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## **BATSA CONCERNED BY SURGE IN ARMED ROBBERIES**

*Tuesday 26 January* - BRITISH American Tobacco SA (BATSA) is alarmed by a record increase in armed robberies of its products, which is stoking organised crime and fuelling the illicit trade in cigarettes.

Since the lifting of the lockdown sales ban, armed robberies of BATSA cigarettes in transit have soared compared to incidents during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020.

BATSA notifies the South African Police Service of all such crimes and is urging increased vigilance to counter this menace, which is a drain on the South African fiscus as well as BATSA's operating revenues.

BATSA's General Manager Johnny Moloto said: "This alarming increase in criminals targeting our products should be of major concern to the authorities.

"In Q1 2020, armed robbers stole 1,195 cartons per month (239,000 individual cigarettes) of our products. We, obviously, had no robberies during the tobacco sales ban as we were not transporting products. When the ban was lifted, on a monthly average 2,845 cartons of cigarettes (569,000 individual cigarettes) were stolen during armed attacks on our distribution vehicles. And this, although we have increased security measures.

"In February 2020, the last full month before the lockdown ban, there were four such robberies. In September, the first full month after the ban was lifted, there were 12, a four-fold increase."

BATSA had reported a year-on-year drop in the incidence of armed robberies in the two years before 2020, which can be attributed to increased protection measures put in place by the company.

"The lockdown sales ban led to an explosion in the illicit trade and the increased involvement of organised crime syndicates," said Mr Moloto. "The ban also normalised the purchase of illicit cigarettes by South Africa's 11 million smokers.

"Since the ban, we have seen a dramatic growth in the sale of illicit cigarettes in mainstream outlets, which can also be attributed to the economic hardship being suffered by South Africans.

"BATSA continues to be transparent and supports all law enforcement activities in the prevention of crime. As is required by law in South Africa, all robberies against BATSA are

reported to SAPS with the aim of achieving arrests of criminals targeting our business, as well as recovering stock and preventing it from entering the illicit supply chain.

“BATSA supports all efforts to combat the illicit market and is fully compliant with the latest production counter regulations, which should give SARS officials oversight of every cigarette made in South Africa.

“BATSA calls for all other cigarette manufacturers to comply with these regulations.”

ENDS

