April 1, 2008

His Worship Mayor Fred Eisenberger
71 Main Street West
2nd Floor
Hamilton, Ontario
L8P 4Y5

Fred

Dear Mayor Eisenberger:

I am very concerned about gun violence in Toronto and other cities in Ontario and the rest of Canada. Handguns are used in violent crime and homicide, perpetuate cycles of violence, and contribute to a significant number of injuries, accidental deaths and suicides. The presence of guns on our streets creates obstacles for our youth and the development and growth of our neighbourhoods and business centres. I am asking that we work together to remove this threat and ban handguns across Canada.

I have enclosed my letter to the Prime Minister seeking his leadership and action from the Government of Canada to enact a handgun ban, and to stop the smuggling of handguns into Canada. This will include convincing the United States to strengthen U.S. gun controls, and additional anti-gun smuggling border security efforts to stop the flow of guns entering our country and making their way onto our streets.

I am asking for your support and that of the Big City Mayor’s Caucus and Mayor and Regional Chairs of Ontario. By working together we can act on a comprehensive strategy to address the impacts of gun violence, and provide a persuasive voice to move other orders of government and key stakeholders to take the necessary action.

Again, I hope you will work with me for a federal handgun ban. I look forward to hearing your views on this matter.

Yours truly,

Mayor David Miller
City of Toronto

encl. Letter to the Prime Minister
Update Toronto Gun Violence Strategy
March 26, 2008

Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

I am writing to ask that your government take immediate action to ban handguns in Canada.

Handguns have become more than just a violent threat to the safety and security of Canadians. These deadly weapons have scarred our neighbourhoods with the loss of too many lives and increasingly endanger the health and vitality of proud communities across Canada.

It is time to banish handguns from our nation.

Here, in the City of Toronto, we are committed to making our safe city safer. We have put 450 more police officers on the streets and in our neighbourhoods. The Toronto Antiviolence Interventions Strategy (TAVIS) is producing positive results. And through the Community Safety Plan established in March, 2004, we are balancing enforcement with crime prevention programs. We are investing in youth and building on the strengths in our communities. We are creating partnerships with all sectors of our city to ensure that every young person has a chance to succeed.

Our approach is working. We take pride in the fact crime is down in every major category. Except gun murders.

Torontonians are too often reminded of the threat of handguns. They know too well that the availability of these weapons - even those legally-owned, licensed and registered - can perpetuate incidents of violence. Torontonians want something done to confront and overcome this major obstacle to making their safe city safer. Residents of cities right across Canada are of a like mind.

The Government of Canada must take action to address gun violence and to assure Canadians that individuals and families are safe and our communities are secure. In addition to a domestic handgun ban, the federal government must assume the leadership needed to stop the flow of foreign handguns into the country. This will require convincing the Government of the United States to impose further gun controls within its jurisdiction. Furthermore the federal government must work to strengthen anti-gun smuggling border security to stop the flow of guns entering our country and making their way onto our streets.
I am personally working to build partnerships with other governments and key stakeholders in the cause of public safety. These partnerships are necessary if we are to address the complex international and domestic causes of gun violence and better understand the negative impact it has on our communities. With this in mind, I am writing to all federal party leaders to secure their support.

To close, I again ask that you commit yourself and your government to safe streets for all Canadians. With your leadership, handguns can be banned in Canada and our border security can be strengthened to prevent them from being smuggled here. With your leadership, the Government of Canada will show that it stands firm on public safety and security.

Yours truly,

Mayor David Miller
City of Toronto
I am committed to making our safe City safer. We have put 450 more police officers on the streets. And we're addressing the root causes of violence through our Community Safety Plan. The strategy is working. Crime is down and young people in priority neighbourhoods are benefiting from the creation of thousands of jobs, training and recreational opportunities.

