



GUN CONTROL EDUCATION PACK

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The contents of this pack are provided to help answer some of the most frequently asked questions about gun control in the UK. There are references to other material and sources of useful data.

For more information on Current Issues, and Facts and Research, together with links to other relevant sites, you can also visit the Gun Control Network web site at

- <http://www.gun-control-network.org>

1. THE GUN CONTROL DEBATE

No one could dispute that guns are dangerous objects with the potential to cause damage to property, and injury and death to animals and humans. It is why most people fear them, yet it is also the reason why others are attracted to guns. Most guns were designed specifically for killing, to be used by the military and law enforcement agencies. In the wrong hands they are the tools of crime and terror. A civil society controls dangerous objects in the interests of public safety. Guns should not be an exception, yet the issue of whether and to what extent guns should be controlled is extremely contentious.

At the heart of the gun control debate is the question of where the balance should lie between the rights of the general public to be safe from gun violence and the privilege of gun enthusiasts to own and use weapons. No civilised society would deny its citizens the right to be safe, but opinions on the 'rights' of gun owners can be poles apart and are viewed very differently from one country to the next. In most developed countries gun 'rights' are restricted and are dependent on factors such as proof of the necessity to own guns (for sport, hunting, vermin control and, more rarely, for self defence) and a person's fitness (mental, emotional) to use them.

Many gun enthusiasts contend that their rights are more fundamental than this. In the United States, for example, members of the gun lobby, and even some outside it, believe that an unconditional right for civilians to own guns is enshrined in the Second Amendment to the Constitution. The matter is still fiercely debated and a definitive legal judgement has yet to be provided. The constitutions of most other countries, however, make no reference to a "right to bear arms".

Assuming that there is no absolute right to own a gun, (and gun control advocates would argue that there is no moral or practical justification for this), the gun control debate hinges on the extent to which public safety is compromised by gun ownership. Gun owners put their faith in screening procedures that would eliminate unsuitable, and therefore unsafe applicants for firearm licences – in their view all legal gun owners could then be regarded as trustworthy and competent to own even the most dangerous weapons without risk to the public.

Gun control advocates argue that this is unrealistic and dangerous - no screening procedure can reliably predict the present, let alone the future behaviour of an applicant, an opinion supported by medical and psychiatric experts. This was apparent in Britain at the time of the Hungerford and Dunblane massacres, and in many other instances when licensed gun owners turned their guns on innocent victims.

Even if fitness were guaranteed, the question then arises as to which particular guns can be entrusted to those who wish to shoot. Gun enthusiasts would probably say 'any gun'. The gun control view is that the most dangerous guns (based on how easily concealable the gun is, its rapidity of fire, power and calibre) should be prohibited. However, since all guns are potentially dangerous ownership should not be permitted unless it is essential.

The most reliable data indicate that from country to country the rate of gun violence correlates with the level of gun ownership (see **International Aspects**). High gun ownership creates a higher risk, not only for a community in general, but also for gun owners themselves, and so gun control advocates support any measures that lead to an overall reduction in gun availability.

There is a contrary view, widely expressed within the American gun lobby, that higher gun ownership reduces crime, but there is very little objective support for this. Indeed most academic research supports the opposite conclusion.

It is fair to say that there is a significant difference in the motivation of advocates on the two sides of the argument. Although the specific aims of those in favour of tight gun control vary from country to country, reflecting differences in existing gun legislation and cultural aspects of gun use, they all base their arguments around the need for public safety and are concerned with the welfare of the whole population. In contrast, the gun lobby generally argue on behalf of a minority, themselves, defending the right to gun ownership irrespective of its wider implications.

For a detailed discussion of the main arguments put forward by the gun lobby and gun control advocates see:

Simon Chapman (1998) *Over Our Dead Bodies*. Pluto Press, Annandale.

- This book is about the Australian gun control campaign that followed the Port Arthur massacre in Tasmania in April 1996

Peter Squires (2000) *Gun Culture or Gun Control? Firearms, Violence and Society*. Routledge, London and New York.

- Focuses on the gun control debate in the UK

Josh Sugarmann (2001) *Every handgun is aimed at you. The Case for banning handguns*. The New Press.

- The book summarises the leading research and statistics on handguns and handgun violence in the USA.

