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The Newsletter of the Canadian Firearms Centre
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In Sight Bulletin No. 3(PDF format 96 KB). Try the Adobe download page if you do not have a PDF reader!.

U.N. study shows international cooperation the answer to firearm misuse

When it comes to keeping firearms out of the wrong hands, an international study has shown that international cooperation is the answer because no country acting alone can do the job. The United Nations International Study on Firearm Regulation also shows that many other countries around the world share Canada's deep concern about the risk that firearms pose when they fall into the hands of criminals.

James Hayes, of the Canadian Firearms Centre (CFC) observed that firearms misuse is a complex problem with no easy answers. "However," said Hayes, "I find it interesting that in the United Kingdom, which has very strict regulations on firearm ownership, the rate of firearm homicide per 100,000 population is only one-fifth Canada's. The United States, which has uneven regulation of firearms from state to state, has a firearm homicide rate that is ten times Canada's."

"Canada is not alone with its new firearms regulations," added Hayes, who coordinated the

international project team, "the survey shows that many countries have taken steps to improve their regulations over the last five years."

The study, which was completed within 14 months, is the first of its kind. Forty-six countries, representing two-thirds of the world's population, all world regions, and a cross section of developed and developing countries, responded to the detailed questionnaire.

"In Canada, we are interested in how much commonality of approach there is around the world," says the CFC's **Tony Dittenhoffer**, a research expert with the international team. "This survey gives us a birds-eye view of what countries have been doing regarding firearms regulation."

Crossing borders — international concerns

A major frustration for many of the countries that participated in the U.N. study is the illegal trafficking of firearms across international borders, made possible by weak firearm regulation in some countries. "Guns originally used for military purposes very quickly cross borders in civilian hands after conflicts, often through criminal networks," says Hayes. "There are strong concerns around the world about smuggled arms and how they relate to organized crime and illegal drugs." In Canada, the federal government and the province of Ontario have formed a Core Group to combat the illegal movement of firearms. The Core Group will support cooperation among law enforcement agencies, share information on illegal firearms, and target specific areas where firearm trafficking is suspected. The provinces of Quebec and British Columbia are expected to join this initiative soon.

Hayes says the U.N. study showed that import and export controls are not enough on their own to restrict the smuggling of firearms. According to the report, more consistent regulations are required worldwide to combat the problem. Law-enforcement agencies also need to trade information on the illegal movement of firearms and cooperate in tracing firearms. Hayes says the survey will help in the development of international policies to deal with firearm-related crime and public safety problems.

The study showed that all of the participating countries regulate firearms to some extent. Most recognize that firearms have several legitimate civilian uses, such as hunting or target-shooting. And many countries reported that they have undertaken significant policy or program initiatives within the last five years to further protect their citizens from the criminal and violent misuse of firearms.

The U.N. responds...

The resulting draft report provided valuable input for developing policy recommendations, which were used as the basis for a U.N. resolution sponsored by Australia, Japan, Canada, and Mexico, and co-sponsored by 33 countries representing Africa, South America, Europe and Asia.

According to Hayes, "The survey is an ongoing process. Other countries have been invited to submit their responses by September 30 this year, so we can expect a revised version after that date." In the meantime, Hayes noted, Canada has an obligation to comply with the recommendations that have already been made.

Recommendations from the U.N. resolution, **'Measures to Regulate Firearms':**

Member nations should:

- consider implementing **regulations on firearms**, including safety and storage rules, appropriate penalties for firearms offences, amnesty programs, licensing systems, and record-keeping systems;

- promote bilateral, regional and **international cooperation**, particularly with regard to smuggling and technical assistance;
- ask Interpol to develop a **standard, international system** for classifying and identifying firearms; and
- encourage other international organizations like the World Customs Organization and the World Health Organization to undertake work on the trade of firearms and the **exchange of firearm information**.

Justice Minister accepts House of Commons Recommendations

Responding to recommendations from a parliamentary committee, the Justice Minister recently agreed to amend the draft regulations on firearms to simplify procedures and lower costs for certain individuals and businesses.

In February 1997, the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs presented 39 recommendations on how to improve the draft regulations, which had been tabled in November 1996. Amendments to the draft regulations include making fees for visitors who come to Canada with firearms payable only once a year, instead of every 60 days, and reducing certain fees and the cost of some business licences. This will be of benefit to the motion-picture industry and the import-export industry, among others.

Other amendments include treating most reproductions of antique firearms as antiques, not firearms. In this way, these reproductions will be exempt from all except the safe-storage provisions of the Firearms Act. The federal government will also work with the provinces and territories to ensure that Canadians' privacy is well protected across the country when they provide information for firearms permits and register their firearms. The federal government will also attempt to clarify or simplify many of its administrative procedures related to privacy.

Before making its recommendations, the Standing Committee heard from representatives of such groups as the motion-picture industry, hunters, historical re-enactors, manufacturers, museums, Aboriginal people, public-health bodies, and Chief Provincial Firearms Officers.

Building an International Consensus

While Canada played a leadership role in the new United Nations international study on firearm regulation, the CFC's **Tony Dittenhoffer**, a research expert with the project team, says the team members worked hard to ensure that the study reflected the consensus of all countries.

"The study and its recommendations are the product of a lot of collective work and collective thinking," says Dittenhoffer. "And the leadership role Canada played was essential to achieving the consensus."

The CFC's **James Hayes**, coordinator of the international project team, recalls how each U.N. member country was "very interested" in the study's contents. "Every page of the study gives new information on this subject," he says. "The survey results give governments a valuable instrument to use as a basis for regulating the misuse of firearms. The survey is also a good starting point for those involved in research and policy work—it shows them what questions to ask."

The idea for the survey was born in May 1995, at the Ninth U.N. Congress in Cairo, when Japan put forward a resolution asking for an international study to find out what regulatory and administrative controls exist in various countries to deter illegal activities involving firearms. The resolution

received the unanimous support of the 138 countries represented at the Congress.

For a copy of the *Government Response to the Eighth Report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs* , which describes the amendments to the firearm regulations, call 1-800-731-4000.

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