

COALITION

for Gun Control / pour le contrôle des armes

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Montreal, May 18, 2006: Quebec public safety organizations vow to fight the Federal Government's plans to dismantle Canada's gun control system.

In response to the announcement Wednesday of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's plan to dismantle Canada's gun control system, Quebec's major public safety groups vowed to stand up for gun control. In response to gun lobby groups who have been aggressively lobbying and demonstrating, the Harper government announced plans, in the short term, to simply ignore gun owners who broke the law by failing to renew their firearm licenses or who were caught with unregistered rifles or shotguns. Harper plans to circumvent parliament and introduce an amnesty on the law. He also announced that he will refund or waive fees for re-licensing Canada's 2 million gun owners, at \$60 a license that could total \$120 million in forgone revenue. He also announced plans to formally dismantle the gun control system with a new law to be introduced in the fall. In the minority government it is not clear whether such a law would pass.

Said Denis Cote, President of the Fédération des policiers et policières municipaux du Québec: "The law is an important tool in our efforts to fight crime. We need controls on ALL firearms. Licensing gun owners helps reduce the chance dangerous people will get guns. Registration holds gun owners accountable for their firearms and reduces the chances legal guns will be sold illegally or stored improperly. The system helps support criminal investigations but it also is used to remove guns where there is a threat. Our members report many incidents where the system was used to prevent crime and to support investigations. We believe that the proposed changes to the law will jeopardize public safety and the safety of our officers."

"Police across the country are using the system 5000 times a day." said Yves Francoeur, President of the Fraternité des policiers et policières de la Ville de Montréal. Every time there is a tragedy involving guns, people ask "why did this happen?" "What can we do" To many of us the answer is obvious – keep guns away from dangerous people. In rural areas we see many tragedies involving rifles and shotguns. A rifle or a shotgun in the wrong hands is just as deadly as a handgun. Gun control is not the whole solution but it does reduce the risks that guns will be misused and that legal guns will enter illegal markets. The Government should be focused strengthening them. Dismantling our gun control system would be a step backwards.

Pierrette Michaud, of the Quebec Association of Public Health maintained: "While it is early to judge the impact of the law, gun death and injury are the lowest they have been in more than 30 years. Declines in suicides with firearms, domestic murders with firearms, robberies with firearms and homicides with rifles and shotguns are particularly dramatic over the past decade. The rates in Quebec have declined even more than in the rest of Canada. In this province public health has worked with other groups to ensure the law is effectively implemented. Our job is to find ways to prevent death and injury and this law is part of a comprehensive strategy. The Quebec Public Health Association fought to have this law introduced and we defended it all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. We will support all politicians in Quebec when they stand up for gun control."

Robert Simon of the Centre for Suicide Prevention indicated: "It's a myth to think that guns are an urban problem. I come from a rural area where rates of gun ownership are high and suicide, especially with rifles and shotguns, is a particular problem. We have worked hard in recent years to use the law effectively and to improve, for example, the storage of firearms. And these efforts have paid off. In our region, and across the province there have been significant reductions in firearm suicides. Controls on firearms save lives."

Catherine Bergeron, whose sister Genevieve was killed in the Montreal massacre said. "It is astonishing that 16 years after the massacre, and more than 10 years after the law passed, we are still having this debate. The law is working and has proved particularly valuable in reducing murders of women."

Wendy Cukier, President of the Coalition for Gun Control and a Professor at Ryerson University in Toronto concluded. "There was nothing in the Auditor General's Report that justifies dismantling the system. In fact, contrary to claims that she would find additional costs, she confirmed that the overall system cost slightly less than \$1 billion over 10 years. 2 million gun owners have been licensed. 7 million guns have been registered. Going forward it will cost about \$80 million a year. Eliminating the registration of rifles and shotguns will not save much money – about \$10 million a year. Without information about who owns what guns we do not have viable gun control. At the same time, the proposal to waive or refund renewal fees for 2 million gun owners (at \$60 each) could cost Canadians \$120 million in lost revenue. These proposals serve no purpose but to appease the powerful and vocal gun lobby. They will undermine safety."

Earlier in the week national organizations including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Professional Police Association, the Canadian Federation of University Women, Canadian Public Health Association and many others have expressed their concerns. More than 40 women's groups, including Fédération des femmes du Québec also oppose plans to dismantle the law. The Attorneys General of Ontario and Quebec have said they will fight the proposals.

Table 1 - Number of Firearm Deaths by Type, Quebec, 1990-2003

Source: Coroner of Quebec

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Suicides	344	304	302	292	297	279	294	291	294	259	221	205	188	166
Homicides	87	99	88	74	52	62	65	60	62	62	72	62	29	28
Accidents	15	11	12	8	9	3	5	9	4	7	4	7	4	10
Undetermined	14	11	14	16	5	3	3	1	2	3	9	5	3	2
Total	460	425	416	390	363	347	367	361	362	331	306	279	224	206

- Bill C-17 passed in 1991 – it strengthened the screening for Firearms Acquisition Certificates and improved storage
- Bill C-68 passed in 1995 – it required all gun owners to be screened and licensed and all guns to be registered.