2. THE CAMPAIGN TO BAN HANDGUNS, 1996-1997

In Great Britain all handguns were banned from private ownership as a result of legislation passed in 1997. The handgun ban was the culmination of a campaign that began in the immediate aftermath of the Dunblane massacre. A summary of the key events before and during the campaign is provided. More details can be found in the references.

Events prior to the Dunblane massacre

- 1970 The Home Office asked Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary to undertake a review of firearms controls. The resultant *McKay Report*, prepared in 1972, was never published.
- 1973 Following the McKay Report, the Conservative government prepared a green paper, proposing eleven broad-based restrictions on gun ownership and use. After intense lobbying from gun users, the Government abandoned its plans to tighten the gun laws. Licensed gun owners were able to own and use a range of weapons including semi-automatic rifles and high-powered handguns.
- 1987 On 19 August sixteen people were killed and fifteen injured by a lone gunman Michael Ryan in and around the Berkshire town of *Hungerford*. Ryan finally shot himself. His guns were all legally owned. Half of his victims were shot with a handgun. There was no public inquiry.
- 1988 As a response to the Hungerford massacre Conservative Home Secretary Douglas Hurd introduced the *Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1988*. In spite of calls for a significant tightening of the gun laws, the legislative changes were very limited. Semi-automatic rifles were banned but handguns remained legal weapons. To own a handgun an applicant for a firearms licence had to show good reason for ownership. In the vast majority of cases this simply involved a wish to participate in target shooting. In Great Britain handgun ownership was not permitted for the purposes of self-defence and private security (the situation is different in Northern Ireland), a fact that is frequently overlooked by those commentating on British gun laws from outside the UK.
- 1989 One consequence of the 1988 Act was the setting up of the *Firearms Consultative Committee* (FCC). Its role was to provide advice on firearms to the Home Secretary. The membership consisted almost entirely of men with personal interests in shooting and/or the firearms trade and their advice had a tendency to make it easier for enthusiasts to use guns. The views of the victims of gun crime were generally ignored. Neither was there any place on the FCC for professionals such as doctors who dealt with the consequences of gunshot wounds.

Events following the Dunblane massacre

March 1996 On 13 March sixteen five- and six-year old children and their teacher were shot dead at *Dunblane Primary School* in Central Scotland. Three more teachers and eleven other children received gunshot wounds. The perpetrator Thomas Hamilton was a licensed gun owner who had brought his four lawfully-held large calibre handguns from his home to the School. After his three-minute shooting spree he killed himself with a revolver shot. Before he entered the School Hamilton had not committed any offence under existing firearms legislation.

The massacre had a huge impact on the British public, the majority of whom would have been totally ignorant of the types and numbers of weapons that gun owners were able to keep at home. There were immediate calls, especially among national newspapers for a tightening of the gun laws. Most focussed their attention on handguns, considered to be especially dangerous because they are rapid-firing and easily concealed. Many observed that they had no social use, their ownership justified solely on the basis of sport

Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth (also by coincidence the MP for Dunblane – the Shadow Scottish Secretary George Robertson also had a Dunblane connection as he lived in the town) announced that there would be a public inquiry into the massacre chaired by the senior judge Lord Cullen. Until Lord Cullen reported the Government would not comment on new gun legislation, although it did promise that legislative time would be made available later in the year.

April 1996 Two major petitions calling for a ban on the private ownership of handguns were launched. One was run by the *Sunday Mail* (a Scottish tabloid newspaper). The other, the *Snowdrop Petition*, was started by a group of people from the Dunblane/Stirling area not directly involved in the tragedy (although some knew a few of the victims' families). Most were mothers with young children who simply wanted something to be done to prevent another such atrocity happening again. None had any previous campaigning experience.

The Snowdrop Petition was formally launched on 22 April at the Scottish Grand Committee in Inverness. It quickly gained the support of the families of the Dunblane victims. Contrary to press reports, the campaign was neither instigated nor run by the families themselves.

