

# IN TERROR AND IN SILENCE

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO CRIME AND SAFETY AT PETROL STATIONS

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Petrol Station 5 Safety Project

December 2002



# IN TERROR AND IN SILENCE

An investigation into safety levels and standards at petrol stations  
Petrol Station 5 Safety Project, December 2002



Written by Adrian Hadland  
Foreword by Nelson Mandela



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# DEDICATION

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This report is dedicated to the memory of the “Petrol Station 5”

Julius Thembile Mjali, aged 37

Arthur Zukisani Ngxumza, aged 23

Sibongile Same, aged 28

Saziso Bashe, aged 23

Alfred Zithulele Nyumbeka, aged 30

who were murdered where they worked at Jaffer’s Motors in Grassy Park,  
Cape Town, on Monday June 24, 2002.

May they rest in peace.



# FOREWORD

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There are times when the agony of a few captures the empathy and sadness of a great many. It is sometimes only in this way that we can be moved to make things change. The murder of the five young men who have become known as the 'Petrol Station 5' was just such a moment. Their tragic deaths touched our hearts and filled our collective spirit with grief and with horror.

But just as we reel from the loss, so we are moved to seek answers. We ask how it can be that five young men can simply be executed late at night at their place of work? And why is fear so prevalent at South Africa's petrol stations?

We ask ourselves why, in one of the most powerful and wealthy sectors of the economy, poverty and hardship are so commonplace?

We also want to know what can be done to make the petrol stations that so many of us use every day safer places to work in, to manage and to visit.

This report begins to provide answers to these questions. Informed by wide-ranging submissions and assisted with on-the-ground research, it examines the current environment of the fuel retail sector. It uncovers the plight of the 'forgotten underclass' of petrol attendants, of whom the Petrol Station 5 were representative. The report also comes up with a number of key recommendations for the consideration of the sector and the government.

This project does not seek to hand out blame nor point fingers. In its neutrality and in the compassion of its working group, it seeks merely to highlight key issues impacting on the sector and to protect life.

The report, finally, serves as a memorial to the lives of the Petrol Station 5, to Julius Thembile Mjali, Arthur Zukisani Ngxumza, Sibongile Same, Saziso Bashe and Alfred Zithulele Nyumbeka. We can only hope that through their deaths, some good will come for others and in achieving good, give solace to those who love and miss them.

I commend the work of the project and urge all those to whom this report applies to pay close heed.

NR Mandela  
Cape Town, December 2002





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Petrol Station 5 Safety Project is a multi-disciplinary civil society investigation into crime and safety at petrol stations in South Africa. Sponsored by the Social Cohesion and Integration Research Programme of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the project specifically excluded participants with any direct connection to the South African petroleum and liquid fuel industry.

The project was sparked by the murder in June 2002 of five petrol station attendants at a Shell garage in Cape Town. The objectives of the project at the outset included an assessment of the crime situation at petrol stations, the identification of obstacles to improvements and the formulation of recommendations aimed at protecting the lives of people who work in, manage, own or use South Africa's petrol stations.

The report sets out the sources of information to be used in the investigation. These comprise oral and written submissions from a wide variety of stakeholders and interested parties together with a specially-commissioned survey of 25 petrol stations in the Western Cape, that is, the RISE survey.

The report introduces the issue of growing violent crime in South Africa generally and at petrol stations in particular. The reasons for the focus on the sector are set out. The report observes that people who work in the forecourts of South Africa's 4,900 service stations constitute an especially vulnerable grouping exposed to the rising incidence of violent crime.

In Chapter Two, the report sketches the structure of the South African retail fuel industry, noting its high degree of sophistication, complexity and regulation. It profiles the four main components of the sector: the retailers, the consumers, the attendants and the oil companies.

Chapter Three sets out the policy, socio-political and internal environments of the sector. It anticipates forthcoming legislation and notes the often discordant relationship between the three vertical tiers (employees, dealers and oil companies) of the sector.

Chapter Four sets out the patterns of violent crime experienced in the sector and introduces international research already conducted into forecourt crime. It is clear that South Africa is far from alone when it comes to experiencing crime at service stations, though specific local conditions apply.

A summary of strategies already employed to combat crime in the sector is detailed in Chapter Five. This is accompanied by a section on problem areas and pitfalls in crime prevention initiatives.

Finally, the report includes 26 recommendations. These are broken down into four sections: Organisational, Workplace and Conditions, Allocation of Resources and Utilisation of Technology, and Regulatory and/or Legislative. A brief summary of each recommendation, all of which are set out in full at the end of the report, is as follows:

## Organisational recommendations

1. The creation of a cross-sectoral, high level retail fuel industry crime prevention structure



2. The holding of an industry-wide summit to address deep-seated animosities within the sector and to plan for the future
3. An appeal to the labour ministry to unblock the sector's stifled access to training and learnership funding

### Workplace and conditions recommendations

4. The establishment of career paths and job grades for petrol attendants
5. The creation of site safety officers on the forecourt
6. An industry-wide agreement on job grades
7. Better collection of personnel records
8. Special attention for petrol attendants at industry bargaining councils
9. An appeal to the trade unions to improve their servicing of this sector
10. Greater responsibility for owners and managers to determine hours of operation
11. Adoption of transparent, industry-wide franchise agreements to prevent arbitrary action by individual agents
12. A common policy on tipping needs to be agreed and communicated to the general public
13. Renewed efforts to ensure staff are trained and re-trained in armed robbery survival and security procedures
14. The substantial improvement of working conditions of petrol attendants
15. An encouragement to owners and managers to provide more incentives to staff
16. Greater awareness of workplace compensation and relevant procedures needs to be communicated to forecourt staff
17. Minimum wage for petrol attendants must be revisited
18. Management training for owners and managers including crime prevention, conflict resolution, teamwork and diversity management
19. A more comprehensive policy on trauma counselling for those affected by violent crime
20. Improved monitoring and evaluation of occupational health standards by the labour department, assisted by the retail fuel industry

### Allocation and utilisation of resources and technology

21. Investigation of low cost group life insurance urged
22. Quicker strides toward cashless working environment needed
23. Better access to aggregated information and data on security and crime

### Regulatory and legislative recommendations

24. The legislation of minimum safety standards for every new petrol station and obligatory, phased-in implementation at existing sites. Standards to be determined by the industry and built into new regulations
25. A 1% fuel price levy to be used to offset capital expenditure incurred by petrol stations to improve security and safety infrastructure. The levy is to be raised in a restructuring of the margins or, if necessary, imposed on top of the current taxation
26. Re-look required for RSC levy