

Federal Government Takes Important First Step with New Federal Gun Regulations but Stronger Measures Still (or Gun Sale Controls) Needed

March 20, 2018, Ottawa, ON: As students across the U.S. march in solidarity for tougher gun laws in an uprising against the ongoing gun violence seen in their schools, the Government of Canada is introducing new gun legislation. Urging action against gun violence is not new in Canada, but for years, its gun laws have been eroded as gun violence begins to increase. In response, the Coalition for Gun Control has been advocating for decades for tighter gun controls and was joined today on Parliament Hill by legal experts, victims of gun violence and women's groups to review and comment on the long-awaited Government of Canada new gun-legislation.

While Bill 71 has not been studied in detail by Wendy Cukier, Coalition for Gun Control founder, she said, "the Liberal government has made an important first step with this new gun legislation, including reintroducing stronger licensing provisions and controls on sales of firearms. Stronger measures are desperately needed. Most Canadians do not know that when they ended the registration of unrestricted firearms and destroyed the data on 6 million firearms, they failed to reintroduce the controls on sales put in place in 1977. Contrary to what many Canadians believe, there are stronger controls on gun sales in the U.S. right now than in Canada." The U.S. for example which allows for law enforcement to check any time to support investigations without a warrant and inventories are inspected annually. More work is needed to examine the details in the legislation particularly with respect to its impact on the controls on handguns and military assault weapons.

The timing of today's bill is critical because for the first time in decades, the majority of firearms recovered in crime in Canada's largest city, Toronto, were originally legally owned in Canada not the USA. While annual rates vary, Toronto gun murders for 2016 rose by almost 60% from 2015 and Saskatoon may be up 50%. Other cities including Ottawa and Regina are reporting increases in gun violence. Since 2004, restricted weapons, principally handguns, in Canada have doubled to 795,854 in 2015 (compared with 384,888 in 2004) and there are more than 1 million legally owned restricted and prohibited weapons. [Former PM Stephen Harper claimed these guns were "virtually banned"].

Canadians want action. Polling by Environics Research during the election and more recently by Hill and Knowlton show most Canadians in every province want strict screening and licensing (88%). They want severe restrictions on access to handguns (62%). They want military weapons properly classified and prohibited (83%). And they want measures for tracking gun sales and controlling the illegal trade (80%) including 67% living in rural areas.

Gun control advocates are also on Parliament Hill calling on politicians to look at the evidence not the rhetoric and stand up for public safety in the face of the vocal, strident and emotional gun lobby. Public safety, violence against women experts, physicians,

police groups and victims of gun violence insist that strong regulation of firearms is critical to ensuring public safety for all Canadians, especially women and children. Quotes:

Colette Prevost, Director of Advocacy, YWCA Canada,

Firearms figure prominently in the cycle of violence against women and the evidence is clear – when firearms are present, women and their children are more likely to die. Controls over firearms are associated with a precipitous fall in murders of women with guns, without evidence of substitution effects. A gender lens is critical in advancing progressive firearms legislation in this country, – for every woman killed or injured with a firearm, thousands more live with the daily threat of such violence.”

Professor Martha Jackman, Co-Chair National Association of Women and the Law

“The Charter mandates an equality rights analysis of public safety issues, such as gun control, given the gendered difference in attitudes towards guns and their impact. Canada’s international human rights obligations also require governments to control firearms, to protect women and their families from gun violence. The United States government has been cowed by the gun lobby into abandoning its obligations to protect all of its citizens from unregulated guns. We cannot allow this to happen in Canada – our Constitution forbids it.”

Josée Madéia, Project Administrator, National Association of Women and the Law and family farmer in rural Quebec

People claim that the push for stronger gun laws is motivated by concerns about gun violence in large cities and ignores the concerns of rural Canadians. They could not be more wrong. In smaller communities, where there are more guns, there are higher rates of gun violence. In smaller communities there are also higher rates of gun death and injury. A higher priority needs to be placed on public safety. And politicians need to remember, women vote too.

Priscilla de Villiers, Victim Justice Network, mother of Nina who was abducted and killed with a legally-owned unrestricted rifle in Burlington, ON in 1991 (in spite of the fact the killer was out on bail on violence offenses).

Linda Silas, President, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

As a health care professional who grew up in New Brunswick, I want to reinforce the importance of effective regulation of firearms as part of a broad public health and safety strategy, particularly with respect to the safety of women and children. Too often this debate is framed in terms of “criminals” versus “law abiding gun owners” or as a struggle between urban and rural voices. The terrible truth is, according to our health statistics, where there are more firearms there is more opposition to gun control, but where there are more firearms, there are also higher rates of firearm death and injury. While much of the focus has been on handguns, a rifle or a shotgun in the hands of angry or disturbed individuals can also have tragic consequences.