

# **FIREARMS: PROTECTION OR RISK ?**

**Practical Guidebook**

**Antonio Bandeira  
and  
Josephine Bourgois**

**Translation by Jessica Galeria**

**PARLIAMENTARY FORUM  
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS**

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## The authors

**Antonio Rangel Bandeira** is a political scientist, with post-graduate degrees from York University (Toronto) and Brandeis University (Boston). He directed the Sociology and Political Science Departments at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and the Technical University of Lisbon. He was a Lieutenant (reserves) in the Brazilian Army, and is author of the book *Sombras do Paraíso* (Ed. Record, Rio de Janeiro, 1994). He coordinates the Arms Control Program at the NGO Viva Rio in Rio de Janeiro. Email: [rangel@vivario.org.br](mailto:rangel@vivario.org.br)

**Josephine Bourgois** is a social scientist with post-graduate degrees from New York University and École Normale Supérieure (Paris) and in a degree in Literature from the Sorbonne (Paris). She was a researcher at Viva Rio and currently is executive coordinator of the Brazilian Public Security Forum in São Paulo.

## Preface

**Daisy Tourné** is a teacher and social psychologist. Currently she is a congresswoman for the Socialist Party in Uruguay (member of the Broad Front government coalition), and has been a government representative since 1995. She is also a member of Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO), acting as vice-president of the Commission on Equity, Gender, Children and Youth. She works on sexual exploitation of children, and women's rights, among other issues. From 2001 she has been pushing for new gun control legislation that would create a national arms control system (she presented the proposed bill in 2004). In collaboration with the Civilian Disarmament Association (*Asociación de Lucha por el Desarme Civil, ALUDEC*), she has also participated in public awareness campaigns using the slogan, "You've got a gun, you've got a problem". She is a member of the Advisory Board for the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons since 2005.

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## Preface

**Congresswoman Daisy Tourné**

Let us begin with the obvious (to which most people are oblivious). Guns were made with one objective: to kill. So why, in a democratic society that should facilitate civic participation and conflict resolution through institutional means, do you want a gun? What do you think you will do with it? What do you expect it will do for you? What will happen with the gun? Where and when will you use it?

It is everyone's responsibility to think about these questions and try to answer them. Many people want to get a gun or to keep the ones they have because they believe this will bring security and protection. This decision involves all sectors of society – civil society, politicians, doctors, activists, the business community – and should not be decided as an individual issue. In democratic societies, having a gun, a tool made to commit a violent act, is not a person's right, but a concession made to that person by the state.

This book invites, insists, and provokes debate. It seeks to answer whether civilian possession of firearms truly increases security. And whether the current levels of gun ownership – more than 600,000,000 small arms in the world – are justifiable, in light of the life and death consequences for the societies in which they circulate.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the flood of guns in our societies has become a nightmare. The human and economic costs are out of control. One thousand deaths per day – can these be justified? The fabric of social capital, health institutions, schools, police, women, children: none can withstand the grave consequences of firearms and ammunition. Guns wreak havoc on our societies, resources, people, ideas...

As we read through the debates in this book, it becomes more and more clear that human security, that which we want most to protect, is also that which is most put at risk by proliferation and misuse of small arms. Increased control over available weapons is a way forward to turn the tide of societal and state degradation. It is clear at the outset that for this to work we must go after illegal guns, and strictly monitor implementation to avoid diversion of legal guns to illegal markets. And at the same time, to prevent gun violence we must also take away legal guns when they are misused or when their use is not justified. At the end of the day, it does not really matter whether a gun that has killed or maimed someone is legal or illegal. The result is the same: death or severe injuries, and it is our universal duty to do everything we can to prevent it.

On the other hand, we have the opportunity and the duty to reformulate the initial question, from "Why do you want a gun?" to "Why should you be allowed to have this gun?". It is imperative that we analyze the impact of guns using objective, rather than



subjective, criteria. As parliamentarians we can definitely say that it is bad legal practice to respond exclusively to the public's feelings or sensibilities – or as we commonly say in Latin America, “to legislate for the angry mob”. While it is important to take into account people's perceptions and sensations, we must use objective and rational analyses in order to respond effectively to the people's needs. And that is precisely what this book provides, data and information, which speak for themselves in dispelling the myth: it is a bad idea to have a gun and worse still to allow the population to arm themselves. We repeat: “Why should you be allowed to have this gun?”...

Domestic violence, child abuse, buying and keeping a gun at home – where it is often used in violence and threats against women and children – all must be rethought carefully. But first, we must take a step back and give ourselves the chance to think that guns are not natural everyday objects, beyond questioning in the social landscape.

In gathering findings and conclusions, this is a book about arguments, and making arguments, elucidating pros *and* cons. The authors, Dr. Antonio Bandeira and Josephine Bourgois, do this with an international and global perspective, but basing themselves mainly in the Brazilian experience controlling guns and ammunition. The disarmament policy in Brazil, enshrined in the Disarmament Statute of 2003, which culminated in the gun ban referendum in October 2005, was truly a laboratory of arguments, both for and against. These were formulated, attacked, evaluated, rejected, and perfected, while the entire world looked on. The result, a ‘no’ to the ban, as well as the process and the electoral campaign, taught us many things. But perhaps the main lesson we draw is that the most persuasive arguments are those in favor of gun control; ordinary citizens can and do back them. Putting the issue on the table and stimulating debate with broad sectors of society helps the population to be more aware and more responsible.

The Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, of which I am a member, is a parliamentary network that tries to establish greater and correct control over firearms and ammunition.

As elected government officials, we need information, arguments, and data that backs up our work: to legislate, make policy, raise awareness, and govern. This is what this publication aims to provide: the tools to help think and decide. At the Forum we try to develop policy to reduce the proliferation, presence and circulation of firearms and ammunition, understood as part of global reforms to the security sector, and contribute to achieving security and peace in our societies and nations.

The first lesson evidenced in *Firearms: Risk or Protection?* is that we can and should build security with convincing arguments, with reason instead of fear, and a vision of society in which the gun culture has been overcome. Fear is a paralyzing feeling. A fearful society is a society capable of justifying any kind of violence. Thus, fear cannot and should not be the guiding principal for delineating public security policies. We must be able to understand fear, not internalize it or elevate it to the category of ideology. Within an arms race logic, fear gets away from us; it inscribes and predicates our future on a self-fulfilling prophecy of ever more bloody and cruel violence.

Let us control firearms and take away those for which there is no objective reason or well-founded justification. Let us use the arguments in this book to achieve societies that are – as recognized by the authors – not “protected *by* guns”, but “protected *from* guns”

**Montevideo, September 2006**

## Introduction

This Guidebook aims to provide a straightforward response to everything you've wanted to know about the advantages and disadvantages of using guns for self-defense – but did not know who to ask.<sup>1</sup> There are answers to questions, myths and criticisms that have come our way over the years, in the different countries in which we have debated and spoken on gun violence prevention.

This international edition is meant to be a source of information for people who are deciding whether to buy or keep a gun, or who want to advise their communities on these issues; for lawmakers or others seeking to influence gun laws; and for teachers, journalists or other informers of public opinion.

Our societies are becoming increasingly violent, while at the same time, violence has become increasingly lethal due to unfettered gun proliferation and misuse. Governments have responded differently to the public outcry for improvements in security. Four countries have completely banned civilian possession of firearms: Luxemburg, Borneo, Malaysia and Botswana. Another three countries have severely restrictive gun laws: Japan, the United Kingdom and China. The majority of the countries we studied do have some controls in place. The most permissive legislation is found in the United States, Finland and most Arab countries.

The world has never been so highly armed. There are more than 600,000,000 small arms in circulation, considering data from only 110 countries, or about half of the world population.<sup>2</sup> These guns kill around 300,000 people a year in wars, break-ins, suicides, homicides among friends or relatives, and accidents. At the same time, policymakers pour attention and resources into preventing kidnappings among famous people, terrorism and serial killers, which, although they are a concern, occur far less frequently than gun deaths. However, they do make a big impact on public opinion, often manipulated by the 'fear factor'.

Although Latin America has just 14% of the world's population, it is responsible for nearly half the gun homicides in the world<sup>3</sup> – due to lack of effective gun control policies and other factors we will also analyze here. Violence consumes between 13-15% of the region's GDP.<sup>4</sup> And this holds true even though just one country on the continent is engaged in an official war. Colombia's internal conflict has killed more than 475,000 people since 1979. Even there, it is a commonly-held belief that both military and civilian casualties are caused with war-grade weaponry. But the Red Cross has estimated that 60% of the victims of war are killed with small arms, and 35% of these deaths occur amongst civilians.<sup>5</sup>

It took six years of research, travel to many different countries, and a focused effort to take in all possible information on what went right and what went wrong with disarmament efforts around the world. With the exception of criminals, gun owners and people who want to get rid of guns have a single objective: security. We respect both

sides because ultimately they want to prevent violence and increase safety – but who is right? In this publication, we present the reader with pros and cons of using guns for self-defense, so that he or she may reach their own conclusion. The information has been gathered in major research centers around the world, though much of it is little-known outside specialist circles.

As the population becomes increasingly decimated by growing violence, people become more curious or even anxious to learn about an issue that is still taboo in many countries: the secret universe of guns and gun violence. The illicit trade in firearms and ammunition pulls in sky-high profits, and those who benefit would do almost anything to keep ‘inside’ information under wraps. Little is said and little is known about the comings and goings of guns; basic questions remain unanswered. Should we buy a gun to defend our families and our property? What are the advantages and risks involved? Do people have a fundamental right to self-defense with a gun? Does gun control make life easier for criminals by taking guns away from ‘honest citizens’, who are then left ‘defenseless’? Should women use guns to protect themselves against violence perpetrated by men? What are the main sources that supply arms to criminals and how can they be controlled?

We also discuss the influential relationship between violence and culture, media, education and religion. We synthesize the basic points of the debate among theoreticians in favor of or opposed to the use of gun for protection. We can help elucidate the true situation of countries often considered ‘exemplary’, for their position (defense or opposition) with regard to small arms control: Switzerland, Australia, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Japan. We report on different realities – rich and poor, north and south – with low violence and high death rates, with few and many guns in civilian hands. Statistics are available for most countries that have tried different solutions to halt armed violence. We evaluate the impact of firearms use on public health and the economy. Particularly vulnerable sectors, such as women, children and youth are analyzed – the latter being the most frequent victims and perpetrators of gun violence.

