

United Nations Biennial Meeting of States
to Consider Implementation of the
Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in
Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
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Statement by Gary Mauser
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I am Gary Mauser, Professor Emeritus, of Simon Fraser University in Canada. I represent the National Firearms Association. For over 20 years, my academic research at SFU has involved researching firearms and crime.

In my professional opinion, there is no empirical support for claims that civilian access to SALW engender criminal or terrorist violence. Two demonstrably false assumptions lie at the core of UN disarmament efforts: first, that SALW exacerbate criminal violence, and second, that action plans to reduce civilian access to SALW will mitigate that violence. A survey of the research literature fails to find convincing support for these primordial assumptions. See Hahn, Kates and Mauser, Kleck, Lott, Wellford.

Mr. Chairman, it is a myth that more civilian guns mean more murders or criminal violence. This claim relies upon a flawed model, the public health approach that equates firearms with dangerous diseases. See my Fraser Institute paper, "Hubris in the North", available on SSRN.

Many disarmament advocates are apparently ignorant of the epidemiological model. Like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who was surprised to learn that he had been speaking 'prose' all his life, many anti-gun advocates may be astonished to discover the profound weaknesses of their intellectual foundations.

Mr. Chairman, the campaign to disarm civilians rests upon junk science. No methodologically sound study has found a meaningful relationship between homicide rates and gun ownership. No respectable academic research supports the claim that civilian firearms ownership is a driving force behind civil unrest or criminal violence. A wide variety of other factors have been found to be important: lack of economic freedom, organized crime, non-democratic government, governmental corruption, drug trafficking, and a history of violent ethnic conflict.

Studies by the Small Arms Survey assume but do not demonstrate a link between lawful civilian firearms ownership and social problems. Their own surveys show that firearms ownership is highly concentrated among the largest and wealthiest societies; these are the most politically stable countries in the world and typically boast of low levels of violence.

I turn now to the second assumption. Support is lacking for the claim that a National Action Plan, including collection and destruction of civilian-owned SALW, has been or could be effective in reducing access to SALW by criminals or terrorists, and consequently would reduce criminality, inter-ethnic conflict or instability.

Mr. Chairman, few countries in the world are capable of instituting complex regulatory schemes such as owner licensing and firearms registration. Canada and South Africa both have strikingly failed to set up a workable national system. In no country in the world have such regulations proved effective in reducing criminal violence. Not Canada, not the UK, not New Zealand, not South Africa. Note, Mr. Chairman, the political and developmental divergence of these countries.

Gun bans are rarely effective. Not in South Africa; nor in England. After decades of ever-stricter gun controls, Great Britain banned handguns and confiscated them from all permit holders in 1997. Yet in 2009, homicides are still higher than pre-ban levels. Despite the confiscation of all law-abiding English people's handguns and the destruction of much Olympic-level sport shooting in the UK, the Metropolitan Police are reported as saying, "Gun crime is out of control".

Even if gun bans did work, many alternative weapons are available to would-be murderers. Eight decades of police-state enforcement of handgun prohibition have kept Russian gun ownership low, yet Russia's murder rates have long been four times higher than those in the United States. In Rwanda, the machete is the most common murder weapon.

The reason that nations (or regions) with more guns tend towards lower violence is political rather than criminological. Politicians often think that banning guns will be a quick fix. But gun bans do not work; if anything, they make matters worse. They disarm the law-abiding, yet are ignored by the violent and the criminal. Nations with severe violence problems tend to have severe gun laws. For example, countries as diverse as Jamaica and the Republic of Ireland banned virtually all firearms in the 1970s, but homicide and gun homicide have continued to increase.

In sum, Mr. Chairman, research shows that banning civilian guns increases people's vulnerability, fails to reduce violence, and merely empowers criminals and terrorists at the expense of the innocent. My research is available on my websites and on SSRN.

Thank you.