The Sunday Mail petition gained 428,279 signatories within 5 weeks. It was handed to Home Secretary Michael Howard on 26 April by a group of Dunblane families. The group met other senior politicians including Prime Minister John Major and Labour Opposition leader Tony Blair and pressed their case for a total ban on handguns. The families were convinced that the Dunblane massacre would not have taken place had handguns been banned after the Hungerford massacre nine years earlier. Thomas

- Hamilton would not have planned and executed the massacre without easy access to handguns, they argued.
- May 1996 The *Cullen Inquiry* started in Stirling. Evidence was taken on a number of matters relating to the massacre, including the private possession of handguns.
- The *Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee* began its own investigation into “Handgun Ownership”. The Committee took oral evidence from a limited number of witnesses representing shooters, the police and the Home Office. No gun control advocates were asked to provide evidence. The minority Labour group on the Committee suggested that its investigation should be abandoned because of the Cullen Inquiry but were overruled by the majority Conservative group.
- July 1996 Once the Cullen Inquiry had finished, the Dunblane families were able to give interviews for the first time and took advantage of the intense media interest to speak out for a handgun ban.
- The Snowdrop Petition, signed by more than 705,000 people, was handed into Parliament. The occasion provided another opportunity for Dunblane families to meet senior politicians, and for campaigners to discuss the issues with the media.
- Two weeks later *Gun Control Network* (GCN) was launched at a Westminster press conference. GCN was founded by a small group of people including parents of victims of the Hungerford and Dunblane massacres, academics and lawyers. It was set up not only to contribute to the immediate campaign for a handgun ban but also to argue the case for tight gun control after the handgun issue had been resolved. It was a recognition that the gun lobby were likely to push for a reversal of any handgun ban and that a permanent organisation was needed that continued to promote the arguments in favour of tighter gun control. During the campaign, members of GCN, the Snowdrop campaigners and the Dunblane families coordinated their activities, participating in radio and TV discussions and providing frequent media interviews and statements. Discussion programmes often involved members of the gun lobby who were adamant that no changes to the gun laws were necessary.
- Aug 1996 The Home Affairs Select Committee published its report on “Handgun Ownership”. The committee was split along party lines. The majority Conservative group ruled out any significant changes to gun legislation and rejected the need to prohibit any weapons. The Labour group provided a minority report supporting a handgun ban and recommending tighter controls over other weapons including air guns. The Conservative majority’s *status quo* stance was condemned by much of the media. The Report’s conclusions were effectively ignored by their frontbench colleagues in the Government.
- Oct 1996 All the main opposition parties, Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish Nationalists and Plaid Cymru agreed to support a total ban on handguns. The Conservative government was awaiting the publication of the Cullen Report before revealing its position.

- On 16 October the *Cullen Report* was published. It recommended a number of changes relating to the licensing and use of handguns but stopped short of recommending a ban. The Government went beyond Cullen's recommendations and announced that it would introduce a bill to outlaw the private ownership of high calibre handguns (those above .22). There would be tighter restrictions on the use of .22s but these small calibre handguns would remain legal weapons. The Dunblane families and others immediately announced that they would continue to campaign for a total ban. Their central argument was that all handguns could kill irrespective of the calibre.
- A parliamentary Early Day Motion demonstrated all-party support for a total ban, but the Government insisted that all Conservative MPs support their position of a partial ban. Opposition MPs were allowed a free vote, and campaigners urged the Conservatives to follow suit. In fact some pro-gun Tory backbenchers went on defy the party whip and voted against any ban, while a smaller group who took the opposite view voted for a total ban (see below).
- Nov 1996 An intense period of lobbying preceded the Second Reading of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill during which an amendment proposing a total ban on handguns was introduced by Conservative backbencher Robert Hughes. Campaigners urged other Tories to vote for the amendment and asked the Government to drop its three-line whip. The amendment was defeated by the Government despite being supported by four Conservative backbenchers and the vast majority of opposition MPs. The lobbying campaign for a total ban continued.
- Under the auspices of the *Sportsman's Association of Great Britain* the gun lobby organised a number of marches and demonstrations against any changes to gun laws. These attracted patchy levels of support.
- Feb 1997 In spite of dogged opposition from parliamentary supporters of the gun lobby, especially in the House of Lords, the Firearms (Amendment) Bill became law and a partial ban on handguns was introduced. There would be a surrender period for the guns and related equipment lasting a few months, and gun owners would be compensated.
- The campaign for a total ban continued and now included billboards and cinema advertisements.
- April 1997 The Snowdrop Campaign was wound up and its administration taken over by Gun Control Network. The Labour Party manifesto for the forthcoming General Election pledged that, if elected, Labour would introduce a bill banning low calibre handguns. Candidates from the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Scottish Nationalist parties all indicated their support.
- May 1997 A Labour government was elected and immediately introduced another Firearms (Amendment) Bill to ban all remaining handguns (.22 calibre). It received overwhelming support in the House of Commons.