But Toronto continues to face unacceptable incidents of gun violence. These cannot be fully addressed without a total ban on handguns. This ban is an integral part the action plan that has been developed to fulfill my mandate to make Toronto an even safer City. This report updates Council on the actions taken so far. It was developed to meet the following objectives:

- A handgun ban
- Tougher crime legislation for illegal gun use
- Increased anti-gun smuggling security at the Canada-U.S. border
- Stronger U.S. gun controls
- Continue community-based prevention and youth opportunity development

A staff report detailing the comprehensive strategy will be brought forward in June.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mayor recommends that:

Executive Committee receive this report for information

Financial Impact

The recommendations carry no financial impact on the City of Toronto.
ISSUE BACKGROUND

As members of Toronto Council know, I am a long time supporter and advocate for a handgun ban in Canada. In my platform document, “Toronto 2010: Vision of a Great City”, I committed to making our safe city safer through the delivery of a number of initiatives, including: calling on the federal government to ban handguns and all semi-automatic weapons, advocating for tougher crime laws for anyone who commits a crime while in possession of a gun, stronger anti-gun smuggling border security, and to continue the successful Toronto Police Service’s Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy.

Gun violence in Toronto affects us all. Each time someone is murdered or injured as a result of gunfire, or threatened with a gun, it causes untold grief to families, creates instability in our neighbourhoods, impedes the development of our business centres, and diminishes trust in the institutions that govern society. Unfortunately the people of Toronto have become too familiar with the ugly realities of gun violence and the complex socio-economic conditions that perpetuate this destructive behaviour. Although we are proud when we hear media reports of how safe Toronto is, as in the recent Maclean’s “Most dangerous cities in Canada” report, we do not lose sight of the ongoing challenges of gun violence. The City of Toronto is taking action to address the root causes of gun violence and to get the guns off our streets. A key component is the following strategy.

A Handgun Ban

The federal government has jurisdiction over the legislation that governs firearms, the Firearms Act, and the Criminal Code. Under this legislation, firearms are classified under three broad categories: prohibited, restricted, and non-restricted (rifles and shotguns). Still, all types of firearms can be legally possessed by residents in Canada under terms and conditions set out by the legislation. Currently there are 632,559 legally registered, restricted, and prohibited weapons in Canada. Many gun owners possess more than one gun.

Large cities face considerable public health and safety risks because of legal gun ownership. Guns contribute to a significant number of injuries, accidental deaths and suicides. Guns are used against women and children in incidents of domestic violence and are used in other violent crimes and homicides. Canada ranks fifth among industrialized countries in the rate of firearms deaths among children under the age of 14.

A major source of illegal firearms in Canada is theft from domestic sources1. This means that firearms are primarily obtained illegally from residential and commercial break-and-enters where legal guns are stored. Members of organized crime are known to identify and target firearms owners, in particular those with large collections.


Update on Toronto Gun Violence Strategy 2
Even more, handguns have become the weapon of choice for criminals in Canada. In 2006, Canadian police services reported just over 8,100 victims of violent gun crime, ranging from assault to robbery and homicide. Handguns made up nearly two-thirds of all firearms used in firearms-related violent crimes since 1998. Toronto experienced the highest number of victims of firearm-related violent crimes in 2006, in Canada, one-quarter of all firearm-related victimizations. In 2006, 1,993 people in the Toronto CMA were victims of a violent offence related to guns.

I have taken action to pressure the federal government to enact a handgun ban. I have recently sent letters to the Prime Minister and federal opposition leaders calling for a federal handgun ban. In January, I met with Ontario Attorney General Chris Bentley and we agreed to work together towards a gun ban. On March 3, he and Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services Rick Bartolucci met with federal Ministers Rob Nicholson and Stockwell Day to seek tougher federal gun laws, including a ban on handguns; noting “with almost 194,000 registered handguns in Ontario, there are thousands of opportunities for theft and abuse.”

The federal government does not support a handgun ban. Their position holds that there are sufficient controls in place to direct the ownership and use of handguns in Canada. I am prepared to convince them otherwise.

**Tougher crime legislation for illegal gun use**

On November 23, 2006 in Toronto, I stood with the Premier in support of the Prime Minister as the federal government introduced new bail reform legislation. Last September, I wrote to the Prime Minister and the federal opposition leaders, urging them to reintroduce crime legislation reform into the current parliamentary agenda. In February, I wrote to Senator Joan Fraser, Chair of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, where Bill C-2 “Tackling Violent Crime Act” was being heard, to recommend passage.

