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Saab, Gracan Communications, and the SAPS join hands with KwaZulu Natal to build safer communities

Commissioner Bheki Cele inaugurates GPS-Based hand held system empowering communities to work with the police.

South Africa's efforts towards creating safer communities took a major step forward today with the launch of a hand held high-tech tracking device for use by community policing activists. Developed by Saab and with Gracan Communications for the KwaZulu Natal Department of Safety and Liaison, the system was inaugurated by National Police Commissioner Bheki Cele in Durban's Umlazi township.

Roughly the size of a standard gate opener or panic button, the device can be carried discretely by members of the Volunteer Social Crime Prevention Project as they participate in the daily life of the community. When a button is pressed, the device automatically sends a message to the South African Police Service (SAPS) base station, identifying the volunteer and – using a built in GPS capability – his or her exact location. This allows the police to respond rapidly to crimes in progress, fights, or other emergencies.

A messaging function on the handset allows community policing volunteers to sms details of planned criminal activities to the SAPS discretely from wherever they discover the information, whether a tavern, on the street, or elsewhere. Software integrated into the SAPS base station allows all calls to be logged, mapped, and tracked for use in further investigations or prosecutions.

“This device, which we will evaluate further in a pilot project in Umlazi, really empowers community policing activists to work closely with the SAPS,” said Commissioner Cele. “Once we have gathered some experience in its day to day use we will establish standard operating procedures and seek to roll the project out in other appropriate areas of the country.”





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The idea for the hand held device was championed during Cele's period in office as KwaZulu Natal MEC for Safety and Liaison. Together with the SAPS base station, the hand held devices and the software management suite are known as the Khoian Civil Command and Control System.

“This is an important technological step forward which will assist us in bringing peace and stability to our communities,” said KwaZulu Natal MEC for Safety and Liaison Willis Mchunu. “VSCPP volunteers serve as the ‘eyes and ears’ of their communities and compliment the efforts of our local law enforcement and crime prevention agencies. They help prevent crime by maintaining an active presence in their neighbourhoods and liaising with members of their community.”

Besides enabling communications from community policing volunteers to the SAPS, the Khoian Civil Command and Control System allows the police to track the whereabouts of the volunteers, assuring that they are active in their allotted patrol areas. An integrated battery ensures that the device cannot be switched off by the volunteers, and that they are traceable at all times while on duty. Volunteers are expected to patrol independently on foot.

“Saab has been very pleased to work closely with our colleagues in Gracan Communications in developing this particularly user friendly solution to a specifically South African challenge,” said Saab Security and Aviation Systems General Manager Sisa Tanda. “It is another important step on the path to safer communities using technologies developed and integrated locally.”

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