- Nov 1997 Attempts were made to amend the Bill and allow exemptions for international competitions and for disabled shooters. The amendments were defeated. By November the Bill had reached its final stages and became law. All handguns were now illegal.
- Feb 1998 All .22 calibre handguns were surrendered by the end of the month. Gun Control Network continued its work (for current issues visit the GCN web site).
- 1999 GCN members were invited to join the Firearms Consultative Committee. Since then the membership of the FCC has been broadened, though it remains dominated by men with shooting interests. When the Home Affairs Committee reviewed the issue of "Controls over Firearms" GCN was invited to provide evidence.

Further details and comment on the campaign can be found in:

- Mick North (2000) *Dunblane: Never Forget*. Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh.
- Peter Squires (2000) *Gun Culture or Gun Control? Firearms, Violence and Society*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Stuart Thomson, Lara Stancich and Lisa Dickson. (1998) *Gun Control and Snowdrop* in FF Ridley & Grant Jordan (eds) *Protest politics: cause groups and campaigns*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

See also:

Home Affairs Select Committee Fifth Report (1996) *Possession of Handguns*. HMSO, London.

Lord Douglas Cullen (1996) *The Public Inquiry into the Shootings at Dunblane Primary School on 13 March 1996*. The Stationary Office, London.

The *Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1996* was discussed in the *House of Commons* on 28 October 1996 (Queen's Speech), 12, 18 and 19 November 1996, 4 December 1996, 18 February 1997 and in the *House of Lords* on 16 December 1996, 16 and 21 January 1997, 4, 11 and 20 February 1997.

The *Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1997* was discussed in the *House of Commons* on 11 and 16 June 1997, 27 July 1997, 3 November 1997 and in the *House of Lords* on 6 June 1997, 15 July 1997, 16 and 27 October 1997 and 11 November 1997.

Firearms Compensation was discussed in the House of Commons on 9 June 1997.

Also of relevance to the handgun debate is a statement on gun victim Thomas McIntyre made by *Dr John Reid* (Motherwell, North) on 15 January 1997.

For transcripts see Hansard at: <http://www.parliament.uk/hansard/hansard.cfm>

3. PARLIAMENT

The use and misuse of firearms remains an important issue to politicians. The following list refers to parliamentary activity since the passage of the Firearms (Amendment) Acts in 1997

Committee and Group Reports

The Second Report from the *Home Affairs Committee* Session 1999-2000 HC95 - *Controls over Firearms*

- <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmhaff/95/9502.htm#evidence> - Report and Proceedings
- <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmhaff/95/95ap01.htm> - Written Evidence
- <http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm48/4864/4864.htm> - Government Response

The Fourth Report from the *Northern Ireland Affairs Committee* Session 2002-2003 HC 67 – *The Control of Firearms in Northern Ireland and the Draft Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2002*

- <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmniaf/67/6702.htm> - Report, Proceedings and Evidence
- The Government Response was published on 8 May 2003 by The Stationery Office

The Report from the *All Party Parliamentary Group on Gun Crime – Combating the Threat of Gun Violence*, November 2003

- www.saferworld.org.uk/APPGGunCrimeRepEmbargoed.pdf - Published by Saferworld

Bills and Debates

For transcripts see *Hansard*.

- <http://www.parliament.uk/hansard/hansard.cfm>

Bill moved by Dr Nick Palmer (Broxtowe) (21 January 1998)

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Firearms Act 1968 to restrict the acquisition and possession of air weapons; and for connected purposes.

House of Commons debate on *Air Gun Safety* (23 June 1999)

Bill moved by David Atkinson (Bournemouth East) (30 October 2001)

That leave be given to bring a Bill to restrict the availability and use of ball bearing guns and similar replica weapons

Parliament

Bill moved by Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford) (29 October 2002)

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Firearms Act 1968 to restrict the acquisition and possession of air weapons; and for connected purposes

Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) – Part 5 of this Act introduced new controls over certain types of firearm.

See: www.saferworld.org.uk/APPGGunCrimeRepEmbargoed.pdf

4. CRIME FIGURES

Gun crime statistics are published annually by the Home Office for England and Wales, and by the Scottish Executive for Scotland.

As with all statistics they are open to differing interpretations. By quoting selected data, the gun lobby have suggested that recent figures for England and Wales demonstrate that the handgun ban did not work and has led to an increase in violent crime. This interpretation was widely reported in the press, yet careful analysis of the figures does not support any such conclusion. Because of tight gun control the British gun crime figures are low in comparison to many other countries, but low numbers are inevitably subject to fluctuations that are not always statistically significant.

