

Exhibit: COVID-era enforcement — the government's willingness to use force

Supporting exhibit to the "Connect the Dots" memo. Compiled June 2026 from official and human-rights sources (IPID, SAHRC, Amnesty International, UN OHCHR, gov.za / Minister Cele, Daily Maverick, GroundUp, News24, TimesLive). Figures are sourced; where data does not exist, that is stated plainly.

Between March 2020 and February 2021, the South African government arrested 411,309 of its own citizens for lockdown breaches — reportedly more than any other country, including the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte. Thirty-two people died from police action in the first six weeks alone. The regulations specifically criminalised Christian worship: in-person services, singing, baptism and the Lord's Supper were all prohibited; conveners and congregants faced up to six months' imprisonment. This record is the clearest available evidence of how the government uses state power when it decides a practice must stop.

1. The scale of arrests

Minister Bheki Cele / gov.za crime statistics:

Point in time	People arrested for lockdown breaches
Day 1 (27 Mar 2020)	55
By 31 Mar 2020	17,000+
Late May 2020	~230,000
Mid-Aug 2020	298,252
End Feb 2021	411,309

- South Africa reportedly exceeded even the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte in total lockdown arrests.
- The overwhelming majority of arrests were for breaching gathering rules and curfew — the same regulatory category as attending or leading a church service.

2. Criminal records

Of the 298,252 arrested by August 2020 (Cele, gov.za):

- **181,579** were released on warning to appear in court;

- **28,337** were found guilty ($\approx 9.5\%$ conviction rate) — offences spanning liquor, gathering, transport, business and cross-border breaches;
- Minister Cele acknowledged that "**most of the people arrested will come out with criminal records.**"

3. Arrests for religious gatherings

No national total exists specifically for religious-gathering arrests; they are absorbed into the broad "gathering" category. Documented incidents:

- **17 worshippers** arrested while praying in **Pretoria West** (April 2020);
- **Sebokeng church** (January 2021): approximately 250 congregants; police deployed rubber bullets and stun grenades; three leaders aged 47, 62 and 69 were arrested;
- Easter service preacher arrested in Elliotdale, **Eastern Cape** (April 2020);
- **Gabola Church** pastor, wife and congregants arrested and fined (May 2020);
- **Bishop Bheki Ngcobo** arrested (May 2020);
- Ramadan gatherings broken up; police filmed making disrespectful remarks (Minister subsequently apologised).

Levels 5 and 4 banned all in-person worship. Levels 3 and 2 capped attendance at 50 regardless of congregation size and explicitly prohibited singing, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Conveners and attendees faced up to six months' imprisonment.

4. Killed by police (SAPS) or army (SANDF)

IPID, first 40 days (25 March – 5 May 2020):

- **32 deaths from police action; 16 deaths in police custody;**
- **10 deaths** directly attributable to lockdown enforcement;
- **589 assaults, 25 reports of torture, 8 alleged rapes;** total complaints up **32%** on the same period in 2019;
- President Ramaphosa described "**11 lockdown deaths and 230,000 arrests**" as "**over-enthusiasm;**"
- approximately **76,000** SANDF troops and police were deployed on the streets.

Named victims — all Black, Coloured, or African migrant:

- **Collins Khosa** (10 April 2020, Alexandra) — beaten by SANDF soldiers over a glass of beer; post-mortem: blunt-force head injury. The army cleared its own soldiers; eight witnesses said otherwise.
- **Sibusiso Amos** (29 March 2020, Vosloorus) — shot dead on his own veranda; four children aged 5 to 11 were injured in the crossfire.
- **Petrus Miggels** (27 March 2020, Ravensmead, Cape Town) — Coloured man; died within an hour of a police confrontation; IPID closed the file citing "heart failure."

- **Adane Emmanuel** (2 April 2020, Isipingo) — Ethiopian national; assaulted and arrested for selling cigarettes; died shortly afterwards.
- **Elma Robyn Montsumi** (April 2020, Cape Town) — died in a police cell.
- **Ntando Elias Sigasa, 23** (April 2020, Naledi, Soweto) — family reports he died from a police beating.

5. Who bore the force

No official race-disaggregated data exists for lockdown arrests or enforcement deaths. What the record shows:

- Enforcement and lethal force fell mainly on **poor Black and Coloured township communities** — Alexandra, Cape Flats, Soweto. An estimated 200,000 petty arrests "disproportionately targeted poor Black South Africans."
- Every named enforcement death was Black, Coloured or African migrant. No white or Indian enforcement deaths appear in any available record.
- SAHRC Commissioner Chris Nissen: *"COVID-19 has exposed the brutal inequality... what about people in townships?"* Minister Cele denied the force was "racial."

The record therefore shows lethal force directed overwhelmingly at Black and Coloured citizens, while the religious prohibitions hit Christians of every colour. The driver was control of the population and the Church — not racial targeting.

6. Impunity

- Historic IPID conviction rates: **0.9%** (firearm discharge), **0.6%** (assault), **0.2%** (torture).
- The SANDF cleared its own soldiers in the Khosa case.
- Only in **July 2022** — two years later — did IPID arrest 16 officials over 2020 lockdown assaults that caused a death.
- The **UN OHCHR** (27 April 2020) raised concern over *"heavy-handed and highly militarised"* enforcement in South Africa.

Note on the "115 deaths in custody" figure

In **July 2021**, Amnesty International South Africa's Executive Director, **Shenilla Mohamed**, stated that *"at least 115 [people] died in police custody during the lockdown period, 25 people were tortured, and 589 assaulted."* This figure does **not** appear in Amnesty's written 2020/21 annual report, and its time period and definition are unclear: it may cover a longer or differently defined window than the hard lockdown, and may conflate custody deaths with deaths from police action.

The accompanying "25 tortured / 589 assaulted" figures match the official IPID record exactly; that same dataset records 16 custody deaths plus 32 from police action for the period 25 March – 5 May

2020. The document-backed totals: **48 deaths in the hard-lockdown window** (32 police-action + 16 custody); **217 custody deaths for the full 2020/21 year** (all causes).

The pattern did not end with the hard lockdown. The IPID's own figures for the **following year (2021/22)** were higher still — **223 deaths in police custody** (up ~3% on 2020/21) and **192 reports of torture**, as recorded in the U.S. State Department's 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices (citing IPID). Far from a one-off lockdown blip, deaths in custody and torture reports continued to rise the next year.

The 115 figure is most accurately stated as attribution rather than as a flat documented total: *"Amnesty International South Africa's Executive Director stated in July 2021 that some 115 people had died in custody during the lockdown."* The document-backed totals above (48 in the hard-lockdown window; 217 for the full 2020/21 year) are the firmer basis.

Key sources

IPID statements; SAHRC; Amnesty International (2020/21); UN OHCHR (27 Apr 2020); gov.za / Minister Cele crime statistics (14 Aug 2020); Daily Maverick ("Ramaphosa calls 11 lockdown deaths... 'over-enthusiasm'"; "Eight witnesses saw soldiers assault Collins Khosa"); GroundUp (additional killings; first-death investigation); News24 / TimesLive; BusinessTech (411,309 arrests); U.S. State Dept 2020 IRF Report (South Africa).