



The volutary fingerprinting of private security officers

Confidential

1. Introduction

The following sets out information pertaining to the fingerprinting of private security officers for the purpose of checking criminal records as part of the effort to align this sector with the South African Police Service operations and to root out criminal elements within this sector. This is done in the interest of reducing crime and to enhance the integrity of the Private Security Industry in South Africa.

2. The current practice associated with the vetting of personnel

In terms of article 21(1) of the Private Security Regulation Act (PSIRA), Act 56 of 2001, hereafter refer to "The Act" an application for registration must be accompanied by a clear and complete set of the applicant's fingerprints. These paper records of fingerprints are submitted to SAPS for processing and screening for previous convictions and/or unsolved crimes contained in the wanted database. It currently takes 6 to 8 weeks to complete this process.

Prior to 2002, provision was made to perform a preliminary screening on the basis of the applicant's name and identification number. This provision was made to deal with the delay in processing by SAPS which often results in large backlogs of the applications. This practice was however halted in 2002 when SAPS indicated, according to PSIRA, that they have stopped updating the identification system based on name and identification number and subsequently stopped this provision. Subsequently, all applicants have to wait for their criminal clearance by SAPS for between 6 and 8 weeks. According to PSIRA, SAPS' priority is to service the core functions i.e. courts and investigations, so that the screening of security applicants is done on an overtime basis.

Currently, unless the PSIRA withdraws a security officer's registration certificate for any legal reason, such officer will remain registered with PSIRA "for life" as there is no obligation for officers to renew their of registration. Some employers in the industry would also rather employ registered jobseekers than wait for up to 8 weeks for a criminal record clearance.

In 2006 SAPS awarded a contract to Ideco implement an automated criminal record clearance on its behalf. Ideco specializes in electronic fingerprint systems and its automated solution is able to clear a person within 48 hours as it is directly linked to SAPS's criminal database. This is done by scanning the candidate's fingerprints on a mobile or fixed biometric device. The scanned record is transmitted electronically for comparison with records on the SAPS's database in order to determine and declare a "hit" or "no hit". Where the system returns a hit result, details of the crime and/or sentencing involved may be obtained from another SAPS database after a further few days. This outsourcing enables SAPS to focus on their core function i.e. criminal investigations as the non-core function of criminal record clearances for civil purposes is performed by Ideco. This also enhances the efficiency of clearance service for the private security industry and facilitates speedy renewal of registration with PSIRA.



PSIRA has endorsed this arrangement in principle provided that the appointment of Ideco officials carrying out this activity passes the test of integrity.

3. The identification of shortcomings in the current system.

Section 22 of the Act states that: “The Minister may prescribe procedures and principles in respect of periodic applications for the renewal of registration by registered security service providers and the conditions and requirements for the granting of such applications”.

Currently no regulation or prescribed procedures are in existence in terms of this section. In essence this means that no renewal of registration could take place and by default no regular clearances, be done as renewal of registration could only be realised by submitting a clear set of fingerprints to PSIRA as required by section 21(1) of the Act. It is however understandable that this section is not implemented based on the old system as yet as it would be impractical to request SAPS to process and screen approximately one million security guards' fingerprints currently on the database of PSIRA.

It is proposed that the Minister gives consideration to Section 22 in the near future, taking the new development, the availability of the electronic fingerprint system from Ideco, into consideration. The prescription of procedures in the form of regulations will sanitize the industry from undesirable elements on the one hand and enable the creation of a database and a true register of who is still active in the security industry. It is estimated by PSIRA that this exercise will reduce the current number of approximately one million to approximately six hundred thousand security officers. The promulgation of the relevant regulations will oblige security service providers to be subjected to continuous clearance in the form of renewal of security registration.

The above proposal was discussed with representatives of SAPS, PSIRA and SIA. All these institutions are *ad idem* on the principle that Section 22 should be considered by the Minister but the regulations should be part of a bigger vision i.e. the integration of all relevant security providers' fingerprint systems such as the private security data base, fire arm register and possible link to the home affairs records. This will not only address the effectiveness of the current practice but will also enable the different institutions to align the different capacities in order to support the promulgation of Section 22. A realistic time of completion would be in the region of two years but all institutions agree that it should be completed before 2010. It is vitally important to tighten any loopholes in the system prior to the biggest event in 2010 – the FIFA World Cup – in order to prevent abuse of the security industry by criminals. It was also jointly decided that PSIRA will take the lead in this project.

This step will not address the request from business as well as government leaders that security officers be cleared as soon as possible as far as criminal convictions are concerned. It is estimated by several industries that the security industry could house between 10 and 15% of security officers with criminal convictions. This gives rise to the need to investigate other measures to overcome this predicament in the short term.

4. Looking towards an immediate and interim solution.

The only effective way of clearing security officers is by way of fingerprint comparison with the criminal data base through the Ideco solution. As already pointed out, no legal obligation exists for security officers and/or service providers renew their registration with PSIRA. The other option available in the interim is where security companies could be persuaded to subject themselves to a **re-fingerprinting** process on a voluntary basis. Ideco was consulted and indicated they are in a position to support the initiative logistically.



In essence a business cluster or business entity would contact all their security service providers with the request to subject the security officers in their employ to a criminal record clearance. If the security provider agrees with this proposal, contact must be made with Ideco. Ideco will send out a representative who will conduct the process at the cost of R 40.00 (VAT Included) per person and will clear those who could be cleared within 24 hours. Those officials who could not be cleared based on previous criminal records etc would be referred to PSIRA who will consider the issue further in terms of the law. As far as the costs of the clearance are concerned, we recommend not burdening the individual security official with this cost.

Several business entities and security companies have already committed to this process. During a recent meeting of the Anti Crime Leadership Forum, the deputy Minister also applauded this initiative from the Private Security Industry.

5. The way forward

In order to make an impact as far as the objective is concerned; it is important for as many business clusters/entities to join this initiative in order to persuade their security service providers to participate on a voluntary process. The following framework of action is proposed taking the festive season into consideration:

Proposed action	Responsible	Time frame	Outcomes
Request to private security providers	Businesses		List of participating security providers and number of security officers submitted to Business Against Crime and Ideco. vho@ideco.co.za
Conducting of process by Ideco	Ideco at vho@ideco.co.za	continuous	Voluntary process completed.
Further briefing to the Minister of safety and Security in terms of the way forward.	Graham/Anton	1 December 2007	Minister briefed on progress
Media release on initiative	All participating parties	Feb 2008	Acknowledgements to companies participated
Issuing of Certificates of Acknowledgement to participating companies	Ideco Chairperson/Big Business Forum	Feb 2008	Acknowledgements to companies participated