

Gun Control - 1993

The cry "Violence!" Shall no longer be heard in your land, Nor "Wrack and ruin!" Within your borders. (Isaiah 60:18)

Issue

Gun violence in the United States has reached epidemic proportions, affecting all Americans, both children and adults, fostering a climate of fear in urban, suburban and rural communities and demonstrating the total inadequacy of existing legislation and controls.

Background

The quality of life in the United States has deteriorated because of the proliferation of guns in the hands of those who abuse and misuse them. Gang wars, drive-by and random shootings, children with guns, quarrel resolution by guns, suicides and homicides in homes, shoot-outs in schools, recreational facilities and the workplace: there is no haven.

According to the FBI and United States Department of Justice, more than 24,000 Americans are killed annually with handguns in homicides, suicides and accidents. Handguns are involved in an average 9,200 murders, 12,100 rapes, 210,000 robberies and 407,600 assaults per year. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms reports more than 200 million firearms in private possession. The Steelman Commission, a United States Interagency Task Force, reports that handgun violence adds \$4 billion annually to health care costs.

Teenage suicide rates, guns brought into schools by children and family arguments ending in homicide are directly related to increased access to handguns in the home. Guns are forty-three times more likely to be used in the suicide or homicide of a family member or friend than in self-defense against unlawful entry (New England Journal of Medicine, June 1986). Recently some gunmakers have targeted women as a significant new market, encouraging them to buy compact guns with smaller handles, easier triggers and special finishes.

Existing federal laws are inadequate. Current prohibitions on the purchase or possession of firearms lack an enforcement mechanism. Manufacture or importation of automatic assault weapons for civilian sale is banned. Although there is an importation ban on some semi-automatic assault weapons, there is no prohibition on their domestic manufacture or purchase. Federal dealer licenses have been available almost without restrictions. State and municipal laws vary from strict control to little or none.

Ideologically diverse constitutional experts concur that the Second Amendment to the Constitution confers no individual right to carry a gun. Supreme Court and lower federal court rulings uphold this principle.

In 1967 NFTS called for restrictions on firearm sales to criminals. In 1991 the Board of Directors endorsed the Brady Bill, calling for a national waiting period to permit a criminal records background check and to prevent immediate purchase by angry or suicidal persons.

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THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTIONS ARE PROVIDED FOR CLARITY:

Guns are classified as handguns (short guns), including pistols, which can be but are not necessarily assault weapons, and revolvers, which cannot be assault weapons, or as rifles and shotguns (both long guns), which can be either assault or sporting weapons.

Assault weapons include automatic and semi-automatic pistols, rifles and shotguns designed for military purposes, equipped with combat-type hardware and spray-fired from the hip. The time difference required to empty an automatic vs. a semi-automatic assault weapon is minimal. Rifles and shotguns designed for recreation (skeet and trapshooting) or hunting are not assault weapons.

Resolution

The Women of Reform Judaism, in fulfillment of the Jewish mandate to choose life and in affirmation of the right of every human being to live free of violence, declare their opposition to the availability and abuse of guns in the United States and call upon all American sisterhoods to:

- 1) Urge the immediate enactment of the Brady Bill as a minimum first step towards federal gun control.
- 2) Work to assure the establishment and implementation of strict federally mandated licensing requirements for firearms dealers.
- 3) Urge strict federal waiting period, background check and registration requirements for purchase or ownership of weapons designed for recreation and hunting.
- 4) Educate constituencies, congregations and communities to become knowledgeable advocates for strong gun control measures; and work jointly with temple youth groups to the same end.
- 5) Monitor the status of state and municipal gun control legislation and work in coalition with local organizations to achieve needed reforms at those levels of government.
- 6) Demand the immediate adoption of all security measures necessary to assure weapon-free schools.
- 7) Oppose the targeting of women in the design and advertising of handguns and the manufacture of guns designed to resemble innocuous objects.
- 8) Call for a federal ban on the importation, manufacture, transfer, sale, purchase, transportation or possession of all assault weapons for personal use and of ammunition specific to them and participate in advocacy campaigns to enact such a ban.
- 9) Establish as a goal an eventual ban on the importation, manufacture, transfer, transportation, sale or purchase of all handguns for private possession, with controlled exceptions for licensed collectors, licensed clubs for target shooting (with facilities for mandatory safe storage of weapons and ammunition) and cases of demonstrated special need.

Further, the Women of Reform Judaism commend those states and municipalities that have enacted strong gun control laws; and

Take note of the fewer than 100 annual handgun deaths in Canada and urge United States Sisterhoods to work to emulate the Canadian model of strict gun control.