

COALITION NEWS

Keeping you informed about the latest gun control developments

27 Years Since the Montreal Massacre, much remains to be done

Dear supporters of gun control,

This year as the 27th anniversary of the Montreal massacre approaches, we remember the 14 young women who died at Polytechnique in Montreal and reflect on what has happened since that fateful day December 6, 1989. We had some important victories - the passage of Bill C-17 improved screening for firearms acquisition certificates and banned some assault weapons; Bill C-68 introduced licensing and registration for all gun owners, banned some handguns and assault weapons, and defined safe storage. And we saw concrete reductions in firearm death and injury as a result. Murders of women with guns plummeted and so did suicides, particularly among youth. In 2000 we also won an important victory when the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously upheld the constitutionality of the law. But the last decade has been one setback after another and we have a lot of work to do to regain lost ground.

- Bill C-19 in 2012, which began the abolition of our Canadian firearms registry, the destruction of the records on more than 5 million rifles and shotguns or unrestricted firearms (except in the Province of Quebec which challenged the constitutionality of the law) and the elimination of important controls on the sales of these guns, controls which had been in place since 1977.
- Bill C-42 in 2015, which amended the Firearms Act and repealed some of its basic measures including authorizations to transport restricted firearms (handguns and some assault weapons) erosion of the authority of the Chief Provincial Firearms Officers over the ATF's but also licensing of gun owners and regulation of gun clubs; erosion of the powers of the RCMP to define prohibited firearms without political interference.

Even more, the rhetoric about gun control "punishing law abiding citizens" and being ineffective took root. References to the risks associated with firearms in suicide and violence against women were pretty much purged from the public record and the only focus was on illegal guns smuggled from the United States. Predictably, we are seeing signs that this is starting to take its toll.

[Is the last decade of relaxed controls increasing the illegal gun trade?](#)

A report just released from the Toronto Police Service shows that for the first time in decades, the majority of handguns recovered in crime in Canada's largest city originated in Canada not the USA (see article [here](#)). What does this mean? It is hard to say but it appears that the last decade's erosion of our gun laws is having a direct and measurable impact. **Over the last ten years the number of privately owned restricted weapons in Canada has almost doubled - there are more than 800,000 registered.** Every illegal gun begins as a legal gun and by doubling the stock of legal handguns while relaxing controls we increase the risk that legal guns will be sold illegally, stolen or diverted to illegal markets. The Coalition has been warning politicians about the impact of putting gun owner interests above public safety but our concerns have fallen on deaf ears (see

article [here](#)).

While the Liberals promised to undo some of the damage done by the Conservatives (while at the same time pledging not to reinstate the registration of rifles and shotguns), so far they have taken no action.



The Gun Lobby Remains Influential

In Canada the gun lobby continues to exercise more influence than it should and I worry that they results of the US election will reinforce gun control "chill" here. In the year since the Liberals were elected there has been no action at all on the excessively modest proposals in the Trudeau election platform. While explicitly refusing to tackle the registration of rifles and shotguns, they did promise to reverse the most egregious measures introduced by the Conservatives. But those seem to be far down on the list of priorities. And now the Conservative leadership candidates are parroting Trump trying to appeal to the same disaffected elements in Canada with inflated rhetoric. Quebec's Maxime Bernier is fanning the fears of gun owners "Without changing any laws, the Liberals could steal our property and make people criminals overnight...I don't believe that owning firearms makes you a criminal, or dangerous, or violent person," he wrote. "When I'm prime minister, firearms owners won't have to worry anymore."

There is little in the Liberal election commitments or even the Coalition platform that poses a "threat to gun owners" but everyone seems to be treading carefully for fear of enraging the gun lobby. Ralph Goodale, from Saskatchewan, is now the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. He knows from experience the trouble that can be made by the small but vocal and well-resourced gun lobby. Many of our long-time allies in government have moved onto other issues or given up. Many new Members of Parliament were children at the time of the Montreal Massacre, know little about gun control and appear to care even less. Firearms are pretty much off the crime agenda (except for smuggled guns). Firearms are absent in the discussions of violence against women. There is no focus on firearms in suicide or injury prevention strategies. **With your help, we can change that. But we need to mobilize support.**



Where do we currently stand?

The vast majority of Canadians want action. Polling by Environics Research during the election showed most Canadians in every province want strict screening and licensing. They want severe restrictions on access to handguns. They want military weapons properly classified and prohibited. And they want measures for tracking gun sales and controlling the illegal trade.