Any analysis of changes in reported handgun crime must also take into account the growth in the use of *legal* imitation guns in crime (the police estimate that up to 80% of reported handgun crime is attributable to imitations) and the reactivation of *legal* deactivated guns such as blank-firing pistols. Neither group of weapon was affected by the handgun ban. Handgun use is also linked to the growth of illegal drug trading, gang activity and 'organised' crime, all of which must be tackled by tougher law enforcement measures.

The most recent Home Office data (2002/03) show:

- A total of 24,070 offences were committed with firearms
- An air weapon was the most commonly used firearm (in 13,822 instances)
- A handgun was used in 40 homicides and in a total of 5540 crimes

See Crime in England and Wales (2002/03): Supplementary Volume 1. Homicide and Gun Crime

- <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosb0104.pdf>

The latest figures for *Scotland* from the *Scottish Executive* (2002) show:

- An air weapon was the most commonly used firearm
- A total of 1014 recorded offences in which a firearm was alleged to have been used, at a similar level to that in the five years since 1998
- The number of offences involving the alleged use of a pistol/revolver decreased from 64 in 1999 to 32 in 2001, the lowest number since 1990

See the Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletin Criminal Justice Series CrJ/2003/7 (Sept 2003)

- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/00276-00.asp>
- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats> - earlier reports

The most recent annual *British Crime Survey* 2001 shows overall crime fell by 12% between 1999 and 2000, violent crime by 19%. The full British Crime Survey 2001 is at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hosb1801.pdf>

5. CURRENT ISSUES

Replica weapons

The last few years have seen an increase in the criminal use of imitation and replica guns in crime. Research strongly suggests that the gun manufacturers are behind the growing replica market - many of these guns are exact replicas made under licences issued by the major gun manufacturers. Some of the guns are so called 'soft air guns' which shoot plastic bullets, others are BB guns which shoot ball bearings. Unlike the handguns they resemble, replica guns have not been banned and there are almost no restrictions on their purchase.

Among concerns shared by gun control advocates and the police are:

- The insecurity and fear engendered by the presence of lookalike guns in communities
- The encouragement of an early interest in guns
- The pressure put on police to respond to all sighting of guns, some of which are replicas, requiring the frequent deployment of armed response units
- The risk to users, since the police must assume the gun is a real one even though it may not be - fatalities have resulted from such incidents
- The use of replica guns in crime - it is impossible for most people to distinguish a replica from a real gun, so those confronted with a replica gun would understandably consider themselves threatened and endangered.

Whilst the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) makes it illegal to possess an imitation firearm in public, campaigners believe that nothing short of banning the manufacture, sale and possession of replica weapons will deal with this escalating problem.

For further details see:

- Ian Taylor and Rob Hornsby (2000) *Replica firearms: a new frontier in the gun market*. INFER Trust Report no.1
- Gun Control Network leaflet (enclosed)

Air weapons

The majority of reported gun crimes are committed with air weapons, yet there are few restrictions on the purchase and use of these weapons. Some of the present laws are frequently flouted. In particular, a large number of air gun offences are carried out by unsupervised youths, even though it is illegal for anyone under the age of 14 to use an airgun unless supervised by an adult (over 21).

The Home Affairs Committee took evidence on the use of airguns in 1999, and recommended to the Government that the weapons should be brought into the licensing system. The present Government is reluctant to introduce licensing for airguns, citing the costs involved and manpower required. To gun control advocates

and animal welfare groups the amount of airgun crime is sufficiently high to justify the expense and effort of more effective control.

The recent introduction of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2003) resulted in measures which made it illegal to possess certain types of air weapon (the self-contained gas cartridge or SCGC guns) without a firearms licence, but the other changes made to the legislation relating to airgun ownership and use were rather limited.

Deactivated weapons

Current legislation permits owners to keep deactivated guns. Firearm collecting is often given as the reason. Although methods of deactivation are supposed to ensure that the process is irreversible, some of these guns have been reactivated and used in crimes. Together with replica guns they represent a significant proportion of the handguns used in crime.