People are divided into those who believe that owning a gun is a right and a necessity for self defense, and those who believe that guns just bring an illusion of security. However, if there are no guns, who will defend us? For some, as Secretary of State for the US Condoleezza Rice put it, “to arm oneself is a right that is as important as freedom of speech and religious freedoms”. For other specialists in public security, a lack of control over possession and carrying guns increases the lethality of violence.

The objective of this Guidebook is to provide readers, particularly policymakers and public opinion leaders, with as much information as possible in a straightforward and succinct format. We hope this knowledge will help people decide what kind of society they want to live in: a society protected by guns, or a society protected from guns.

## 1. Global Firearms Map

There are nearly 639,000,000 small arms in circulation globally, up 16% from the previous year. The figure is based on information from 110 countries, representing about half of the world population. Of these, just 37.8% belong to the armed forces, 2.8% to police, and 0.2% to rebel groups. The lion's share – 59.2% – are in the hands of civilians. Experts calculate that the armed forces have nearly 200,000,000 small arms, but they only officially declare some 16,000,000.<sup>6</sup> Even though around 4,000,000 weapons are destroyed each year, gun manufacturers add more than 8,000,000 new small arms to the market every year.<sup>7</sup> In 2000, total small arms production, including ammunition, was worth US\$7.4 billion. These weapons are produced in 1,249 companies, in at least 92 countries.<sup>8</sup> Nearly 2/3 of this market is dominated by 13 countries: United States, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Brazil, China, Austria, Switzerland, United Kingdom, France, Israel and South Africa.<sup>9</sup> The largest small arms exporters are United States, Russia, Italy, Germany, Belgium and China.<sup>10</sup> The largest importers are the United States, Cyprus, and Germany.<sup>11</sup>

### Model of analysis

Under Keith Krause's coordination, the research team at Small Arms Survey of the Graduate Institute for International Studies in Geneva developed a model of analysis together with Rio-based NGO Viva Rio. Researchers used the model to study guns and gun violence in Brazil, as well as test a methodology that could be useful in other contexts. An explanation of this methodology, as well as the results of the study, can be found in *Brazil: the Arms and the Victims*.<sup>12</sup> This publication is the first complete overview of existing weapons in Brazil, as well as their impact on public health.

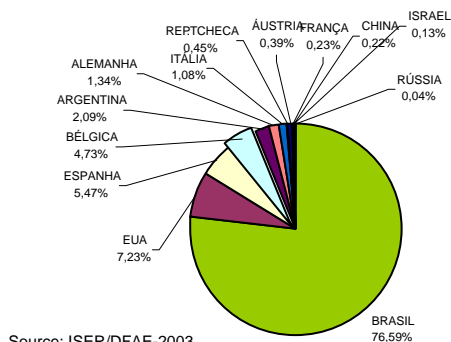
The research estimates that there are some 17,400,000 small arms in circulation in the country. The conclusions of this study are cause for real concern, and help explain the alarmingly high rates of violence in Brazil:

- Ninety percent of guns (15,257,808) are in civilian hands – internationally, civilian possession is at around 59% – and at least 10% (1,753,133) belong to the state;
- Illegal guns represent nearly 50% (8,492,857) of the total; 54% of illegal guns (4,635,058) belong to the 'informal market', that is, so-called 'honest citizens' who own guns that are not registered, and 46% (3,857,799 firearms) are in the hands of criminals;
- Among private sector small arms, 30% are informal (not registered), 25% criminal and 45% are legal.

Brazil, which in 2003 voted in strict national gun laws called the Disarmament Statute, has seen its internal security eroded by international arms trafficking. The country is in the top five small arms producers in the world, and gun control laws are only now beginning to be implemented. So the majority of guns used by organized crime are made in Brazil. But, even so, more than 23% of these weapons come from countries that say they are committed to stopping international arms trafficking. A pioneer study conducted by ISER/Viva Rio evaluated 223,584 records on illegal guns confiscated by police in Rio de Janeiro between 1950 and 2003. The findings showed that 76.59% of these were Brazilian, 80% were pistols and revolvers, and 63% were produced by the Brazilian

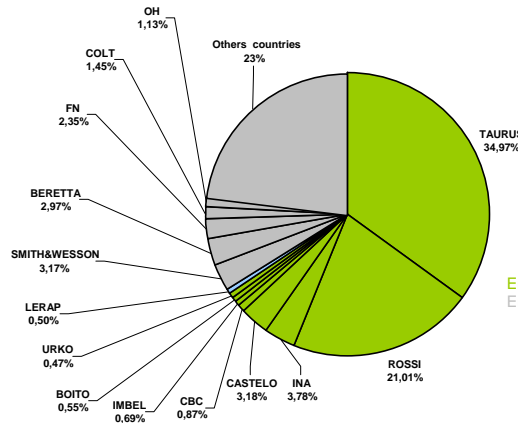
companies Taurus and Rossi.<sup>13</sup> The following two illustrations show the relationship between Brazilian-made guns and guns from other countries.

**By country of origin (1950-2003)**



Source: ISER/DFAE-2003

**By brand/producer (1950-2003)**



Em Verde: Empresas brasileiras  
Em Cinza: Empresas estrangeiras

Source: DFAE/ISER, 2003

**2. Map of Gun Violence**

Since the end of World War II, nearly 30,000,000 people have died in different armed conflicts; 26,000,000 of them were killed with guns. While small arms represent only an eighth of the total arms trade, clandestine markets or lack of controls make them easy to acquire. They are relatively affordable, easy to transport and handle (even for a child), long-lasting and easy to conceal. These are the weapons that supply organized crime, and feed the explosion of violence in urban centers and armed conflicts.

It is estimated that nearly 300,000 people are killed by firearms throughout the world each year. Around 100,000 of these die in wars and 200,000 from guns used in assaults, robberies, rapes and suicides;<sup>14</sup> if we include non-intentional firearm injuries, the number jumps to 270,000. Some 40% of the world's homicides are committed with firearms.<sup>15</sup> In the following table, published by Cukier and Sidel,<sup>16</sup> we see the ranking of countries with the highest number of firearms homicides in the world.

**Countries with the Highest Rates of Reported Firearm Deaths (per 100,000 inhab.) in the World\***

Ranking	Country	Year	Total Firearms Deaths (minimum)	Total Firearms Death Rate (minimum)	Gun Homicide Rate	Gun Suicide Rate	Accidental Firearm Death Rate	Undetermined Death Rate	Percent of Homicides with Firearms	Percent of Firearm Deaths that are Homicides
1	Colombia	2002	22.827	55,7	51,8				86	93
2	Venezuela	2000	5.689	34,3	22,15	1,16	0,42	10,57	67	95
3	South Africa	2002	11.709	26,8	26,1				54	97
4	El Salvador	2001	1.641	25,8	25,3				71	98
5	Brazil	2002	38.088	21,72	19,54	0,78	0,18	1,22	64	97
6	Puerto Rico	2001	734	19,12	17,36	1,17	0,49	0,1	91	91
7	Jamaica	1997	450	18,6	18,2	0,37			58	98
8	Guatemala	2000	2.109	18,5						
9	Honduras	1999	1.677	16,2	16,2					
10	Uruguay	2000	104	13,91	3,11	7,18	3,53	0,09	63	22
11	Ecuador	2000	1.321	13,39	10,73	0,77	0,25	1,63	68	80
12	Argentina	2001	371	11,49	4,34	2,88	0,64	3,63	70	38
13	USA	2001	29.753	10,27	3,98	5,92	0,28	0,08	64	38

\* Firearm death rate among 112 countries.

Source: Global Firearms Deaths (Toronto: Small Arms/Firearms Education and Research Network, 2005)

Of these countries, Colombia does not effectively implement its gun control law and is engaged in a war; Brazil and South Africa have new legislation that is still in the beginning phases of implementation; and Argentina has a moderately restrictive law and the rest of the countries have permissive or insufficient laws to combat illicit small arms trafficking. By contrast, Japan, which has one of the world's strictest gun laws, has a gun homicide rate of 0.03 per 100,000 residents.<sup>17</sup>

According to Amnesty International, "60.9% of human rights violations are committed with small arms in the 12 countries most affected by violence, including Brazil". Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest gun death rate in the world: between 12.89 and 15.5 per 100,000 residents. Sixty percent of homicides in the Americas are committed with guns.<sup>18</sup> The Pan American Health Organization found that 84% of the total homicides (120,000) committed in 2000 in the Americas occurred in the four countries with the largest populations: Brazil (38%), Colombia (27%), United States (20%) and Mexico (15%).<sup>19</sup>

### **The case of Brazil**

Brazil ranks fifth in the world for gun death rates (number per 100,000 residents), and first for the absolute number of people killed by these weapons. In 2003, there were 39,284 gun deaths and 19,519 gun injuries.<sup>20</sup> In Angola's 27-year civil war, 350,000 people were killed. In the 1990s alone, 369,101 people were killed in Brazil, more than the 340,000 people killed with the atomic bombs launched over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>21</sup>

The numbers on firearms violence in Brazil are impressive:

- Of the 104 Brazilians killed by guns on an average day in 2002, 94 were homicides, four were suicides, one was an accident and five were unknown intent;<sup>22</sup>
- Guns kill 3.5 times more than AIDS. Youth are 27 times more likely to die by guns than the rest of the Brazilian population;<sup>23</sup>
- Homicides have increased four times faster than the rate of population growth;<sup>24</sup>
- Most (63.9%) homicides are committed with firearms, while 19.8% are caused by other weapons.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Pros and Cons of Gun Use

#### The ‘surprise factor’

Let us analyze the following statement: “Guns are the most effective way for an honest guy to defend himself against a criminal attack”. A person who is insecure about gun crime could feel the need to get a gun, take some shooting classes and prepare themselves to fulfill their perceived duty to protect the family. Having a gun usually makes the owner feel more secure. People who have guns must be prepared to risk their own lives, if need be, to stop such an attack. At the same time, they hope that just brandishing the firearm without firing it will be threatening enough to scare the intruder away. But is this actually a realistic supposition about what would happen during an armed break-in?

Not really, as this scenario leaves out some critical elements. The most important one is the ‘surprise factor’. It was the attacker who initiated the break-in, and he (or in rare cases, she) would obviously choose a propitious moment and the best conditions to do so. The criminal has a powerful advantage over the victim, who is surprised by the break-in, likely while he or she is sleeping, watching television, eating dinner, or driving their car. They are not likely to be standing with their gun in hand, ready to shoot. If the intruder’s gun is already pointed at the victim, it could go off in a fraction of a second, making it irrelevant if the victim is an experienced shooter (though most often, they are not anyway). It is highly unlikely that the victim will get the chance to use a gun defensively – even if it is within easy reach.