Many Canadian cities are worried about a rise of gun violence. While annual rates vary, **Toronto gun murders for 2016 are up 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). [Former PM Stephen Harper claimed these guns were "virtually banned"].
- Controls over the movement of handguns - the Authorizations to Transport (ATF) - were made meaningless with Bill C-42 and the **powers of the Provincial Firearms Officers to rigorously screen license holders, ATFs and gun shows were eroded.**
- There is no longer a requirement to verify firearm licenses when guns are sold and gun owners who do not renew their licenses, avoiding screening with an automatic 6

- month extension.
- Endless rhetoric about "punishing criminals and leaving law-abiding gun owners alone" as well as resource cuts, have **eroded screening and licensing provisions**. Murders of women, particularly in smaller communities, seldom make the front page of national newspapers but lax controls on firearms have played a role in dozens of recent cases.
 - A review by Alberta Court judge Marlene Graham of the death of Corey Lewis who died in a police standoff after assaulting his wife and son, noted **weaknesses in firearms licensing allowed him to possess five firearms in spite of a history of suicide attempts, and mental illness and a history of domestic violence**.
 - When suicides spike among populations where gun ownership is high, no one seems prepared to grapple with the question of access to firearms.
 - Semi-automatic assault weapons such as the Ruger Mini-14, used in the Montreal Massacre to kill 14 young women and injure many others are unrestricted and **therefore completely untraceable**. A licensed individual can acquire an unlimited number of these dangerous weapons without any records being kept. In 1989 gun sellers had to maintain manual records which is how the killer was identified. But this requirement no longer exists.
 - Most Canadians are shocked to learn that **New York State now has better controls on the sales of rifles and shotguns than most of Canada**. Since 1977, Canada required gun sellers to keep a record of who they sold unrestricted rifles and shotguns. When the registration of rifles and shotguns was ended and the records on 6m rifles and shotguns destroyed, **no measures were put in place to track the sales of rifles and shotguns**.
 - Along with the Ruger Mini 14, powerful sniper rifles are sold as unrestricted firearms. Assault weapons, which should be prohibited, are sold as restricted weapons. **The list of prohibited weapons desperately needs updating. But when the RCMP tried to get a powerful assault weapon off the market, they were slapped down by the Harper government**. And little progress has been made since then.
 - On September 29, 2013, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2117 encouraging states to fulfil their international commitments to **stop illicit gun trafficking, noting that the illegal trade is closely connected to terrorism, transnational organized crime, drug trafficking and many other illegal activities around the globe**. Yet Canada is still not in compliance with the major international agreements established to fight the illegal gun trade.
 - Resolution 2117 also called on states **"to take into account the particular needs of women and children"**. At the recent 65th Session of the UN Committee to End All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Barbra Schlifer Clinic (which led the 2012 Charter Challenge to defend the law) reiterated concerns about the lax gun laws in Canada on violence against women. When Canada's "feminist" Government reported on its obligations under to CEDAW Treaty, to take "all measures" "without delay" to protect women from violence committed by anyone within its borders, **it made no mention of gun control. We have lost our position as global leaders on this issue**.



What do we need?

The Liberals have been fresh and bold on many issues but so far gun control has not been one of them. Perhaps the Toronto results will serve as a wake-up call. The problem is not just smuggled guns! We need rigorous controls on all firearms. We just hope it will not take another devastating tragedy to get their full attention. As a minimum, the Trudeau Government must:

1. Reverse the measures passed in C-42 - restore authorizations to transport handguns, strict screening and routine licensing checks and verification when firearms are purchased.

2. Eliminate the amnesties for failure to renew licenses and reinstate strict screening measures on renewal as well as continuous eligibility checks.
3. Ban military assault weapons - update the prohibited and restricted lists consistent with the advice of police experts.
4. Establish as quickly as possible, a system to track all gun sales, reestablishing and modernizing measures that were introduced in 1977 but eliminated in 2005.
5. Put in place the necessary measures to allow Canada to ratify important international agreements - the OAS Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, explosives, the 2001 Program of Action on the Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms, the Marking and Tracing Agreement and CEDAW.
6. Restore detailed data analysis of firearms death, injury and crime; imports/exports, sources of firearms in crime to support research and track progress.
7. Embark on a national awareness program to highlight the risks associated with firearms in suicide, homicide and unintentional injuries, extending our Quebec firearm violence prevention initiative "Save a Life. Ask the question. Is there a gun?"
8. Reinstate evidence based approaches which consider firearms in the context not just of street crime but domestic violence and suicide. Provide open and transparent access to data on guns and gun ownership, firearms death and injury.
9. Bring back a comprehensive approach to preventing crime, domestic violence and suicide which recognizes the importance of effective gun control.
10. Bring experts on public safety, suicide prevention, crime prevention and prevention of violence against women back to the discussion table.

This December 6, please reaffirm your support for effective gun control in Canada. We need your help more than ever!

Please contact us for additional information. Together we can make a difference.

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You can also support the Coalition for Gun Control in its advocacy work by making a [donation](#).



Thank you for your prompt action and unstinting support!

The Coalition for Gun Control



Founded in the wake of the Montreal massacre, the **Coalition for Gun Control** is the only national non-profit organization working to reduce gun injury, death and crime in Canada. It is endorsed by more than 300 crime and injury prevention, health, women's safety, victims' rights, policing, grassroots and community organizations including the YWCA of Canada, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the families and victims of the École Polytechnique massacre and Dawson College shootings.

www.guncontrol.ca