In a recent report on *Illegal Firearms* by the Centre for Defence Studies at Kings College London, the authors state that "...there are at present two types of handguns that are popular with criminals – both of these involve the conversions of items that can be obtained legally". The Report, which was commissioned by the Countryside Alliance's Campaign for Shooting, has been used by the gun lobby to support its claim that the handgun ban has not worked. However, the fact that reactivated weapons, which whilst deactivated are legal, are frequently used in crime supports a case for extending the ban to deactivated weapons.

See Centre for Defence Studies (2001) *Illegal Firearms in the United Kingdom*. Working Paper 4. Kings College, University of London.

Minimum age for shooting

Current legislation allows children of any age to be introduced to firearms and shoot, provided they are supervised. Some shooting organisations actively encourage young shooters by emphasising a fun element in the sport. In the view of gun control advocates the recruitment of shooters at an early age can lead to an unhealthy attachment to guns. They reason that such dangerous weapons ought only be handled and used by mature adults. This issue was also raised during the Home Affairs Committee's hearings in 1999. The committee concluded that a minimum age should be introduced. This recommendation has not been taken up by the Government.¹

Field sports

Field sports (game shooting, deer stalking) and clay pigeon shooting have not been affected by the recent legislation, nor are there proposals to outlaw any of these shooting activities.

Some concerns about the firearms used in field sports have been raised by gun control advocates and by the Home Affairs Select Committee.¹ These include:

- The licensing of shotguns – this differs from that for Section 1 firearms (rifles) and permits an unspecified number of shotguns to be held on a single licence thus promoting an uncontrolled proliferation of weapons
- The use of multishot rifles and shotguns – guns that can fire more than one shot without reloading are significantly more dangerous.

¹For details of the evidence given to Home Affairs Committee, the Committee's Report and the Government's response see the links under **Parliament** (p.9).

Firearms Legislation Review

The Government is about to undertake a review of all the legislation covering the ownership and use of firearms. The Government has promised to consult with all interested parties before bringing forward its proposals. Future versions of this Pack will provide information about the proposed changes.

For details see: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/consult_firearms.html

6. INTERNATIONAL ASPECTS

Data on firearms and violence

Data on firearms and violence are currently being collected from countries all over the world. The data allow comparisons to be made between countries and the relationship between gun violence and gun ownership to be analysed. The data indicate that levels of gun violence are greatest in countries such as the United States where gun ownership is highest, lowest in countries like Japan in which firearm ownership is very tightly restricted.

The most comprehensive set of data has been collated by The *HELP Network* (The Handgun Epidemic Lowering Plan Network) in collaboration with *SAFER-Net* (Small Arms/Firearms Education & Research Network). Fifty countries and cities are currently covered.

See: <http://www.helpnetwork.org/frames/fact.state8.html>

Campaign to restrict the global trade in small arms

As many as 500,000 people are killed each year with small arms, a category that largely equates with guns. About 200,000 are victims of murder, suicide and 'accidents', often in countries that are, at least nominally, 'at peace'. Another 300,000, the majority of whom are civilians, die in conflicts. The staggering human and economic devastation caused by the proliferation of firearms has led to action by a number of agencies, including the United Nations.

The World Health Organisation highlighted the problem in its recent report on Violence and Health.

See: http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en

In July 2001 the UN held a conference to discuss the Illicit Trade in Small Arms. For campaigners the outcome was disappointing, as it did not lead to a binding agreement among states to restrict arms trading. The agreed pact simply *urges* states to establish new laws aimed at regulating arms brokers and ensuring "control over the export and transit of small arms and light weapons" and limits itself to *appealing* to states to destroy surplus stocks of small arms and to criminalize the illegal production, possession, stockpiling and trade in small arms. Plans to prevent states selling guns to rebel groups were blocked by the United States.

For a report see: <http://www.un.org/events/ref40.htm>

Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have urged more radical and immediate measures. Gun control groups believe that the issue of domestic gun control impacts on the arms trade, as guns will frequently flow from countries with weak gun laws to become part of the illicit trade. In 1999 a large group of NGOs, including international aid agencies, development organisations, peace groups and gun control organisations linked up to form the *International Action Network on*

Small Arms (IANSA). IANSA is coordinating many of the efforts to restrict the arms trade. Together with Amnesty International and Oxfam, IANSA is running a Control Arms campaign. To get more information on current campaigns visit these websites.

IANSA: **<http://www.iansa.org>**

Control Arms: **<http://www.controlarms.org>**

Saferworld: **<http://www.saferworld.co.uk>**

International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War: **www.ippnw.org**



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