Studies on the benefits and risks of using firearms to prevent gun crime (such as break-ins or assaults) and homicides have been available for decades in the United States. For example, a study by the Justice Ministry, conducted between 1987 and 1992, concluded that guns are not effective for self-defense because criminals usually surprise their victims. Most people will not have enough time to use their gun to react to a crime.<sup>26</sup> Another study, analyzing official data from 1987 to 1990 in the *National Crime Victimization Survey* concluded that, on average, “using a gun to resist an assault causes less than two murders in 1000. The most likely explanation is that firearms are rarely used to resist a residential break-in because few gun owners have enough time to get their gun and use it in their defense.”<sup>27</sup> Naturally, unfavorable conditions for a potential victim can become favorable if he or she is able to see the attacker before he strikes – like if they have a guard dog that barks, closed circuit TV, or other security equipment.

#### Firearms and other weapons: a comparison

Some people believe that “if you want to kill someone, and there is no gun around, you will use any other weapon that is handy, especially knives”. It goes without saying that knives, or other perforating or blunt objects, have many non-violent uses. In exceptional cases they made be used to harm another person. Guns, on the other hand, are made exclusively to kill. They are extremely effective, and extremely lethal; the chances that a gunshot victim will survive are slim. When people use guns in cities for self-defense, innocent bystanders can be inadvertently shot. This is the rule rather than the exception in shootouts when someone on a bus or subway tries to stop an armed robbery. Other



weapons “imply greater involvement with the victim, physical proximity, courage and a serious determination to go through with the act. By contrast, firearms can be shot from a distance, without becoming involved with the victim at all”.<sup>28</sup> In the following graph, FAP means Firearm Projectile and N means the number of cases analyzed.

In Brazil, 63.9% of homicides are committed with guns, while 19.8% are caused by other weapons. If we look at injuries, 39% of hospitalizations for violence or attempted homicide are caused by other weapons, and only 30% are caused by guns – this is testament to the lethality of gun violence. The chance of dying in an assault with a gun is 75%, while with other weapons it is around 36%. Three out of four people intentionally shot with a gun will die.<sup>29</sup> In other words, while other weapons wound more often than they kill, firearms kill far more than they wound.

Guns are used in just 50% of attempted suicides in Brazil. Why? Because the attempts are usually successful, and the person dies. Thirty percent of attempted homicides (aggression in which the victim did not die) are committed with firearms, but the majority (39%) are with other weapons, which are far less likely to result in death.

A series of five massacres in China in 2004 left 46 schoolchildren wounded and nine dead.<sup>30</sup> The killers did not use guns in the attacks; if they had, the proportion of deaths to injuries would almost certainly be inverted. However this is unlikely, due to tough Chinese legislation that makes it very difficult to get a gun.

In 1992 in the United States, “firearms killed 37,776 people and sharp objects killed 4,095. While 134,000 people survived gunshot wounds, 3,100,000 people injured with sharp weapons and receiving medical treatment survived”.<sup>31</sup> Imagine that the students at Columbine had attacked with knives instead of automatic firearms. Think of the wound a child would have if she cut herself on a piece of glass, or with a knife, then compare that to the injuries she would have if she accidentally shot herself. An attempted suicide or homicide with a bottle or other weapon has enormously different consequences than with a gun. At the international level, the median cost of treating gun-related injuries is 12 times higher than those caused by sharp objects.<sup>32</sup>

#### **“Cars and knives also kill people. Why should only firearms be banned?”**

This argument comes from the United States: “Guns can cause death. Agreed. So can automobiles, swimming pools, and physicians, all of which cause more deaths annually than guns. Are we going to ban those?”<sup>33</sup> Clearly this comment is just used to make a point, but careful analysis shows how absurd it really is. First, most traffic deaths are accidental, not intentional. Guns, on the other hand, are designed to kill – and to kill efficiently. They lower the risk of harm to the perpetrator, who can shoot from a distance without giving the victim a chance to react. They allow a would-be murderer to kill several people at once or in seconds, or to inadvertently shoot innocent bystanders. Stray bullets kill a person every six days in Rio de Janeiro, according to the Public Security Secretariat. Therefore, comparing firearms with other objects in the home or car, considering them equally harmless and ‘inert’ – especially around children – is simply irresponsible.

Traffic accidents are a serious problem and the cause of death for many young people each year. Even so, Brazil is one of the few countries where more people are killed by guns than by cars. In 2002, 38.8% of deaths among young people 15 - 24 years old were caused by guns and 16% by car accidents. (See *Youth and armed violence*.)

### **Amateurs vs. professionals**

It is also important to remember that professional criminals would not hesitate at all to shoot someone attempting to react to an armed crime. The same cannot be said of the 'honest citizens', whose ethical or religious orientation triggers strong emotions when faced with the brutality of taking another human being's life. This anxiety can cause them to vacillate, which be all the time an attacker needs to shoot first. As the gun control campaign in Uruguay asks, "Are you prepared to kill? A criminal is."

Further, even if the victim is able to react effectively, he or she could still be taken out by an accomplice, a partner in crime. Examples abound in everyday news reports: "Military police officer Ary Santos was shot several times yesterday and killed after he tried to respond to an attempted assault on the Washington Luiz highway. Ary killed one of the criminals in the shootout, but was himself then killed by a second attacker."<sup>34</sup> If even an experienced police officer is not able to respond safely to such a situation, imagine what could happen to an unprepared civilian.

### **The myth of the good guy in the movies**

Generations of people have grown up revering the good guy in the movies, from yesterday's western cowboys and detectives, to today's Rambos and Exterminators. Hollywood films have had an extraordinary influence on standards of masculinity across different cultures. The good guy, because he has a sense of justice and a good cause on his side, repels the bad guy's attacks *and* comes out unscathed. This fantasy, played out over and over again, begins to infiltrate the collective imagination. Young men are particularly susceptible to confusing special effects with reality.

Sometimes the outrage and injustice experienced by victims of gun crime contributes to their feeling that they must try to stop it, that they, like their Hollywood heroes, will come out unscathed. Unfortunately 'happy endings' in real life are very rare. The harsh reality is that most attempts to react to an armed assault end in tragedy. Whether we like it or not, to a criminal's perverse logic, if a victim draws a gun they must die.

### **"Guns as a last resort"?**

A cautious person might think they will be able to weigh the risks: "If it seems like I have a good chance, I'll use my gun against the intruder, but if it seems risky, I won't." But an attacker may strike your car, or invade your house. He will rummage through all the places where he is most likely to find money or other goods, and he will find your gun. Your gun, stored in an accessible place – because if not, how would you get a hold of it quickly to defend yourself? And predictably, when he finds it, the intruder will become enraged, thinking, *you were going to wait for me to slip up and you were going to use this gun against me!* And he will end up shooting you. This is the most common

scenario, according to police we interviewed in Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia and Jamaica. This is the tragic irony: guns meant to protect family members often wind up being used against them. People whose guns have hurt or killed family members face a nightmare of despair and guilt. Like the desperate father in a Rio suburb who will forever lament his “damn gun!” after seeing a thief use it to kill his son.

**“Are you prepared to kill someone?”**

If you have a gun and you react to a crime, there are two possible outcomes: either the criminal will surprise you and you will die, or you will kill the intruder. But are you prepared to kill a person? Some are. But the majority of us would have a problem living with murder, even if we think we acted in legitimate defense. Are you prepared to deal with the consequences for your family and the victim’s family? Once the moment of fear and hatred has passed, will you be alright with having killed a human being because they wanted to rob you? Would it not have been better to call the police to catch them and recover your stolen possessions? This is what police are for – they have a risky job, for which they must be prepared to kill, if necessary – protecting good citizens from this danger and deep trauma. But, if you feel prepared to kill, to face the consequences of this extreme act of violence, and you think it is worth it, then you are right to get a gun.

**“Firearms – defensive or offensive?”**

For people who live in concentrated urban areas, and not on large properties protected by dogs and security guards, firearms are useful for attacking others. They are far less useful for self-defense – except in the rare case that a person knows in advance an intruder is coming. Being a good shot does not make any difference if there is already a gun pointed at you, or someone you love. Of course there are unusual stories of a victim who realizes his house is being broken into, gets his gun, and uses it to successfully scare off the intruder – in the best case, without having to shoot anyone. The problem is that keeping a gun at home creates other types of risks for the family, as we will see further ahead.

**“Guns should be used only by well-trained individuals”?**

An encounter between two people with guns is not like a dispute between, for example, a judo fighter and someone who knows nothing about the sport. In the latter, training and technique would assure the superiority of the experienced fighter, even if the other attacks first. When guns are involved, however, the person who attacks first has a huge advantage, regardless of who is a better shot or who has a better gun. Moreover, it is one thing to be a good shot when firing at fixed targets, or even moving targets, on a shooting range. But it is quite different to grab a hidden gun, under stress, and shoot it (supposing that it is already loaded), while a gun is pointed at you. If the attacker’s gun happens to fail, or he misses his shot, you may have a chance to be like a hero in the old west. But isn’t it better to plan to live (or stay alive) based on what is actually likely to happen rather than improbable luck?

Gun laws in many countries include preventative measures to avoid accidents, especially among curious children and depressed or angry family members. For example, they may require a gun to be stored unloaded, with ammunition in a separate locked container; others require a lock mechanism on the gun or trigger. But if we take these essential

precautions to prevent misuse, will we be able to use the gun for self-defense? Will a gun owner have time to find the gun, unlock it, load it, cock it and shoot the armed intruder before he shoots first? For these reasons, many people go against the law and keep their guns loaded, cocked, and easily accessible, on the bedside table or in the glove compartment... just waiting to be grabbed by a drunk or jealous husband, or discovered by a confused child contemplating suicide, or by a robber looking for goods to steal.

Thus, knowing how to handle a gun is only useful in a few situations: a) to avoid accidentally firing it (the owner, but not others), b) to stop an intruder if you can shoot first (rarely happens), or c) to kill someone. The same thing happens to people with guns as to nations that invest massively in military defense: outside interests and feelings of superiority push them towards aggression. Some people cannot resist the temptation to put in practice what they have learned about handling guns, and try to thwart an attack. The cemetery is full of brave souls who confused courage with a lack of good judgment.

