

July 20, 2010

Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0A6

RE: OCTEVAW'S PLEA TO MPs AND SENATORS TO RESIST THE RELAXATION OF CANADA'S GUN LAWS

Dear MP,

We are writing to urge you to work to meet international obligations to protect women and children from gun violence by resisting efforts to relax Canada's gun laws.

Currently, there is one bill before Parliament that would eliminate the registration of unrestricted long-guns:

Bill C-391 - An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry). The bill introduced by Candice Hoepfner (Conservative, MP for Portage-Lisgar, Manitoba) calls for the dissolution of the long-gun (rifles and shotguns) registry. It also aims to retroactively destroy all records of registered long-guns to date.

SUMMARY

This enactment amends the *Criminal Code* and the *Firearms Act* to repeal the requirement to obtain a registration certificate for firearms that are neither prohibited firearms nor restricted firearms.

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Le texte modifie le *Code criminel* et la *Loi sur les armes à feu* pour supprimer l'obligation d'obtenir un certificat d'enregistrement à l'égard des armes à feu qui ne sont ni prohibées ni à autorisation restreinte.

Bill C-391 was introduced on March 3, 2010, passed 2nd reading on the same day and was sent to Committee of Public Safety and National Security, where it was discussed on May 4 and May 6, 2010.

The Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women and, through leadership, education, advocacy and political action, to promoting a coordinated response to women and their children who have experienced abuse. Our members include women's centres and shelters, counselling agencies, community resource and health centres, victim services, child protection services, hospital and police representatives, the crown, academic researchers and other concerned community members. We have collaborated for more than 20 years to ensure that our broad network of services work together for the best interests of women and children.

How do these Bills affect violence against women?

Rifles and shotguns are the firearm most likely to be used in woman abuse. The efforts to destroy the long-gun registry pose a very serious risk to the women experiencing intimate partner violence. Thus, the passage of **C-391** would seriously weaken Canada's gun control laws and endanger public safety, especially that of women and children.

The risk of physical harm, threats, intimidation and ritual abuse-torture to women increases when a gun is present in the home where abuse is occurring. Moreover, the use of guns often results in multiple victims, many times children. Violence against women is a systemic problem that is engrained in many aspects of our society. UNIFEM and Amnesty International have described this world-wide human rights violation as “pervasive,” “universal” and “pandemic.” OCTEVAW strongly believes that the access to and use of firearms contributes to this global problem.

- 1 in 3 Canadian women killed by their husbands is shot, 88% with legally owned rifles and shotguns, the firearms of choice in domestic violence and suicide. (IANSA)
- In Canada the rate of spousal homicide against woman has been between 3 and 5 times higher than the rate against men from 1977 to 2006. (IANSA)
- During a web survey of individuals who self-identified surviving ritual abuse-torture... 89 (71%) of the 126 respondents indicated guns were the main weapons used. (Sarson and McDonald 2009)
- The two largest predictors of intimate partner female homicide are: prior threats to kills and access to firearms. (Adams 2007)
- 78% of men who shot and killed their female intimate partners said that they would not have used another weapon. (Adams 2007)
- Men who killed their female intimate partners by knife or strangulation admitted they would have used a gun if they had had access. (Adams 2007)

The Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee reviewed 62 cases involving 100 deaths where 94% of the victims were women and 92% of the perpetrators were men from 2003-2007. During that time period, the committee made five different recommendations concerning the access and control of firearms. In their *Fifth Annual Report of the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee* released in 2007, the committee reviewed a file where a woman was murdered by her common-law husband with a crossbow. “The perpetrator had a criminal record dating back 20 years, but as a hunter he had six firearms registered to him, as well as a crossbow.” The following recommendation to the Federal Government and the Department of Justice regarding firearms regulation was made:

Recommendation 22

It is recommended that the Federal Government revisit the Firearms Act to study the feasibility of a legislative amendment to require the registration of crossbows as restricted weapons.

Comment: There is considerable attention to the seizure of firearms as a preventative measure regarding domestic violence occurrences. Provincial Guidelines are moot to the seizure of other weapons. Although this provides some difficulty in how to characterize numerous items in a residence that could be used as weapons, at a minimum, police officers should be provided with the power to seize any item designed to be used as a weapon even though it doesn't meet the restricted or prohibited category.

Why are Canada's current gun laws important to maintain?

Statistics collected in the first six months after the Public Agents Firearms Regulations came into effect on October 28, 2008 show that, of the 8,281 guns seized from owners who posed a danger to public safety, 74% were non-restricted weapons, mostly shotguns and rifles. In addition, 43% of firearms seized by the police were registered in the Firearms Registry. The police use this registry 15,000 times a day to aid in their investigations. It also enables police officers to check if there are registered guns in the home before entering it which allows them to respond accordingly, saving the lives of our officers as well as the public due to this preparedness. Therefore, it is important that Canada maintains a comprehensive gun registry. Our coalition is not advocating to criminalize rural residents who own guns, but to protect women and children who are clearly at risk in a home where violence occurs and guns are present.

Secondly, between 1997 and 2006, the rate of firearm-related spousal homicide decreased by nearly 50% in part due to legal changes made in 1995 that focused on strengthening controls on shotguns and rifles. Our current laws have helped to save the lives of many women and children across the country and needs to be maintained and strengthened not softened.

Lastly, 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. Currently Canada ranks No. 8 on access to handguns while the US ranks No. 1. Not only would the passage of **C-391** threaten the protection of women and children, but Canada's international commitments to the norms on the control of small arms and the elimination of violence against women would be undermined. Through the Firearms Act, Canada is complying with these norms and serving as an example to other countries.

The gun registry has made all Canadians safer, especially women and children. As an MP, we urge you to work to meet international obligations to protect women and children from gun violence by resisting efforts to relax Canada's gun laws. OCTEVAW puts the safety of women and children first and you should too.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing your response on how you intend to uphold Canada's current gun laws.

Sincerely,

Advocacy Standing Committee of OCTEVAW and

Valerie Collicott, Policy & Administrative Coordinator
Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments (WISE)

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Enclosures:

1. Disarming Domestic Violence Fact Sheet

Suggested Resources:

1. Canada: Torturers, Guns and Bullets (Sarson and McDonald 2009)
2. Coalition for Gun Control www.guncontrol.ca
3. Disarming Domestic Violence, International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)
4. Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee - Annual Report to the Chief Coroner (2008) <http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/files/DVDRC08.pdf>
5. “Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners,” David Adams, Vanderbilt University Press, 2007