

Let's Not Forget the Importance of Gun Control Laws Say Canadian Gun Victims

Press Release

(Toronto, January 16th, 2006) - Families of victims of gun crime and gun control experts gathered in Toronto today to remind Canadians about the high costs of gun violence to Canadian communities and the importance of strong gun control laws as part of any solution.

Susan Jessop, of Ottawa very recently lost her son Lee Matasi to gun violence in Vancouver. She said: "Lee was a talented young man who wanted to make the world a better place. He had already made his mark and had his whole future ahead of him when he was shot by a stranger on December 3 in Vancouver. Gun violence is a complex social problem which needs a comprehensive solution. Strong controls on firearms are part of that solution. The common denominator for all of us here today is that guns have killed our loved ones. Whatever government is elected must take decisive steps within their first 100 days. We won't be going forward if we begin by dismantling effective gun control laws."

Aidan Lumley, a successful athlete and Trent University student was killed after celebrating a friend's birthday at a club in Montreal November 27, 2005. His mother Elaine said "We need to enforce a complete ban on handguns and implement serious mandatory minimum sentences for illegal possession and gun crime. I see no legitimate purpose for a handgun in an urban environment. They are designed to kill. People caught in possession of ILLEGAL handguns have to be treated as potential killers. They cannot be granted bail. Too many murders are being committed by those out on bail. We need zero tolerance for ILLEGAL handguns and gun related crime."

Sarfraz Shah was out with his cousins when he was senselessly shot and killed in Toronto August 13, 2005. His cousin Shahzad Shah said "The impact of gun violence is not measured by statistics. Sarfraz's death left a 22 year-old widowed, a 6 week old baby orphaned and a family and community devastated. "We are committed to making Canada safer and strong gun laws are essential. We need strong controls on all guns to prevent legal guns from entering the illegal market. Gun owners need to be accountable for their firearms and safe storage laws need to be enforced. There should be inspections to ensure gun owners comply with the law. We also support increasing penalties for gun related offenses. It is very important, however, to strike at the roots of violence. I have a five year-old and have seen first hand some of the appalling conditions other children his age live in. We must invest in children and in youth to prevent them from growing up and joining gangs. If we just wait until after they have committed crimes it is too late."

Audette Shephard whose only son, 19 year old Justin Shephard was murdered June 2001 is the founder of United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere (UMOVE). "As a community, we need to work together on integrated solutions. Regardless of colour, creed or race, we need to come together. When we come together we aspire, and together we will achieve. It is critical to strike at the root causes of violence and the culture of violence. But guns are also part of the problem. My son's murder has never been solved. I don't know who killed him or where they got the gun. But guns are symbols of power for youth on the margins and we must make them less available. Clearly it is not a simple matter but certainly the solution is more rather than less gun control."

Karen Vanscoy, of St. Catharines added "My daughter Jasmine was only 14 years old when she was shot to death in our home by a young offender with a stolen hand gun on September 24, 1996. The case did raise many issues about the justice system that need to be corrected but we must also make it harder for guns to fall into the wrong hands. I have heard claims that

handguns are already banned, but with an estimated half million in circulation, clearly they are not. I have heard claims that smuggled guns are the only problem. Clearly they are not. Legal guns are often used in cases of domestic violence or disturbed individuals who commit violence. All illegal guns begin as legal guns. We have heard about a number of thefts from gun collectors who have dozens of guns. Strong controls over guns in Canada are an important part of the solution. Violence against women is a serious concern and legally owned guns are often used. I have been involved in this issue now for almost a decade and remain concerned that often the interests of gun owners are considered over our rights to be safe. The power of the gun lobby should not be underestimated. It is astonishing that after all this time we still have to defend Canada's gun laws. The Conservatives want to dismantle Canada's gun registry should they be elected. This is a grave error and giant step backward in Canada's efforts to address gun violence. Screening and licensing gun owners and registering firearms are necessary to make gun owners accountable and to promote a culture of safety around the use of these weapons"

A statement from Priscilla deVilliers, victims rights advocate for almost 15 years could not attend but provided the following statement "My daughter Nina was killed in 1991 by a man with a legally owned rifle. The inquest into my daughter's death called for the licensing of ALL gun owners and the registration of ALL guns as did five other coroner inquests. Rifles and shotguns in the wrong hands are just as lethal as handguns. Strong gun control laws are only one piece of the puzzle but they are critical. We fought all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to defend our gun laws and we are not going to stop now. Gun violence is like cancer. When you have cancer you need decisive interventions – and we need a strong enforcement and justice system response to the recent surge in gangs and guns. At the same time we know prevention is the key. We need to address root causes and we need to choke of the supply of guns with strong gun control."

"We have been working with victims of gun violence now for 16 years. And we know that that gun violence takes many forms. said Wendy Cukier, volunteer President of the Coalition for Gun Control and a Professor at Ryerson University, "Gang violence with guns is very different from domestic violence with guns but in all cases, controlling access to handguns, shotguns and rifles is an essential part of an effective strategy," While the recent Toronto murders were committed with handguns, a substantial portion of the illegal guns recovered from gangs are rifles and shotguns, half of the murders of Canadian police officers are with hunting rifles (including constable Gignac murdered recently in Laval). Strong gun laws, including licensing and registration of ALL gun owners, are essential. And we need measures to control cross border smuggling.." Cukier will be attending the UN meeting on the illegal gun trade in New York later this week.

The Liberals, NDP and Bloc have all committed to maintaining laws implemented in 1995 that require the licensing and registration of rifles and shotguns. The Liberals have gone further and have called for a ban on all handguns and both the Bloc and NDP have said they will consider it. The Conservatives erroneously claim there is a "virtual ban on handguns" already in place and have promised to defend gun owner "rights". They have also announced that they will repeal Canada's 1995 gun control law and dismantle the system for licensing and registration of all guns. Currently there are four year mandatory sentences for specific gun related crimes but they are often not applied. There are also criminal penalties for smuggling guns but often people bringing guns into Canada are charged under the Customs Act. All parties have pledged to increase penalties for gun crimes, strengthen border controls and invest in primary prevention to varying degrees.

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Additional background at
www.guncontrol.ca