### **Risk of accidents / unintentional injuries**

Carlos Murgel, President of Forjas Taurus, the biggest small arms producer in Brazil, has been known to say, "There are no accidents, but impertinence, imprudence and negligence." In other words, a firearms owner who knows how to handle a weapon and is responsible would be ready to use it without risk. Really?

Police are professionals trained in the use of firearms, but even so are known to inadvertently wound innocent bystanders or themselves. Such occurrences are more common than we would believe. How many accidents are never reported? In a very high profile recent example, US Vice-President Dick Cheney, a staunch gun defender and proponent of bellicose diplomacy, seriously wounded his friend when he accidentally shot him in the face on a hunting trip.

What is the point of being an expert gun handler (this rarely is the case among gun owners), if caught by surprise by an intruder? Or if the experienced shooter loses his head in a fight with a woman or with a neighbor? Sociologist Gláucio Soares concludes, "We need campaigns to show that guns in the home kill more family members than criminals. You buy a gun under the illusion that it will kill an intruder, but your eight year-old son tries to play with it and kills himself instead. Now what?"<sup>35</sup>

### **"Gun-free homes attract criminals"?**

According to the Brazilian Gun Owner and Trader Association website, "The number of residential break-ins will go up if criminals know homes are undefended. Assaultants will become more daring, knowing that no one is allowed to carry a gun anymore."

In reality, criminals are more than happy to assault houses with guns – they are, after all, valuable commodities. Police records reveal that it is common for criminals to break in shouting, "Where are the guns??" In this way the assailant can reduce the risk of getting into a shootout with the victim, and can locate the guns he wants to steal.

Analyzing data from 1999, the United States Justice Department found that guns are not fired in 75% of assaults. If the victim does have a gun, this may even encourage the perpetrator to shoot out of fear. This could explain why it is more common for thieves to use guns in states where guns are more accessible. Another study, based on official FBI data, revealed that “high firearms possession rates increase the probability that homes will be targeted for assaults. A 10% increase in gun possession rates will result in a 3 - 7% increase in the probability that these homes will be broken into. One reason could be that guns are a valuable commodity to steal. This theory is supported by the fact that in 14% of assaults, in homes where a gun was stolen, this was the only thing stolen.”<sup>36</sup>

The rule in Rio de Janeiro is that when police are on their beat alone on the street, they do not carry powerful expensive weapons (like assault rifles or submachine guns) because criminals would target them for attack. Police statements reveal that organized crime pays US\$15,000 to kill police officers if they can also steal their gun.

A person with a gun attracts the interest of criminals: the more powerful the gun, the higher the risk. Flashy guns that are worth a lot of money often generate violence themselves, as criminals or corrupt police fight over them. In summary, carrying or owning a gun only very rarely deters a thief. Analyzing 50,000 families in the United States, researchers from the University of Maryland concluded that, “in general, criminals are not intimidated by victims with guns.” A study comparing data from 50 US cities found that, “when thieves know we have a gun at home, they tend to shoot first and ask questions later, in order to avoid a reaction.”<sup>37</sup>

According to specialist Luciano Bueno, “the networks effect, in which people who have guns protect neighbors and others who do not because criminals think that the neighborhood is well-guarded and secure, in reality generates a radicalization effect, because knowing that there might be a gun in the home, the criminal will first try to immobilize the victims by wounding or killing them.”<sup>38</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, the city of Boston has few guns in homes due to a strict law, and although there are high rates of robberies, there are few deaths and injuries by firearms.

Gun proponents have ironically suggested that if people believe gun control lowers the risk of criminal assaults, they should put a sign on their homes announcing “No guns in this house”. But gun control advocates never claimed that homes with no guns would have a lower risk of break-ins. An honest, effective, and cooperative police force is one way to lower the risk of break-ins in a community. Homes without guns, on the other hand, *are safer for people*: they have a lower risk of accidents, suicides, and heat-of-the-moment shootings among family members or friends, as well as a lower risk for shootings during a break-in. The sarcastic comment, then, can be turned around: if someone believes their home is safer with a gun, they should put a sign outside advertising, “Guns in this house”. Would this scare criminals away or attract them? In many countries, it would almost certainly attract them; possibly not in others.

### **The Bush doctrine: ‘good guns’ and ‘bad guns’?**

The ‘Bush doctrine’ for gun control, upheld against the will of most other countries in the UN Conference on Illicit Small Arms Trafficking in 2001, draws a radical separation between legal and illegal firearms markets. Governments, the logic goes, must control the second, and interfere as little as possible in the first, “guaranteeing free trade and the right of good people to have guns.” The problem with this policy is that it ignores that 99% of small arms are legally produced (we calculate that in Brazil less than 1% of guns are home-made, and only a handful of countries would have higher proportions). Somehow, then, legal guns migrate to illegal markets. In the Brazilian case, one-third of the illegal guns seized by police in Rio de Janeiro were originally sold to ‘good citizens’. In other words, in order to control illegal trade the legal markets must also be monitored and controlled. Such control is possible, if there is political will, because guns are produced by known industries and, until they fall into criminal hands, they follow legal paths. This is very different from drug trafficking, where the entire lifecycle from production to consumption, is clandestine and illegal.

US policy is based on the same mistake made by many other gun enthusiasts: it draws a hard line between honest citizens’ guns, considered ‘good guns’, and guns used in crime, or ‘bad guns’. While the *intentions* of criminals and honest citizens are obviously different, small arms do not respect borders – neither of countries nor of markets. Thus, ‘good guns’ bought for self-defense often end up in the hands of criminals, or are used to commit crimes. Carlos Oliveira, Director of Arms and Explosives Repression in Rio de Janeiro, says that “nearly 150 firearms are stolen monthly in Rio state, the majority from private residences. Just 35% come from private security.”<sup>39</sup>

Research by Rio-based thinktank ISER<sup>40</sup> on 77,527 Taurus pistols and revolvers apprehended and stockpiled by police in Rio state between 1951 and 2003 proved that 30% of these had been bought legally before falling into criminal hands.<sup>41</sup> That is, for every three illegal guns seized, one had been bought legally by someone with a clean record. How do these guns move from legal to illegal markets? Through robbery, theft, loss, resale, diversion from stores and production lines etc., but many from criminals who steal them off ‘honest citizens’ and in attacks on police and private security guards, as well as diversion by corrupt police.

### **Stealing legal guns**

In spite of a widely-held belief that criminals arm themselves with weapons trafficked through illegal markets, statistics reveal that stolen legal guns are actually a major contributor to crime. “In Rio state, a legally purchased gun is stolen every five hours, and 27% of these come from residential break-ins”.<sup>42</sup> In the state of São Paulo, “of the 77,000 guns seized in 1998, 71,400 were stolen and 5,500 were diverted”.<sup>43</sup> According to one analyst, in this state, “on average, 11,000 guns are stolen each year from people who have no criminal records or from private security agents, according to the civilian police”.<sup>44</sup> The study concludes that “a significant reduction in legal firearms would also reduce the number of illegally traded guns.”

This scenario repeats itself in other countries. In Chile, according to the military police (*carabineros*), “80% of the firearms seized in the past six months – 1,657 guns – had

been bought legally before they were stolen from individuals”.<sup>45</sup> In South Africa, “in just one year (1998), 30,220 firearms were stolen or reported lost. Illegal markets in my country are fed by guns that are lost or stolen from legal arms owners.”<sup>46</sup>

Country	Year	Stolen guns	Total legal guns
Australia	2001	4,950	2,165,170
Canada	2001	3,638	1,938,338
England and Wales	1996	3,002	1,793,712
South Africa	2001	23,000	3,500,000
United States	1997	500,000	260,000,000

Source: Small Arms Survey 2004

A report from a well-known North American foundation said, “One stolen gun is worth gold to a criminal, because it can be resold quickly and without much risk of being traced; more than 80% of stolen guns were from attacks on homes and cars”.<sup>47</sup>

In summary, to say *the vast majority of guns used in crimes are illegal* gives the impression that the problem is illegal guns and we don’t have to worry about the legal ones. But research indicates that: (1) Guns in the hands of criminals were legally produced but because of a lack of control, were trafficked on illegal markets; (2) A study conducted on more than 15,000 firearms voluntarily handed in at Viva Rio and partner institutions as part of the Disarmament Campaign showed that just 30% of them were registered; (3) Legal guns are often used in crimes, mainly against family members, friends and acquaintances; (4) One-third of the illegal guns seized in Rio de Janeiro were originally legally sold to so-called ‘honest citizens’; (5) Guns stolen from ‘good people’ can – and do – end up involuntary arming criminals.

#### **Guns used in Columbine and other massacres**

On April 20, 1999, two students at Columbine Highschool, Klebold and Harris, opened fire in a now-infamous school massacre. They killed 12 fellow students, one professor, and wounded 24 other students, before committing suicide. They used two shotguns and two pistols, which had been legally purchased by one of the murderer’s girlfriends in a gun show or bought by a friend.

The massacre shocked the world. A documentary film about the incident, *Bowling for Columbine*, drew attention to the debate on easy access to legal guns and their frequent use in crimes. It also questioned the values of a society where ‘multiple murders’ of innocent people are fairly commonplace, and occur for incomprehensible or very banal reasons. It is striking that, excluding ethnic cleansing in Europe and Africa in the past decade, such murders occur largely in developed countries, such as the US, due to permissive laws and the frequent use of guns acquired legally by ‘good people’.

On April 26, 2002 in the city of Erfurt, Germany, young Robert Steinhäuser, 19, invaded his former school, shooting down 16 students and then killing himself. Robert was a member of a shooters club, so he could legally buy the ammunition he used to attack the school: a Glock-17 pistol and a Mossberg 590 pump-action shotgun.

A specialist from New Zealand, Philip Alpers, has studied massacres with more than ten deaths occurring in the past 35 years in developed countries.<sup>48</sup> His conclusions show that 79% of victims were shot by legally-acquired guns (185 to 233 victims), and 86% of these mass murders (12 out of 14) were committed by the legal owners of the guns used to kill the victims, as seen in the table below (deaths = number of victims + perpetrator).

