



MINISTERS ANNOUNCE PLANS FOR NATIONAL KNIFE AMNESTY

A national knife amnesty is to be held across the country in the spring, as part of the on-going efforts by the Executive, police and their partners to tackle knife crime and violence in Scotland.

The amnesty will begin on May 24 and will run for one month. It will also kick-start a 12 month Safer Scotland Anti-Violence Campaign by the Executive, Violence Reduction Unit and Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland to tackle the culture of violence in Scotland.

The amnesty has been sanctioned by the Lord Advocate – head of Scotland’s prosecution system – who today also confirmed that the Crown Office and Prosecution Service is reviewing prosecution policy on knife crime to ensure the criminal justice system treats this problem with the seriousness it deserves.


During the amnesty, people surrendering knives to the police will not be prosecuted for possession of a weapon while they are handing it in. Research after the four-week Operation Blade in Strathclyde in 1993 shows that a well-planned amnesty can have a substantial impact. More than 4500 weapons were surrendered and in the subsequent 12 months murder rates fell by 26 per cent, attempted murder by 19 per cent, serious assault by 14 per cent and offensive weapons possession by 23 per cent.

To support the longer term effectiveness of the forthcoming amnesty, it will be preceded by educational initiatives co-ordinated by the VRU, and a prolonged period of post-amnesty enforcement.

Justice Minister Cathy Jamieson said:

“In December I announced the development of a new national approach to tackling violence, building on the measures we are putting in place to address knife crime and the excellent work being undertaken by the VRU. This recognises that such a deep-seated problem cannot be solved overnight, but that action also needs to be taken now to make communities safer.

“A knife amnesty alone cannot provide a long-term solution to tackling violence. However, alongside work to challenge the underlying culture of violence and ‘acceptability’ of carrying knives



among some young men, it will support our efforts to create safer daily lives for the people of Scotland. We have already seen the impact of Operation Blade in the 1990s and I want to see that replicated throughout Scotland.

“I now call on all those people who carry a knife – often in the mistaken belief that it will give them some form of protection - to think about the consequences. Coupled with drink or drugs on a Saturday night, these weapons all too often lead to bloodshed. Use the amnesty as an opportunity to put this behind you and stop more young people being killed or maimed through such thuggery. Respect can only truly be earned by the way someone lives their lives – free of crime – not by what they carry in their pocket.”

The Lord Advocate, Colin Boyd QC said:


“During the amnesty people who hand in illegal knives will not be prosecuted for unlawful possession under sections 47 or 49 of the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995. The immunity will not cover other offences involving the use of knives.

“In addition to the amnesty and in the context of the new national approach to tackling violence, I also want to be satisfied we are doing all we can to clamp down on those who contribute to this problem by carrying knives. I have commissioned a review of prosecution policy on knife crime which will ensure that prosecutors maintain a robust approach to such cases. In doing this, they will give careful consideration to prosecuting persistent and violent offenders, in a court empowered to send the offender to prison for the maximum period allowed by law. ”

Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, head of the Violence Reduction Unit, said:

“The knife amnesty is only the first stage in a 12 month long campaign aimed at tackling the culture of violence. A weapons surrender alone will not solve this deep-rooted problem, however it is part of the contain and manage element of our long term violence reduction strategy.

“The amnesty is an opportunity for people to make that potentially life- saving decision and hand in their locking knife or whatever weapon they choose to carry. I would appeal to anyone who carries



a knife or who's considering carrying one, to think twice. No one leaves home with the intention of becoming a murderer, but that's the chance you take if you carry a knife. I'd also appeal to parents – ask yourself the question – do you know if your son leaves home on a Saturday night carrying a knife?"

Detective Chief Superintendent Carnochan added:

"The amnesty will be supported by a year-long Safer Scotland campaign. This will see Scottish police forces tackling all aspects of violence – from gang fighting to domestic abuse.

"In addition, the VRU will be working with all 32 local authorities through the Community Safety Partnerships to establish a national Violence Reduction Alliance. The aim of the Alliance is to ensure that tackling violent behaviour is on everyone's agenda, for the police alone cannot solve this problem – everyone has a part to play in making our communities safer."

NOTES TO EDITORS


1. In December 2005, Cathy Jamieson outlined the Executive's new national approach to tackling violence in Scotland. This builds on the work being taken forward to tackle knife crime, including the provisions in the Police Bill, and on the excellent work being undertaken by the Violence Reduction Unit, set up by Strathclyde Police in January 2005.

2. Key strands of this work include:

- Expansion of the VRU to create a national 'centre for excellence' for violence prevention which will provide consultancy advice and share best practice across Scotland.

- Development, with ACPOS and the VRU, of focused national campaigns to tackle a number of specific types of violence, such as weapon carrying, gang culture and contributory factors such as alcohol misuse.

- Creation of an Executive-led national working group to tackle violence, to identify, investigate and drive forward best practice across Scotland that tackle violence and its underlying causes. It will draw upon a range of experts who will work with the group to share their experience of violence prevention.



- Creation of a national website for those working in this field to share best practice, highlight successful initiatives and provide ideas for local solutions to violence issues.

Plans are also being progressed for a national anti-violence conference, to take place in Glasgow on March 27. This will involve the Executive, VRU, ACPOS, local authorities, and other key partners in the health, education and justice system. It will have the theme 'An Alliance for a Safer Future'.

3. The knife amnesty is the first in the series of the national campaigns outlined above and will run under the Safer Scotland banner.

4. In recognition that a longer-term change in attitude towards knife carrying is also needed, the VRU is planning a number of educational initiatives in the run-up to the amnesty and a prolonged focus on enforcement afterwards.

5. The amnesty will cover the carrying of a knife in public, which would otherwise be an offence under section 47 or 49 of the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995. Immunity will be provided only to those individuals who, in the act of handing in a knife at a police station or other disposal point, would otherwise commit an offence. The Lord Advocate reserves his right to prosecute where there is evidence that the knife was used in the commission of another offence or where a person is caught in possession of a knife but claims that he or she was en route to hand it in at a police station or other disposal point. The police will be able to check surrendered weapons to decide whether forensic examination is merited, although it is expected that the vast majority of knives handed over will be destroyed.

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