On February 28, Bill C-2 received royal assent, amending the Criminal Code by:
- creating two new firearm offences and providing escalating mandatory sentences of imprisonment for serious firearm offences
- strengthening the bail provisions for those accused of serious offences involving firearms and other regulated weapons
- providing for more effective sentencing and monitoring of dangerous and high-risk offenders

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1 Statistics Canada (2008), The Daily February 20, 2008 “Study: Firearms and violence Crime: 2006” Ottawa: Minister of Industry
2 The following facts are derived from Daouerger and De Socio (2008) Firearms and Violent Crime Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE, Vol. 28, no. 2, Ottawa: Minister of Industry
3 Ibid.

*Update on Toronto Gun Violence Strategy* 3
Increased anti-gun smuggling security at the Canada-U.S. border

In my recent letter to the Prime Minister, I requested the federal government strengthen border security to stem the illicit trafficking of guns across the border. Smuggled firearms across the Canada-U.S. border is another major source of illegal firearms in Canada\(^6\). I have consulted with Chief Blair and Alok Mukherjee, Chair of the Toronto Police Services (TPS) on this subject, and they concur with the seriousness of the issue. The Toronto Police Services Board has called on the Prime Minister to ban handguns. Approximately two-thirds of the guns seized by the TPS enter Canada illegally across the Canada-U.S. border. I highlighted this problem with Ontario Attorney General Chris Bentley who has subsequently called on the federal government for increased anti-gun smuggling security at the border.\(^7\)

The sheer size of physical geography between ports of entry, and the rough and remote unattended border crossings, invites exploitation of cross border movement by criminal entrepreneurs and organizations to smuggle firearms across the border.\(^8\) Firearms are moved across international borders to support criminal organizations and individual criminals in their illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, self-protection, intimidation and, as a symbol of status.

Tackling these issues will require a coordinated effort involving, among other agencies, the RCMP, Canada Border Services, and provincial and municipal police services.

Stronger U.S. gun controls

Any strategy to stem the flow of illicit guns onto our streets must address the varying degrees of gun control enforced by U.S. states. Canada’s gun laws are seriously undermined by the close proximity of U.S. states that provide easier access to guns. Each of the fifty states has its own constitution and laws regarding guns. Most of the states’ constitutions provide for some form of state-level right to keep and bear arms. This discrepancy leads to conditions where firearms can be easily and legally acquired in the U.S. and then illegally diverted to criminal groups and individuals in Canada. Considerable support will be needed to pressure the U.S. government to deal with this troubling situation.

My letter to the Prime Minister requests the federal government pressure the U.S. government for stronger gun controls. I raised this issue while meeting with Ambassador Michael Wilson in January. Recently, I held a meeting with Canadian and American organizations that advocate for stronger U.S. gun controls to better understand the issues and to inform Toronto’s strategy. Groups included the: Coalition for Gun Control, Joyce Foundation, Violence Policy Center, Legal Community Against Violence, and the Harvard School of Public Health. Also in attendance was Chief Scott Knight, International Association of Chiefs of Police and Firearms Committee. The support of these groups will give weight to future Toronto action and requests to other governments.


\(^7\) Ibid

\(^8\) See reference #6

Update on Toronto Gun Violence Strategy 4
Toronto can make a valuable contribution by working with efforts by U.S. organizations to impose gun controls.

I have also been involved with the U.S. Mayors Against Illegal Guns Coalition. This organization, which is co-chaired by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, and aligns more than 250 mayors across the U.S., is working to share best practices, develop innovative policies, and support legislation at the national, state, and local levels to help law enforcement target illegal guns.

