

GUNS: THE GLOBAL CRISIS



Worldwide, 1000 people die every day from gunshots, and three times as many are severely injured. Spinal cords severed, bones shattered, families destroyed, hearts broken.

If 1000 people a day were dying from a global epidemic of bird flu, the world would sit up and take notice. But the numbers are not being joined up; a high school massacre in Finland is seen as totally unrelated to a suicide in Switzerland, gang violence in Britain or armed rape in Sudan. The common denominator is the type of weapon involved.

There are an estimated 875 million guns in the world today

- 74% of guns are in civilian hands;
- Of the estimated 1000 deaths by gunshot each day, around 250 occur in a war or armed conflict;
- Nine out of ten people shot dead are boys or young men.

Almost all guns are bought and sold, owned and used by men. And guns kill and injure more men than women. But women suffer heavy consequences from the presence of guns in their homes, communities and countries.

- Guns do not have to be fired to cause harm, they can be used to threaten and intimidate;
- A gun in the home increases the chance of domestic violence being lethal;
- Guns exacerbate the threat to women of male sexual violence in war and peace;
- Women shoulder support and care when male relatives are killed or disabled by gun violence;
- They suffer 'indirect' negative impacts from gun crime, eg: stress on social and public services;
- The failure to decommission guns after war impedes the transition to a secure everyday life;
- Widespread gun ownership by men and boys conditions society to mistakenly regard violence as a natural and necessary element of masculinity.

Curb the international arms trade

Despite their massive contribution to total violent death and injury globally, the international trade in guns and other conventional weapons, such as tanks and torture equipment, is poorly regulated. The British Government is active in seeking a global Arms Trade Treaty that could be a step towards curbing the international trade in conventional weapon, including guns. Why then is the UK still the world's second biggest arms exporter? Why does the government subsidise the UK arms industry? Why are licences still given for sales to countries known for human rights abuses? Why does the Ministry of Defence sponsor the biennial Defence Systems and Equipment International Exhibition at which UK manufacturers of small (and large) arms showcase their goods with those of other arms-producing countries? Guns are among the most popular commodities at this arms trade 'fair'. Buyers include some of the poorest, most war-torn and least democratic states on earth.

Find out more from: *Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT)*, www.caat.org.uk; *Disarm DSEI*, www.dsei.org; *International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)*, www.iansa.org

Strengthen the law controlling the availability of guns in Britain

British law now bans the sale of handguns. However, airguns and imitation guns are involved in at least two thirds of recorded gun offences in England, Wales and Scotland. Airguns are potentially lethal weapons which continue to injure, maim and even kill victims and are responsible for nearly a quarter of all serious gun injuries. Realistic-looking imitation firearms have been increasingly used in criminal activity to intimidate innocent members of the public (a 6-fold rise in offences between 1999-2006 in England and Wales). On 1 October 2007 key measures in the Violent Crime Reduction Act that restrict the availability of airguns and imitation guns were finally implemented but serious concerns remain, including:

- Defending the reasons for purchase of realistic imitation guns which have created significant loopholes;
- The failure to introduce a licensing system for airguns.

More information from: *Don't Trigger Campaign*, www.dont-trigger.com; *Gun Control Network*, www.gun-control-network.org; *Mothers Against Guns*, www.mothersagainstguns.net

YOU ARE NOT POWERLESS! Give this leaflet to a friend. Sign our letter to the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown. Get more information from one of the organisations listed above. Support their campaigns.

Today's vigil, organized jointly by Women in Black and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), is part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, 25 November - 10 December that mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its role in advancing women's human rights. Women around the world are joining the campaign to raise awareness of how gun violence is affecting them, and their countries and communities.

**Women in Black, C/o The Maypole Fund, PO Box 14072, London N16 5WB
www.womeninblack.org.uk**

Women in Black holds vigils every Wednesday between 6-7 pm at the Edith Cavell Statue, opposite the National Portrait Gallery, St.Martin's Place, London WC2. The vigils are silent, women-only and if possible we wear black.