

June 16, 2009: Canadian groups support international “Disarm Domestic Violence” Campaign, marking the Global Week of Action Against Gun Violence

Canadian groups join others in 85 countries to mark the Global Week of Action Against Gun Violence. **Coalition for Gun Control President, Wendy Cukier**, noted “*Although gun violence takes different forms in different countries, there is a common theme: where there is easy access to firearms, there are higher rates of women and children killed with guns. The Global Week of Action is a good opportunity to draw attention to the fact that in spite of the differences, whether in Canada, South Africa, Australia, Trinidad or Brazil we share common goals: safe communities.*”

A recent report by Amnesty International, Oxfam and International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) shows that the use of firearms in violence against women is a global problem. Women are three times more likely to die violently if there is a gun in the house. Usually the perpetrator is a spouse or partner, often with a prior record of domestic abuse. For every woman killed or physically injured by firearms, many more are threatened.

In 2006, the Geneva based Small Arms Survey singled out Canada’s gun law for its significant impact on reducing gun death and injury in Canada. **The impact on murders of women, most often killed with rifles and shotguns has been most significant. In 1991, 85 women were murdered with firearms. By 2005, that had fallen to 32, a reduction of 62%. In contrast murders of women without firearms declined only slightly during the same period from 185 to 115, a decline of 38%.** The 1995 law introduced the spousal notification to the screening process to give women who may be abused a chance to speak out and continuous eligibility checks to ensure that if there is a domestic violence involving a gun owner, police will know immediately. Police are using the registry 10,000 times a day and have reported many cases where it has enabled them to take preventative action.

But in recent years Canada’s global reputation has been eroded. It has failed to ratify the OAS Inter-American Convention Against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms and it has not met its obligations under the United Nations Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms. Legislations before parliament - Bills C-391, C-301, and S-5 - threaten to dismantle gun control in Canada undermining efforts to prevent gun violence and combat the illegal gun trade.

Women’s groups from across the country including the National Council of Women, the Canadian Federation of University Women, the Fédération des **Femmes du Québec, the Manitoba** Association of Women’s Shelters, the YWCA of Toronto and YWCA of Canada oppose the plans to weaken Canada’s gun laws. More than 30 women’s organizations have written to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, opposing plans to dismantle gun control: “*We are concerned about proposals to repeal the 1995 Firearms Act, to weaken or eliminate licensing and remove the requirement to register all firearms. We strongly support the mandatory screening, licensing and renewal for all firearm owners as well as registration of all firearms contained in the current law. These measures are critical to enhancing the public safety.*”

According to **Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA**, many countries have modelled legislation on Canada’s gun laws to reduce gun violence against women. She said “*That Canada, home of the Landmine Ban Convention and world leader in peace building, should consider moving its gun laws against the global trend towards stricter regulation looks both foolish and irresponsible. Licensing and registration is a crucial step in preventing men who have a history of domestic violence from committing femicide or armed sexual violence in the home.*”

IANSA is leading “Disarming Domestic Violence” is the first international campaign aimed at protecting women from gun violence in the home. The main goal is to ensure that people with a history of domestic abuse are denied access to firearms, or have their licenses revoked. Of the nearly 900 million small arms in the world today, more than 75% are in the hands of private individuals – most of them men. Given this, women are paying a disproportionately heavy price for the multi-billion dollar trade in small arms.

Jan Reimer, Provincial Coordinator of the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters said “*Access to firearms is one of the top five risk factors in domestic homicide. Rifles and shotguns figure prominently in domestic violence in rural communities. And while the gun control law is not perfect, there is clear evidence that it is working to help keep women in abusive relationships safer. No one wants to penalize law abiding gun owners. What we want to do is to protect women and children from being threatened with and killed with guns.*”

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For more information contact Wendy Cukier, 416-604-0209

Founded in the wake of the Montreal massacre, the Coalition for Gun Control was formed to reduce gun death, injury and crime and is endorsed by over 300 organizations. For more information, visit our website at www.guncontrol.ca. The Coalition for Gun Control is a member of IANSA, a network of 800 civil society organisations working in 100 countries to stop the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW). More info at www.iansa.org. First launched in 2001, the Global Week of Action has grown to be the largest coordinated gun violence prevention event in the world.