#### MASS MURDERS IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (1966-2002)

Date	Locale	Deaths	Situation of the gun used
26 April 2002	Erfurt, Germany	16+ 1	Legal gun, member of shooters club
27 September 2001	Zug, Switzerland	14 + 1	Legal guns, registered owners
29 July 1999	Atlanta, USA	12 + 1	Legal guns, openly sold in the state
20 April 1999	Littleton, USA	13 + 2	Illegal guns
28 April 1996	Port Arthur, Australia	35	Illegal guns
13 March 1996	Dunblane, Scotland	17 + 1	Legal guns, member of a shooters club
16 October 1991	Killeen, USA	23 + 1	Legal guns, openly sold in the state
13 November 1990	Aramoana, New Zealand	13 + 1	Legal guns, registered owner
18 June 1990	Jacksonville, USA	9 + 1	Legal guns, openly sold in the state
06 December 1989	Montreal, Canada	14 + 1	Legal guns, openly sold
19 August 1987	Hungerford, UK	16 + 1	Legal guns, member of shooters club
20 Agosto 1986	Edmond, USA	14 + 1	Legal guns, openly sold in the state
18 July 1984	San Ysidro, USA	21 + 1	Legal guns, openly sold in the state
01 August 1966	Austin, USA	16 + 1	Legal guns, openly sold in the state

Source: Gun Control Network (United Kingdom)

In the United States, which essentially sets the standard for multiple murders, statistics confirm Alpers' findings. An analysis of 65 such multiple murder over the past four decades (1963-2001), found that 62% of handguns and 71% of long-barreled guns used to commit the murders had been legally acquired.<sup>49</sup>

Between 1992 and 2000, 267 people were killed violently in US schools. Of these, 206 (or 77%) were killed by guns in their classrooms, school buses or gymnasiums. In the following table, we can compare the methods used and results.<sup>50</sup>

#### CAUSES OF DEATH IN US SCHOOLS

School year	Physical injuries	Hanging	Heart attack	Fall	Firearms	Other weapons	Strangulation	Unknown
1992-93	0	0	0	1	<b>43</b>	10	0	0
1993-94	1	1	0	0	<b>39</b>	7	2	1
1994-95	2	0	0	0	<b>15</b>	3	0	0
1995-96	1	0	0	0	<b>28</b>	6	0	0
1996-97	3	0	1	0	<b>15</b>	3	1	2
1997-98	1	0	0	0	<b>35</b>	6	1	0
1998-99	3	0	0	0	<b>23</b>	1	1	0
1999-00	1	1	0	0	<b>8</b>	0	0	1



<b>Total</b>	12	2	1	1	<b>206</b>	36	5	4
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Source: *Report on School Associated Violent Death*, National School Safety Center, 04.01.05

Statistics of massacres in the US quickly become out of date. In the 2003-2004 school year, 49 people died in schools. In March, 2005, Jeff Weise, a 16 year-old Native American student on a reservation in Red Lake, Minnesota, killed nine people, the majority students, wounded seven and killed himself. The young man, a Hitler admirer who identified himself on the internet as “NativeNazi”, had first killed his grandfather and his girlfriend with a .22 caliber gun. Then, with two pistols and one shotgun that he stole from his grandfather, a police officer, he continued his killing spree at the school. One week earlier, Terry Ratzmann, 44, opened fire 22 times at his church in Brookfield Wisconsin, killing seven people, wounding four others, and then killing himself. Survivors said he “seemed like a normal guy”.

So what do pro-gun lobbyists recommend to prevent violence in schools? Following a 1998 school massacre in Arkansas, gun enthusiast and researcher John Lott publicly stated that “allowing professors and other good citizens to have gun in schools will not only make it easier to end these mass murders, but it will also help avoid them.”<sup>51</sup>

### **“Demonizing firearms”?**

The Brazilian Gun Owners and Traders Association said the following in the Senate: “What is it they want [those in favor of holding gun destructions], if not to demonize guns – inanimate objects – as well as their legitimate owners ?”<sup>52</sup> Some people speak out against public ceremonies to destroy excess small arms stocks because they believe these serve to “demonize” objects that are “inanimate” or inoffensive.

Naturally, guns are not the ‘cause’ of violence, but its instrument. Just as the ‘cause’ of malaria is not the mosquito; we combat the mosquito because it spreads malaria. Today, eliminating mosquitoes to reduce transmission and interrupt the epidemic’s cycle is standard medical practice. But at the turn of the last century in Rio de Janeiro, there was a popular rebellion against getting vaccinated for yellow fever, which then caused an epidemic in the city. This old struggle has since been won by science in the field of public health, and is repeating itself today in the field of public security. In Brazil, the more than 19,000,000 guns in circulation (half of them illegal) are causing a true epidemic, with over 100 gun deaths per day.

### **What does the research say?**

Many studies have attempted to answer the question, “Am I safer with a firearm?”, most from the United States. According to the US government, each time a gun was used successfully in self defense for a justifiable homicide, another 185 people were killed by firearms in homicides, suicides and accidents.<sup>53</sup>

The numbers vary, but most research comes to the same conclusion as US *Criminology* magazine: “Many gun owners, particularly handgun owners, believe that guns are useful

for self-defense. However, it is far more likely that a gun at home will be used in a homicide, suicide or unintentional shooting than against an intruder.”<sup>54</sup>

Research from the University of California, coordinated by epidemiologist Dr. Douglas Wiebe, concluded that in that state, people with guns at home are twice as likely to be killed with guns than those who do not have them, and 16 times more likely to use them to commit suicide. More than 56% of firearms victims knew their aggressors; of these, 15% occurred during family fights and 6% in drug-related disputes.<sup>55</sup> Thus, it is for safety reasons – not ‘prejudice’ against guns – that security experts recommend victims do not react if they are attacked by an armed intruder, as this is likely to be worse.

#### 4. Who Kills with Firearms?

##### **“Danger comes from the streets”?**

Not all violence is perpetrated by strangers. Contrary to what we normally believe, most gun deaths occur during personal fights, arguments between family members or friends. There is great resistance to the idea that the threat could be so close to home.

However, according to data from the FBI, “Contrary to popular perception, most homicides do not occur as the result of an attack by a stranger but stem from an argument between people who know each other and are often related.”<sup>56</sup> Further, “in the United States, between 1976 and 2002, only 8.9% of homicides among women and 15.5% of homicides among men were committed by strangers.”<sup>57</sup> In 1997, one in three murders resulted from a fight, and only one in five from criminal activity.<sup>58</sup> In Australia, just “15.6% of gun homicides were committed by strangers to the victim in the period 2001-2002.”<sup>59</sup> In the province of Mendoza, Argentina, “just 10% of guns deaths result from robberies and rape. The rest occur as a result of fights, suicides and accidents”.<sup>60</sup>

##### **“Outside threats to the safety of the home”**

Modern research is dispelling the myth that homes are ‘safe havens’. They could be, and they should be, but often they are actually dangerous. Marital conflicts, violence against women, physical and sexual aggressions against children, disputes among family members, neurotic relationships that lead to physical brutality and torture, etc. – all reveal that homes can hide terrible human rights violations. In many countries, domestic violence is not a crime or is not fully punished by authorities. The crime is ignored and omitted, in effect giving men unlimited control of their partners, and adults total power over children. Women and children suffer ill-treatment at the hands of the unquestionably authoritative father figure, while governments wash their hands of these supposedly ‘private’ affairs. What happens within four walls is not out of the reach of justice. Today in many countries there are specialized police precincts to deal with complaints of violence against women as well as special child protection agencies.

People defend the family unit as the basis of ethics and a source of emotional and economic security; “broken families” are seen as a risk factor for delinquents and maladjusted individuals. However this does not mean we should not ‘interfere in family matters’ or ‘private affairs’, as some homes become traps of abuse of power and force. A

recent study on child abuse in the home found that, for cases reported in July 2004 in Rio de Janeiro, “in 56% of cases, the mother commits the abuse, and the father in 23% of the cases [...] Terrible punishments included using hot spoons, lit cigarettes, knives and chains”.<sup>61</sup> According to another analysis from Rio, “in 1,565 reported cases of sexual abuse against minors, 59% were intra-familial and 40% were extra-familial; in the latter category, 30% of the abuses were perpetrated by neighbors.”<sup>62</sup>

## 5. If We Disarm, Who Will Defend Us?

This is a more justifiable question. Defending civilian disarmament in a society like the UK, in which 81% of those who commit crimes are punished, is easy.<sup>63</sup> It is far more difficult to convince people that they should not have guns a violent country like Brazil where only 3 - 4% of homicides are solved, according to a recent admission by the Justice Ministry. Insecurity, aggravated by impunity, make some seek self-defense and their own forms of justice rather than rely on the state.

Legal expert Celso Bastos argues that “if the state is not able to disarm criminals, they can not ask honest citizens to disarm”. This conclusion would make sense if guns actually increased security. As the majority of serious studies prove, they do not; rather they create an illusion of protection. It is important to correct this misconception and simultaneously pressure the state to provide security more effectively. Further, the notion that a serious police force takes away the need for law-abiding citizens to have guns, ignores the fact that so many crimes are not perpetrated by strangers.

### **“Security can be achieved if the people are armed”?**

Caught in a web of fear, many believe that the answer to insecurity is more guns. Let us imagine that everyone had a gun, at home and on the street. Would we have more “dead criminals”, as some believe? Or would we also have more citizens killed in confrontations and unexpected attacks, more guns stolen from homes and from those who carry guns, more ordinary misunderstandings ending in tragedies, and great increases in deaths by stray bullets, suicides and accidents? We also know that the more honest citizens arm themselves, the bigger and more potent the criminals’ arsenals.

Only incontrollable panic, or an uncontrollable hatred, could lead someone to imagine that a society full of guns would increase security. Public policies, which affect the lives of millions, must be based on rational analyses and scientific research. At the outset, society may not understand which is the most effective policy or why; it must be clearly explained and widely communicated. But it is very tempting to take an easy shortcut with attention-grabbing but innocuous measures. Demagoguery, manipulation of fear and hate have led groups to take the theory of the ‘armed society’ too far, and become involved with terrorist activities or lynchings.

### **“The police can’t be everywhere all the time”**

The theory of the ‘armed society’ also backs another NRA argument: If the police cannot be everywhere all the time, we all need guns to protect ourselves. Let us consider which countries in the world are safest and most free? The answer is, advanced democracies

that have an efficient, honest and respected police force; a culture of tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution; a democratic and agile justice system; a more equal distribution of wealth; a democratic military and police trainings, etc. If our governments do not make public security a real priority, uninformed sectors of society are more likely to get carried away by naïve and dangerous proposals, such as that of the ‘armed society’. The theory is typical of fanatical communities, far removed from reality and intoxicated by racist or intolerant ideologies, such as the extreme right ‘armed militias’ of the US. Filmmaker Michael Moore interviewed fundamentalists who taught three year-old children to fire guns in the film *Bowling for Columbine*. Such groups spawned the terrorists who blew up a federal building in Oklahoma, killing 168 people in 1995 (see *Only Dictators Disarm the People*). In São Paulo, a man left part of his collection of 500 guns spread out around the house, where police seized a photo of his three year-old daughter playing with a .30 anti-air machine gun.<sup>64</sup>

#### **“If rich people have armed body guards, guns must protect them”?**

A bodyguard’s job is to always be alert and prevent surprise attacks. For this, they receive extensive training, which increases their chances of repelling an attack. Even so, they have a very high-risk job, and they usually make good money because they risk their life to protect their employer.

