

Health care experts say eliminating the registration of rifles and shotguns will put health and safety of Canadians at risk

Ottawa, ON, April 28, 2010: Today twenty-eight medical, nursing, allied health and suicide prevention organizations and thirty-three professionals in the same fields, released an open letter to Members of Parliament in order to underscore the importance of the gun registry in helping to prevent domestic murders, accidents and suicides.

National groups including the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions and the Canadian Association of Adolescent Health as well as provincial groups including the Ontario Public Health Association and the Quebec Public Health Association signed a joint letter which underscores the risks firearms present to the health and safety of Canadians and the need for rigorous controls.

At a press conference to publicly release the letter, **Dr. Alan Drummond from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians** and an assistant coroner in Perth, Ontario, said: "As a rural emergency physician and coroner, I can safely say that I've never seen a handgun injury. I have however seen my share of injuries and deaths inflicted by rifles and shotguns. I have felt the pain of investigating a double murder-suicide as a result of escalating domestic violence. Suicide, contrary to public opinion, is often an impulsive gesture. Keeping guns away from depressed people is essential. In the assaults and murders I have seen that have involved guns, the perpetrators acted on impulse and the unsafely stored long gun was readily available. Gun-related injury is not just a Toronto problem that involves gangs. It has occurred in my small idyllic rural community and involved people that would otherwise seem quite normal. Registration of firearms is important to ensure accountability and compliance with safe storage."

Debra Lynkowski, CEO of the Canadian Public Health Association, concurred: "For almost twenty years the Canadian Public Health Association has advocated for stronger gun laws including the licensing of all gun owners and registration of firearms because of their potential to prevent death and injury. We are seeing encouraging results from Canada's progressive gun laws. Firearm related deaths in Canada have reached a 30 year low and of particular note is the dramatic decline in the misuse of rifles and shotguns, the target of the 1977, the 1991 and the 1995 legislation."

Dr. Barbara Kane, Staff Psychiatrist, Prince George Regional Hospital Department of Family Practice said in her personal statement: "As a rural physician, I rely on the registry on a regular basis to help police remove firearms from dangerous and suicidal patients. I have personally been involved in a number of cases where it proved its value. Suggestions that it is 'worthless' are without basis."

Linda Silas, President of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions said: "The Government claims licensing is sufficient to keep Canadians safe. However, the registration of Canada's seven million rifles and shotguns is essential to enforcing gun owner accountability and to keeping firearms away from dangerous or unbalanced people. That is why the Supreme Court of Canada said: 'The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the Firearms Act are both tightly linked to Parliament's goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme.' We are calling on our Members of Parliament to put public safety over politics and defeat Bill C-391 which will repeal the registration of rifles and shotguns."

Lucie Thibodeau, President of the Quebec Public Health Association added, "In the Province of Quebec, the rates of death in rural communities are much higher than in big cities because

firearms are more easily available. A rifle or a shotgun in the hands of angry or disturbed individuals can also have tragic consequences. The licensing of gun owners and registration of firearms has been a key part of our injury prevention strategy with significant results. In fact, our association fought for this law all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. We are urging Members of Parliament to do the right thing for public health and reject Bill C-391: It is imperative that each and every Member of Parliament that believes in prevention vote against this legislation. Every vote counts.”

The letter stresses:

- most firearm deaths in Canada are suicides and the guns most often used are rifles and shotguns.
- when firearms are available, domestic homicides are more likely to involve multiple victims and end in suicide.
- gun related deaths have been reduced since the latest waves of legislative reforms were introduced.
- the greatest progress is in the deaths associated with rifles and shotguns — weapons that have been subject to most of the new measures.
- licensing works hand in hand with firearm registration to keep legal guns in the hands of legal gun owners. Because it allows guns to be traced back to their last legal owner, registration helps prevent illegal sales or straw purchases to unlicensed (and potentially dangerous) individuals.
- registration also helps police with the temporarily removal of firearms in households where there may be a risk for suicide or violence.
- this is why the Supreme Court maintained that the registration component is critical to enforcing licensing provisions and cannot be severed from the system.

The letter concludes: “As health professionals, we know the importance of investing in prevention, whether in road safety or prevention of infectious diseases. We cannot easily measure prevention, but we can certainly measure the effects of ignoring it. Six different coroner’s inquests recommended the licensing of gun owners and registration of all firearms. Indeed, our daily practice informs us of the very real risks associated with firearms and of the value of a strong gun control law. That is why we must speak out against Bill C-391, the private member’s bill currently before the House of Commons which aims to abolish the long gun registry.”

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To view the statement from the Canadian Health Organizations about Firearms Control and Injury Prevention, please visit: <http://www.aspq.org/DL/Declarationang.pdf>.

Contacts:

Nadine Lunt for Dr. Alan Drummond, Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians 613-276-5868

Jim Chauvin, Canadian Public Health Association 613-725-3769, ext. 160

Linda Silas, Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions 613-526-4661

Dr. Barbara Kane, Psychiatrist, Prince George (B.C.) 250-564-1152