



DISARMING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

An International Campaign to Reduce Gun Deaths in the Home
June 2009 – December 2010

The risk of physical harm, threats, and intimidation to women and children increases when a gun is present in the home. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 40-70% of all female homicides are committed by an intimate partner. In Canada the rate of spousal homicide against females has been between 3 and 5 times higher than the rate for males. One in three women killed by their husbands is shot, 88% of them with legally owned rifles and shotguns, the firearms of choice in domestic violence and suicide. The use of guns often results in multiple victims, many times children.

Disarming Domestic Violence is the first international campaign aimed at protecting women from gun violence in the home. The International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), a network of over 800 civil society organizations in 100 countries to stop the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons is launching the campaign in 28 countries. The Canadian campaign is jointly coordinated by the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women and Children (www.crvawc.ca), which promotes the development of community-centred, action research on violence against women and children; Project Ploughshares, an NGO working on peace and security (www.ploughshares.ca); and the Small Arms Working Group of Peacebuild, a Canadian peacebuilding coalition (www.peacebuild.ca).

Campaign Goals

- Help countries enact legislation to take guns out of the hands of actual or potential abusers. In countries where laws already exist, monitor its enforcement and highlight lessons learned for future policy development and sharing with other countries.
- Develop an international network for women's rights committed to producing social change and curbing armed domestic violence.
- Support network members and help them to work together, sharing strategies of 'best practice'.
- Lobby at the international level, including the March 2010 UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting and the July 2010 UN Biennial Meeting of States on the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms to ensure that governments fulfill their international commitments to prevent violence against women.

How Organizations Can Get Involved

- Endorse the campaign.
- Post information/campaign resources on your organization's website.
- Raise awareness by distributing material on the campaign to your network of contacts.
- Launch action initiatives to involve your constituencies (e.g., writing letters).
- Link the campaign to your ongoing events or host a campaign-specific event.
- Share your strategies of 'best practice' in policy development with the campaign
- Join an international network of advocates for women's rights.

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Canada's 1995 Firearms Act

The Firearms Act requires a licence for possession and acquisition, with screening and licence renewals every five years, and registration of all firearms. It contains several measures targeted at keeping guns from those who are at risk to commit domestic violence. These include screening risk factors for suicide and domestic violence, background checks, and notifying current and previous spouses (from past two years) of an individual's intent to acquire a firearms licence. Spousal consent is not required to acquire a licence but if a spouse raises concerns, a secondary review of the application must take place. Any report of domestic violence triggers an automatic review of an owner's licence.

Proposed Changes to the Act

Bills C-391 in the House of Commons and S-5 in the Senate propose to eliminate the registration of unrestricted rifles and shotguns. The passage of either of these bills will seriously weaken Canada's gun control laws and endanger public safety, especially of women and children. Access to information from the gun registry allows Canada's police agencies to be proactive, removing guns from the hands of possible perpetrators through the initial screening process, thus preventing many domestic abuse situations from taking place. When responding to calls, police use the registry to determine whether the home from which the call was made has a weapon in it, allowing them to decide on a proper and swift course of action.

The proposed changes would undermine Canada's international commitments to norms on the control of small arms and the elimination of violence against women. The UN Programme of Action on Small Arms calls for states to maintain comprehensive and accurate records on the manufacturing, holding, and transfer of small arms. The UN General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of Domestic Violence Against Women calls for adequate legal protection against domestic violence.

Canada is internationally recognized as a country with effective gun control legislation and a model for linking gun control to domestic violence.

The law is working

- The use of firearms in homicides declined by 30% between 1991 and 2006.
- The rate of firearm-related spousal homicides decreased by nearly 50% from 1997 to 2006.
- The use of shotguns and rifles in homicides dropped by 65% from 1991 to 2006.
- Since November 2008, police have seized 8261 guns from owners who were either violent or had threatened violence. Seventy-four per cent of these guns were non-restricted firearms, mostly shotguns and rifles.
- 43% of the seized weapons were registered in the Firearm Registry.

Source: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada and Royal Canadian Mounted Police for the firearms seizure statistics.

The erosion of Canada's domestic firearms standards would weaken the impact of Canada's calls for improved national standards elsewhere. Major public safety groups and women's organizations insist that gun owners need to be licensed, all guns need to be registered, and gun owners need to be accountable for their firearms.