It is absurd to compare an ordinary person with no gun to a person who has an armed bodyguard for protection in order to prove that guns increase their user’s security. People who use guns (even in the case of the bodyguard), are more exposed to attack and are will be the first to be shot. A bodyguard who is killed defending their boss is not even usually mentioned in news reports. It is more likely the news will highlight the celebrity, “who escaped an attempt on his life, in which two bodyguards died”.

That some have resources to contract well-trained private security while others do not brings up the related issues of social inequality and the state’s inability to provide public security. Some hold that if only the rich can hire bodyguards, the rest of us should get guns to defend ourselves. But it is inconceivable that a society in which we all have bodyguards or we all have guns would be secure. Safe communities are those with a good police force that protects the entire population and not just those who can afford to pay for private security. The failure of public security pushes us to seek individual solutions (see *Lack of control on private security companies*). But the real solution is to pressure the state so that it fulfills its essential function of protecting all its citizens.

#### **“Criminals do not buy guns at the store”**

A gun lobbyist in Brazil said, in political discussions on the new gun law, “Honorable Senators, the Disarmament Statute will not affect those who it in theory seeks to – that is, the criminals. Obviously, criminals do not buy their weapons in gun shops!”<sup>65</sup>

Obvious, indeed, that criminals do not buy their guns in legal stores, nor are they likely to obey the new law because, by definition, criminals are those who break the law. By the same token, criminals are not the target public in voluntary weapons collections, as seen in studies from some 23 countries around the world. For example, between 0.5 and

1.8% of guns voluntarily handed over were stolen, and the number of guns involved in crimes was inexistent or negligible.<sup>66</sup>

Although we did not expect criminals to hand in weapons in the Brazilian collection campaign, the participation of churches helped delinquents, especially young people, to participate. Because they trust the institution, they sought out pastors and fathers to hand in their guns and get advice on how to leave the life of crime. Mothers also handed over their son's guns, in the hopes that they would stop being criminals and start a new life. These are exceptions rather than the rule. But even these few examples offer hope for affected families and highlight the role of religious leaders in reducing violence among youth. In conclusion, it is true that "criminals do not buy guns in stores" – honest citizens buy guns in stores. It is later that the criminals will get their hands on them.

## 6. More Guns, Less Crime or Less Guns, More Crime?

### John Lott and defending guns

The most well-known researcher to defend gun use is American John Lott.<sup>67</sup> This author attempts to prove that the more guns in the hands of good citizens in a community, the more secure the community. In other words, guns are an effective means of self defense. Lott holds that between 1993 and 1997, there was a large increase in the number of licenses conceded to carry guns, which he says, led to a 29% decrease in the rates of firearms homicides. From this he concludes that the more guns are restricted, the higher the crime rates will be. The researcher takes the US capital city of Washington DC as an example: "in spite of having one of the strictest gun control laws, it is the most violent district in the United States<sup>68</sup>, in comparison with neighboring states, where crime rates are low and it is easy to buy guns. Vermont, for example, allows citizens to carry guns, but has the lowest violent crime rate in the country."

His critics respond by saying that the potential effect of restricting gun sales in Washington DC is reduced because weapons continue to pour in through border with neighboring states. These include Virginia and Maryland, where a person is allowed to purchase "just" one gun per month, as well as Vermont, where there is no gun control (see *USA: Guns and violence*). Even so, between 1976 and 1988, following the 1976 gun ban in Washington DC, "homicides fell from 13 per month to 9.7, and suicides fell from 2.6 per month to two".<sup>69</sup>

Lott's error lies in the fact that takes as examples very violent places, where gun control laws are more rigorous, to prove that disarmament does not work. But these places are not violent *because* of gun control; rather, gun sales were restricted to try to reduce pre-existing violence. Even if gun crime rates do not drop off dramatically, it is always a question whether they would have been even higher without the measures. The same applies to communities with low rates of armed violence easy access to firearms. Probably these places would continue to be safe with or without a restriction on gun sales, because the reasons these places are secure have to do with other factors, such as high economic levels, social integration, efficient police, high level of religiousness, etc. As we always emphasize, guns on their own do not cause criminal violence.

### **The controversy over carrying guns and the “crime deterring effect”**

John Lott popularized the “crime deterring effect” of gun use; that is, the threat of a gun is enough to stop criminals from attacking. According to Lott, “the millions of licenses to carry guns in 31 US states have avoided nearly 1,570 homicides, 4,177 rapes and 60,000 assaults every year in the United States”. Specialists from two renowned research centers in Washington have differing opinions. They claim that John Lott’s studies have factual and methodological errors, and his theories are implausible and out of line with existing criminal research. To the contrary, “security and public health studies find that carrying guns produces exactly the opposite effect”: it increases the lethality of violent crime, as perpetrators seek more and more powerful guns; it increases misuse of guns; and makes it more difficult for police to combat illegal guns.<sup>70</sup>

Lott affirms that, “98% of the time, when people use guns defensively, it is enough for them to simply show the gun to stop an attack”. This is more likely if only the victim, and not the potential attacker, has a gun. But it would be difficult for a person with a gun reacting to a disarmed assailant to allege legitimate self defense, which presupposes the “moderate means that are proportional to the aggression” (see *Legal restrictions to ‘legitimate defense’*). However, it is becoming more and more common for a person to be held up precisely because they have a gun that is desired by criminals. Today, carrying a gun is more likely to have an ‘attracting effect’ than a ‘crime deterring effect’.

Lott’s theories hold a lot of sway in Texas, where more than 200,000 gun carrying licenses have been issued. The NRA told Texans in 1996 that a concealed handgun law would make Texas a safer place. But research shows that thousands of concealed handgun license holders were arrested for committing crimes, not preventing them. There have been 5,314 arrests of concealed handgun license holders since the law went into effect – an average of two and a half arrests every day from January 1, 1996 through August 31, 2001. States now considering concealed carry laws should learn from the dire consequences that Texans now live with day in and day out.

Several studies carried out in the United States have sought to answer the following question: “Would we be safer if all good citizens could carry guns?” The conclusions of this research point up a negative answer:

- If potential victims carry guns, street criminals will be encouraged to use their guns as well. Criminals tend to shoot first and ask questions later, in order to stop the victim from reacting.<sup>71</sup>
- The average increase of gun homicides was 26% in four of five areas under study after laws that made it legal to carry firearms were implemented in Oregon, Mississippi and Florida. Homicides with other instruments increased an average of just 1%.<sup>72</sup>

The notion that ‘more guns means fewer crimes’, which encourages proliferation of small arms, seems to increase insecurity and fear. If more people have more guns, criminals too will have more guns, generating a rising spiral of demand for guns and gun violence. Research supports the opposite conclusion, that is, “Less guns, more lives”, the slogan of a disarmament campaign in Paraná, Brazil.

### **“Successful defense is not reported”?**

John Lott believes that people who scare off attackers by firing warning shots or avoid break-ins by wounding the criminal do not report the incident to police. Therefore, the true number of successful self-defense cases is not computed in official statistics. In truth, underreporting is an issue for many aspects of understanding armed violence. It is very common when people do not trust the police or if police elicit more fear than respect. The underreporting to which Lott refers occurs in most circumstances where the victim does not need a police record to receive compensation or to guarantee some right – not just self-defense. Victims of assaults who chose not to react may also not report the incident to police, because they do not think it will make a difference, or because they fear reprisal by the criminal, or because they are reluctant to interact with a corrupt police officer. In Brazil, we know that “68% of victims of robberies or theft that suffered physical aggression in 1987 did not go to the police because they ‘do not believe in the police’ or because they ‘did not want to involve the police’.”<sup>73</sup> Sub-notification of gun deaths is also common in the rural areas of many countries, where innumerable people are buried without following proper legal procedures. Thus, underreporting distorts both sides of the polemical discussion of the success or failure of guns for self-defense, particularly in countries where confidence in police and government institutions is low.

## **8. ‘Exemplary’ Countries**

Both sides of the gun control debate cite the success or failure of gun control and disarmament policies in other countries to inform the experience in their country. Although there are important differences among countries, studying their experiences is one of the most effective ways to evaluate the possible outcomes of theoretical proposals. However, it is also common practice for lobbyists to distort such international experiences in their intent to manipulate information. Let us look at the official data to get a picture of the real situation in some of the most-cited countries in this discussion.

### **Switzerland: “Armed paradise”?**

Those who defend the Swiss model of “armed peace” say:

- “Switzerland is the best-armed country in the world. All citizens are required to serve in the army, and all members of the military have a firearm in their home. But the rates of crime there are almost zero.”<sup>74</sup>

- “In Switzerland, practically all homes have a gun. Not any gun, not a small .38 caliber revolver, but assault rifles. [...] I ask you: why, then are rates of violence lower than in Brazil, where the legislation is very restrictive?”<sup>75</sup>

### **An army of militia men**

In Switzerland, 37.5%<sup>76</sup> of homes have firearms, while in the United States, the figure is 48%.<sup>77</sup> Military service is continuous (during certain periods of the year): from 19 to 30 years old for soldiers, and through 50 years old for officials and specialists.<sup>78</sup> While active members of the military do bring their weapons home, these are carefully controlled. Guns are kept unloaded with the ammunition in a separate locked container,

for use only in the military trainings or in times of war. This is very different to keeping a loaded revolver in the dresser drawer, or in a holster concealed on the body. At the same time, the ammunition used for this type of weapon is only distributed by the military, not sold to the general public. Finally, the long, military-use weapons, used in the Swiss armed forces are of little use for street crime.<sup>79</sup>

### **“Paradise of tranquility”?**

Gun death rates in Switzerland look less enviable if we consider crimes committed within the homes as well as street crime. According to a criminologist at the University of Lausanne, in Switzerland, “firearms have their greatest impact within the home. We have found significant utilization of firearms in cases of domestic violence. A study conducted in 16 developed countries showed that Switzerland is the country where more women die by firearms and where the perpetrators are men without criminal records.”<sup>80</sup>

In spite of all the precautions in this well-armed country, Switzerland is not as ‘tranquil’ as it seems at first glance. Guns are used in a high percentage of suicides, and the country ranks third in the world after United States and Finland for gun suicides. The gun suicide rate per 100,000 residents is 5.92 in the US, 4.45 in Finland, and 5.8 in Switzerland.<sup>81</sup> Further, by the standards of European developed countries, the Swiss rates are not low: “In 2000, the gun mortality rate in Switzerland was 0.55 per 100,000 residents, higher than in many European countries, such as France with 0.29 and Germany with 0.20.”<sup>82</sup>

Switzerland has the highest gun death rate of many western European countries. It is true that, compared to Latin American countries, these rates may seem ‘paradisiacal’ – but vastly different realities of these regions must be taken into account. To say that “Switzerland is safe because its men are armed” is to ignore other, more important factors that influence security. A gun, on its own, does not cause violence, particularly not in a rich and socially homogeneous country, with a high quality of life, a long cultural tradition of respect for laws and a strong commitment to peace. The neutrality of Switzerland during the past wars is a fact known to everyone.