**Continued community-based prevention and youth opportunity development**

The availability of guns in our city carries a hefty social cost. Access to a gun, whether in the home or on the street, creates unsafe and unstable environments. Guns perpetuate cycles of violence, including violence against women and children. Guns create obstacles to education and economic growth. Youth victimized by guns or convicted of using a gun have difficulty advancing through school or obtaining gainful employment. Neighbourhoods experiencing gun violence confront serious obstacles to economic development and growth.

As you know, the City of Toronto is committed to making our safe city even safer. We have put 450 more officers on our streets and in our neighbourhoods. The work of the Toronto Police Service’s Toronto Antiviolence Interventions Strategy (TAVIS) is producing positive results. Through our Community Safety Plan, which was established in March, 2004, we are balancing enforcement with prevention, investing in youth, building on the strengths in our neighbourhoods and building partnerships with all sectors of our city, to ensure that every young person has a chance to succeed. Crime is down in every major category, except gun murders.

Our commitment to carrying out these programs and collaborating with community groups across the City will continue; in particular our focus on creating opportunities for youth. Police-reported data show that among young people, the use of guns in violent crime is increasing. The rate of youth aged 12 to 17 accused of a firearm-related offence has risen in three of the past four years. In 2006, police reported 1,287 youth accused of a firearm-related violent offence, 32% higher than in 2002, and its highest point since 1998\(^9\).Toronto’s 2006 rate of youth accused of a firearm-related violent crime is 96.2%, well above the national average (55.5) and higher than all other CMAs\(^{10}\).

**Further action**

In a recent meeting of the Mayor’s Panel on Making a Safe City Safer, the topic of guns was discussed at length. Much support was given for a community-based approach to raise awareness and for continued prevention efforts. As a result, I am working with

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\(^9\) See reference #3

\(^{10}\) The rate equals the number of youth accused of a firearm-related violent crime by the total number of youth accused of violent crime; for citation see reference #2

Update on Toronto Gun Violence Strategy 5
others to build a coalition of individuals and organizations across the city to publicly support a call for a handgun ban.

While advocacy for a handgun ban must be focused on the federal government, City staff are preparing options for City-based measures to address gun violence, including a thorough analysis of possible legal measures that the City could put in place to impose gun controls within its own jurisdiction. I have asked for this paper to come forward to Executive Committee in June.

I will also be distributing this report to the Premier of Ontario, the Ontario Attorney General, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Big City Mayors’ Caucus, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Regional Chairs and Single-Tier Mayors of Ontario (MARCO), and the Large Urban Mayor’s Caucus of Ontario (LUMCO).

CONTACT

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(416)-338-7131

SIGNATURE

Mayor David Miller

ATTACHMENTS

- Gun Violence in Canada
- “Ontario Justice Ministers Call On Federal Government To Get Tough On Gun Crime” News Release, Comprehensive Strategy
Mayor Miller's Update on Toronto Gun Violence Strategy  
Executive Committee, April 7, 2008  
Attachment One: Gun Violence in Canada

Statistics Canada reports that gun violence in Canada has remained stable, but more young people are using weapons. They state that in 2006,

"Canadian police services reported just over 8,100 victims of violent gun crime, ranging from assault to robbery and homicide, accounting for 2.4% of all victims of violence. Handguns made up nearly two-thirds of all firearms used. [...]"

Police-reported data showed that among young people, the use of guns in violent crime is increasing. The rate of youth aged 12 to 17 accused of a firearm-related offence has risen in three of the past four years, increasing 32% since 2002."¹

Handguns have become the weapon of choice for firearm murders, as the use of handguns surpassed rifles or shotguns for the first time in 1991, according to Statistics Canada.

There has been an 86% decrease in the rate of homicide involving rifles or shotguns between 1975 and 2006, but the rate of homicide involving handguns remained relatively stable.

By 2006, three times as many victims were killed with a handgun than with a rifle or shotgun.

It is no surprise that Canada's firearms homicide rate is lower than the U.S. However it should be unsettling to learn that Canada's firearms homicide rate is higher than Australia, England and Wales².

In 2006, Canada's firearm-related homicide rate (0.58) was nearly six times lower than the United States (3.40), but three times higher than the rate in Australia (0.22) and six times higher than the rate in England and Wales (0.10).

