement of their own sub-system, they are contributing to the improvement of the overall system.

Mr Hennie van Vuuren, of the Institute for Security Studies, explains that for instance corruption money paid to a prison warder to allow a prisoner to escape can have far reaching implications and eventually contribute to a number of other crimes being committed. To therefore assume that corruption is not a serious crime and that we should not have as priority the stamping out of all forms of crime is not the way to rid our country of crime.

Conclusion

Crime is the result of decisions made by people to act in an unlawful and anti-social manner. It is therefore all about the values that guide the choices that people make. Although crime can be fought in a reactive way through heavy penalties, pro-active measures are much better. Only when the value system of a country clearly discourages crime and people have strong moral principles to abstain from crime can a true democracy exist. Not only the country’s leaders but also all individuals have a role to play in making the system improve from its current poor state.

Overall it remains a huge developmental and educational challenge as well as a matter of effective reaction to show that there is ‘zero tolerance’.

Telephone: 012 349 1152, Fax: 012 349 1154, Cell: 072 373 9222, e-mail: andre@leadafrika.com,