### **Gun legislation**

Even in the relatively peaceful Switzerland, the government has been discussing the necessity of banning semi-automatic weapons, except for hunters or sport shooters. The 1997 gun law was revised in 2002, “due to insufficient control on the arms trade among individuals, and to abuses linked with replica and air guns.”<sup>83</sup> The need to restrict gun use, and to harmonize the law, which was different in for each of the countries 26 cantons, became more clear after a national tragedy in Zoug. In September 2001, a man killed 14 members of the local parliament with automatic guns, which he used on a range at a gun club.

For Cukier and Sidel, “Contrary to much that has been written, Switzerland, which has a relatively high rate of gun ownership, also has rates of suicide, domestic homicide and children killed with firearms that are well above European norms.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Australia: the world’s greatest disarmament effort**



Those who defend guns, in countries like Brazil, are known to repeat: “Statistics from Australia, England and Canada show that fewer guns in the hands of the population are a green light for criminals”.<sup>85</sup> Could this be true?

#### **Port Arthur massacre and the new law**

On 28 April 1996, in Port Arthur Tasmania, Martin Bryant, armed with two semi-automatic restricted military-use rifles, killed 35 people and wounded another 18. The guns used in the massacre could be purchased legally in Tasmania, but not in the majority of other states. The massacre motivated Congress to vote a new national gun law, the Firearms Act, in June of 1996. The main points of the law were:

- Substitution of the notion of the “right” to have a gun for the notion of the “privilege” of having a gun. Self-defense is not considered a valid reason for requesting a gun. Previously, any adult could buy a gun, if they did not have a criminal record;
- Automatic and semi-automatic guns are prohibited for civilians, with the exception of ranchers and sport shooters, who must prove they are absolute necessary;
- Men with domestic violence records are not allowed to buy guns for five years after the incident;
- Individual guns must be stored unloaded, in a locked container and separate from the ammunition;
- There is a mandatory 28-day waiting period before the owner of a new gun may take it home;
- Guns can only be sold in stores that are certified by the police, to impede transactions among third parties and mail order purchases;
- Gun owners must belong to shooters clubs and must undergo training;
- In 2003, an amendment to the law severely restricted the use of handguns, even on shooting ranges and shooters and collectors clubs.<sup>86</sup>

#### **Voluntary weapons collection campaign**

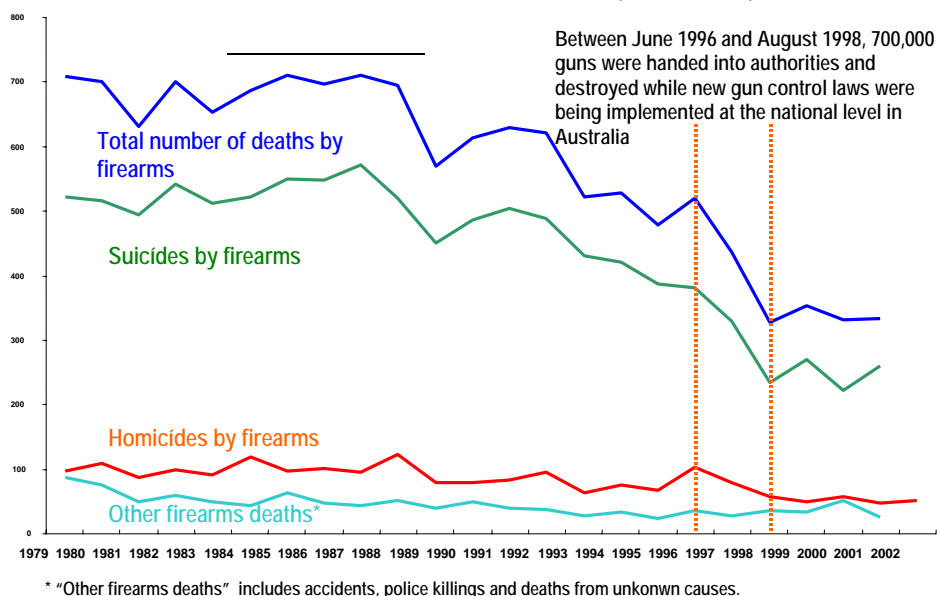
The Australian campaign was one the most successful in the world, in terms of the number of guns collected as well as results. It lasted one year, between 1996 and 1997, and aimed to buy back all automatic and semi-automatic weapons which had been made illegal under the new law. The campaign collected some 643,726 guns, which the government bought at market price. The US\$320,000,000 cost of the campaign was financed by a minimal increase in social security. Thousands of legal guns were also voluntarily rescinded with no compensation, totaling nearly 700,000 guns collected. In those 12 months, nearly 1/6 of the private arsenal in Australia was destroyed.

#### **Results of the law and the disarmament campaign**

Before the Port Arthur massacre, 11 other mass murders were committed with firearms in Australia, in which more than 100 people were killed and 50 wounded. After the new law, there were no such deaths or injuries.<sup>87</sup> In the six years following implementation of the new law in 1996, the total number of firearms deaths dropped from 521 to 299 (a 43% reduction). The gun homicide rate per 100,000 residents<sup>88</sup> went from 0.57 to 0.24 (more than 50% reduction).<sup>89</sup> Homicide rates for women fell dramatically from 0.44 to 0.14 per 100,000 residents.<sup>90</sup>

Some speak of a ‘wave of crime’ in Australia, referring to an increase in armed assaults, a category that includes crimes with all kinds of weapons (guns and others). In truth, crimes without guns, which cause far fewer deaths, increased 20%, while crimes with guns decreased to their lowest level in six years: less than one in five assaults involved the use of a firearm.<sup>91</sup> In 1989/90, guns were used in 27.5% of homicides; in 2001/02, this percentage decreased to 14.2%.<sup>92</sup> The decrease in gun deaths following the gun control law in 1996 and the disarmament campaign in 1996/97 can be seen clearly in the following graph:

### Trends in firearms-related mortalities in Australia (1979-2002):



Sources: *Number of Gun Deaths by Intentionality, Australia 1979-1999*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare/NISU, 2000; e *Causes of Death, Australia 2000, 2001, 2002*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001-2003.

This graph shows that: (1) the drop in the total number of gun deaths was drastic, much more than the preceding trend: -26% between 1979 and 1996, and -40% between 1996 and 2002; (2) For gun homicides, the prior trend was not downward. It was only after 1996 that the levels went down to the lowest rates in the past 20 years: 97 homicides in 1979, 104 in 1996 and 47 in 2002.

In the campaign for the referendum to end civilian guns sales in Brazil in 2005, gun lobbyists went to the media with statistics attributed to official Australian sources showing that gun crimes had exploded since 1997.<sup>93</sup> In reality, the NRA had originally released the fake data in the United States in 2004, which the Australian attorney general is on record denouncing as “offensive, inaccurate and outrageous tactics”.<sup>94</sup> In spite of this, however, the Australian Ambassador in Brazil did not deny the claims until after the referendum was over.

## USA: Guns and violence?

The United States is a hegemonic power in the world, and many people have strong feelings about the country. For some, it is the model to follow, for others, it is the incarnation of evil. The authors of this Guidebook have lived in the United States, and maintain an open, but critical posture, to evaluate the contribution of the United States to the arms control debate.

The US is a notably violent country. The appetite for guns is so widespread that, even in the fast-food country, there are three times more legal gun shops (81,325) and pawn shops just for guns, than McDonald's restaurants.<sup>95</sup> This is the most highly-armed country in the world: 48% of families have a gun in the home.<sup>96</sup> In sheer numbers, this adds up to nearly one gun for every man, woman and child in the country.<sup>97</sup> Violence in conflict resolution is evident among citizens as well as in foreign policy. This is the country of multiple murders in schools and churches, and the land of serial killers. According to the FBI, there is an average of 50 serial killers in the country each year. The United States has the highest gun death rate (14.24 per 100,000 residents) of the 36 most developed countries – eight times higher than the average of all other industrialized countries.<sup>98</sup> A comparison of gun homicides among other developed countries speaks for itself: New Zealand, 4 (in 1998); Japan, 22 (1997); England and Wales, 23 (1999); Canada 159 (1997); Germany, 155 (1999); United States, 11,802 (1998).<sup>99</sup>

### Situation

The Bush government has been busy cutting funds for research centers that study gun and victimization, because it considers gun use “a private issue”. As a result, the most recent data on gun deaths in this country – usually full of statistics – is from 2001. That year, there were 29,573 gun deaths. On average, 80 people are killed daily: 57% are suicides, 38% are homicides, 3% are unintentional injuries.<sup>100</sup>

- With 293,000,000 residents, there are an estimated 242,000,000 to 281,000,000 guns in the hands of civilians in the US<sup>101</sup>, of which nearly one-third are handguns.<sup>102</sup> Experts calculate that the US has 1/3 of the world's small arms arsenal.<sup>103</sup>
- Even before the September 11 terrorist attacks, which led to a rush for guns, each day nearly 5,500 firearms are sold in the country.<sup>104</sup>
- In 2001, 65% of all homicides and 55% of all suicides were committed with firearms, the majority of them legal.<sup>105</sup>
- The United States is the country with the highest rate of gun suicides in the world: 5.92 per 100,000 residents in 2001.<sup>106</sup>
- Of all the gun homicides where the type of gun used is known, 77% were committed with a handgun.<sup>107</sup>
- The largest producer and exporter in the world, the United States has 238 companies in 43 states that produced more than 1,200,000 handguns in 1998;<sup>108</sup>
- Firearms kill 12 times more children in the United States than in 25 other developed countries;<sup>109</sup> former US president Bill Clinton said that 13 children die every day in the

country as a result of guns<sup>110</sup>; 25% of accidental deaths with a gun were among children and youth (under 20 years of age);<sup>111</sup> and 2/3 of the children surveyed in the US said that they could get their hands on a gun if they wanted to.<sup>112</sup>