Firearms accounted for one-third (31%) of all homicides in Canada, approximately two-thirds

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(68%) in the U.S., 16% in Australia and 7% in England and Wales.

In 2006, handguns were responsible for 75% of all firearm-related homicides in the U.S., 57% in Canada, 47% in Australia and 44% in England and Wales.

Toronto experienced the highest number of victims of firearm-related violent crimes in 2006, in Canada, as well as the highest proportion of violent crimes involving firearms (4.1%), or one-quarter of all firearm-related victimizations in Canada. In 2006, 1,993 people in the Toronto CMA were victims of a violent offence related to guns. However, when averaging by population, the firearm victimization rate was slightly higher in both Vancouver (45.3 victims per 100,000 population) and Winnipeg (43.9) than in Toronto (40.4).

Youth, aged 12 to 17 years, accused of committing a violent offence are more likely than adults to use a firearm. In 2006, police reported 1,287 youth accused of a firearm-related violent offence, accounting for 2.8% of all youth accused of violence. This was higher than the proportion of adults who had committed a violent firearm offence (1.8%). The rate of youth accused of a firearm-related violent crime increased over the past few years. The 2006 rate was 32% higher than in 2002 and at its highest point since 1998. The 2006 rates of youth accused of a firearm-related violent crime in Toronto (96.2) is well above the national average (55.5) and higher than all other CMAs.

Sources of Illegal Firearms

The major sources of illegal firearms in Canada are smuggled firearms and theft from domestic sources.

Domestically sourced illegal firearms are primarily obtained from residential and commercial break-and-enters. Members of organized crime are known to identify and target legitimate firearms owners, in particular those with large collections.

The Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) keeps records of stolen or missing firearms since 1974. Currently, there are approximately 85,000 firearms recorded in the system, of which approximately 44,000 are classified as restricted firearms (e.g., handguns). Law enforcement regularly recovers missing or stolen firearms.

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3 Ibid
4 Ibid
The smuggling of firearms across the Canada-U.S. border is the main source of illegal firearms in Canada. Approximately two-thirds of the guns seized by the Toronto Police Services (TPS) enter Canada illegally across the Canada-U.S. border. According to the CISC 2004 Annual Report, firearms that are easily and legally acquired in the U.S. can be illegally diverted to criminal groups and individuals in Canada.

Firearms are moved across international borders to support criminal organizations and individual criminals in their illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, self-protection, intimidation and, as a symbol of status.

The ability to smuggle illicit firearms has been attributed to the size of physical geography between ports of entry allows for criminal entrepreneurs and organizations to smuggle firearms across the border, and the rough and remote geography of portions of the border, and remote unattended border crossings invite exploitation of cross border movement.

A Threat to Public Health and Safety

The availability of legal and illegal firearms produces a significant negative impact on public health and safety. The UN claims that the use of firearms results in 300 thousand deaths worldwide each year; 100 thousand deaths as a result of conflict, and 200 thousand non-conflict related deaths. Firearms are used to conduct acts of violent crime and homicide, and contribute to a significant number of injuries, accidental deaths and suicides.

Wendy Cukier, President of the Coalition for Gun Control, has stated that from a public health perspective, firearms deaths and injuries, whether intentional or unintentional, are a serious threat to the health of Canadians. On average, more than 1200 Canadians are killed and over 1000 are injured with firearms each year. The economic costs of gun deaths and injuries in Canada have been estimated at $6 billion per year. Furthermore, firearms deaths are the third leading cause of death among young people aged 15–24, and Canada ranks fifth among industrialized countries in the rate of firearms deaths among children under the age of 14.

The availability of guns in our city also carries a hefty social cost. Access to a gun, whether in the home or on the street, creates unsafe and unstable environments. Guns perpetuate cycles of violence, including violence against women. Guns create obstacles to education and economic growth. Youth victimized by guns or convicted of using a gun have difficulty advancing through school. Neighbourhoods experiencing gun violence confront serious obstacles to economic development and growth.

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8 Ibid