### **Legislation**

The 50 states of the United States have legal autonomy to decide their own laws on most issues, including most aspects of gun laws. Only a handful of principles are federal, but even so they are not applied by all the states. Examples include norms on concession of licenses to sell guns, the Brady law, which imposes a five-day waiting period in order to check the would-be buyer's criminal records and prevent heat-of-the-moment suicides, murders and other violent crimes.<sup>113</sup> In September 1994, then-President Clinton signed an assault rifle ban, which made it illegal to sell military semi-automatic guns to civilians. The law lasted ten years but was revoked on 13 September 2004, after President Bush and the majority Republican congress failed to revalidate it. Even so, seven states continued to enforce the ban on war-grade weapons.<sup>114</sup> Some important differences in state gun laws are highlighted below:

- In six states there is no minimum age to buy handguns;
- In 46 states there is no legal limit on the number of guns a person can acquire. Only four states (South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and California) impose a limit of one handgun per month, as a measure against illegal gun trafficking. In some states, campaigners are pushing for legislation to stop a person from buying more than 20 guns per month!
- In 48 states it is legal to purchase war-grade assault rifles, which are only banned in California and Connecticut;
- Two states, Massachusetts and Hawaii, strongly restrict a person's ability to carry guns; others make it very easy to buy a gun, such as Kentucky, Montana, Texas, Alaska, Louisiana and Maine. Only in Washington DC is it totally illegal for civilians to own guns.

But neither federal nor state-level restrictions on guns and ammunition apply during the frequent "gun shows", in which these products are sold without any requirements, even to underage youth and delinquents. Only eight states regulate such shows.<sup>115</sup>

In contrast to the global tendency to increase gun control, in recent years the United States has rolled back already tenuous existing gun laws. Since the UN conference on small arms in 2001, more than 50 countries have advanced their gun control policies. In the United States, the Brady Law's five day waiting period went down to three days (in Canada the period is 28 days), and is not applied in several states; the state of Florida recently passed a law stating that any armed response to crime must be considered as "legitimate defense"; President Bush did not renew the assault rifle ban; the gun industry was granted immunity against lawsuits in 13 states. But in others, such as California, gun control has increased: in San Francisco in 2005 a referendum was passed to ban gun and ammunitions sales for civilians in the city.

### **Relationship between types of laws and gun deaths**

Rebecca Peters of the Open Society Institute recently coordinated the most far-reaching comparative research on the different laws in each US state, as well as the degree to which each is actually applied.<sup>116</sup> Peters concluded that:

- 1) States with the weakest laws for legal gun sales are also among those with the highest gun deaths rates, such as Alaska, Nevada, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi.
- 2) Among the eight states with the strictest gun control laws are five with among the lowest gun death rates in the country: Massachusetts, New Jersey, Hawaii, Connecticut and California. It is important to remember that even states with strict gun laws see their efforts weakened contraband from neighboring states that have more permissive laws. These include California (near to Oregon, Nevada and Arizona) Illinois (near West Virginia and Kentucky); and Maryland (near West Virginia).

#### **Washington DC: the most violent district**

Apparently, the capital of the United States contradicts the theory that “stricter gun laws mean less gun crime”. Washington DC (not included in the Open Society Institute study because it is not a state) has a strict law but one of the highest gun death rates (28.7 per 100,000 residents). But actually, the district is located near West Virginia, which has weak laws, and shares borders with other states that until a few years ago had incredibly weak laws, such as Virginia and Maryland. Cases like DC illustrate why one of the conclusions of the comparative study is that restrictions in one state can be undermined by the lax legislation in others. The severe legislation in Washington dates back to the 1976 Firearms Control Regulations Act, which banned handguns and reduced weapons availability in general. As soon as the law came into effect, the number of gun homicides and suicide fell 25%; this reduction did not repeat for other crimes with no guns.<sup>117</sup>

#### **Massachusetts: the most peaceful state**

Massachusetts is the state with the most strict gun control legislation and lowest gun violence rates in the country (mortality rate is 2.84 per 100,000 residents, a third of the national average, 10.41). There were 125 homicides in Massachusetts in 2000, 47.5% of them committed with firearms. In contrast, in 2002 in Louisiana, a state with one-third the population of Massachusetts and permissive gun laws, 560 homicides were reported, 73.7% of them committed with guns. In 1998, Louisiana passed strict legislation, increasing the punishment for illegal gun use and banning war-grade assault rifles. As a result, there was an 80% reduction in the number of accidents with victims under 19 years of age and in 20% of gun suicides, without an increase in other methods of suicide. Homicides also continued to fall.<sup>118</sup>

In 1999, the United Nations already said, “Currently the United States has weaker gun regulations and higher gun violence than all other industrialized countries and even most developing nations.” An overview of the lack of gun control over most of the US helps elucidate why, in spite of all the qualities that make it a great nation, rates of violence are so high. Since 1988, more Americans die by guns in the US in just two years than during 11 years of the Vietnam War (1964 – 1975), without even counting those who are dying in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the 60s, the leader of the black power movement Stockley Carmichael was already saying: “Violence is as American as apple pie”.

Although the United States have the greatest percentage of firearms per person in the world, and one of the highest rates of gun deaths, its rates of death by other methods are in line with world averages. This supports the idea that more gun control tends to reduce the lethality of violence in conflicts, crime, suicide attempts and accidents.<sup>119</sup>

### **Canada and *Bowling for Columbine***

In the film *Bowling for Columbine*, Michael Moore compares the United States and Canada to show that while both countries have many guns in the hands of civilians, only the former is violent. His theory is that there is a “manipulation of fear” in the US, with the objective of electing conservative politicians and stimulating gun sales. This is considerably different to Canada, with its long social democratic tradition and peaceful culture. The film does not emphasize that the number of guns in the United States is much higher than in Canada: 3.5 times more handguns per resident and 31.9 times more guns in absolute numbers.<sup>120</sup> Neither does the film make it clear that the majority of US states have permissive gun control laws, while Canada has a long tradition of control, mainly for handguns. Canada’s problem is more with long-barreled guns.

### **Legislation in Canada**

By 1877, someone who carried a handgun “without a reasonable justification” could go to prison for six months. From the 1930s, it became mandatory to obtain a license and registration for any handgun. The 1995 Firearms Act, and measures to better control carrying guns implemented from 1998, were established to “reduce the mortality, injuries and crimes committed with guns”.<sup>121</sup> The law requires a person wishing to buy a gun to have a clean criminal record (re-checked periodically), and establishes a minimum four year prison sentence for more serious gun crimes. The Canadian law does not consider owning or carrying firearms to be a right. In fact, time and again the courts have upheld the government’s right to protect citizens from guns. Possession of handguns is restricted to the police, armed forces, members of shooters clubs and collectors. In the entire country, only 50 licenses to carry were granted for “self protection”, in cases of proven risk of life, in which the person could not count on police protection.<sup>122</sup>

### **Situation**

- In 2001, there were 842 gun deaths in Canada: 651 suicides (77%), 148 homicides (18%), 28 accidents (3%), five during police interventions and ten for unknown reasons;<sup>123</sup>
- There are an estimated 2,460,000 gun owners and 7,900,000 firearms in the country;<sup>124</sup>
- In Canada, the states with most guns (western area of the country) are also those with the highest rates of gun deaths;<sup>125</sup>
- Around 26% of Canadian homes have firearms,<sup>126</sup> due in large part to a strong hunting tradition, which is also why the number of long arms is much higher than handguns;
- The rigid controls on handguns are absent for hunting weapons. As a result, the majority of gun crimes are committed with the latter: hunting rifles and shotguns were responsible for 52% crimes, 76% of intimate partner homicides, 82% of suicides and 90% of accidents with guns.<sup>127</sup> Today, civil society groups push to step up control on long arms in response to these concerns.

- Between 1970 and 1996, nearly 37,000 people were killed with guns, an average of 1,385 per year.<sup>128</sup> In other words, in 26 years, less Canadians were killed with guns than the number of Brazilians killed in just one year (39,000 deaths in 2003).<sup>129</sup> But, for a developed country, with great social equality, an exemplary of a culture of tolerance and ethnic integration, the following numbers concern the government, which informs:<sup>130</sup>

- 86% of gun homicide victims knew the perpetrator;
- 63% of victims of gun homicides committed in the home were women, and
- 27% of gun homicides were committed with guns, in 1997.

### **Comparison with the US**

- In the United States, 66% of all homicides were committed with firearms, while in Canada the percentage was 27.3% in 1998;<sup>131</sup>

- Canada has nearly 500,000 handguns, in contrast to the US, which has 76,000,000, or 63.3 times more.<sup>132</sup>

- In the US, 80% of all homicides are committed with handguns, while in Canada the biggest problems are long arms.<sup>133</sup>

- The influence of gun control laws – strict in Canada and permissive in the US – on crime becomes very clear in a comparison between the two countries. While both have similar levels of homicide without guns (in 2002 the rate for Canada was 1.38 and for the US, 1.9 per 100,000 residents), the homicide rate with handguns is 6.5 times higher in the US than in Canada (Canada, 0.55 and US, 3.6 in 2002).<sup>134</sup>

### **Results of gun control**

- The gun homicide rate fell 40% between 1989 (0.8/100,000) and 2003 (0.48/100,000), while homicides without guns did not fall significantly (from 1.6/100,000 to 1.2/100,000);<sup>135</sup>

- Homicides with long arms fell from 131(0.47 per 100,000) in 1989 to 32 (0.12 per 100,000) in 2003; gun death on the whole, mainly suicides, fell more than 60%;<sup>136</sup>

- Gun homicides among women dropped 2/3 since 1989 and fell 40% between 1995 and 2003;<sup>137</sup>

- Gun homicides among women dropped 2/3 since 1989 and fell 40% between 1995 and 2003;<sup>138</sup>

- Homicides with rifles and shotguns fell significantly: from 0.5 in 1989 to 0.14 per 100,000 residents in 2003. The handgun homicide rate did not fall as much, due to trafficking from other countries.<sup>139</sup>

- Robberies with guns fell more than 50% since 1991;<sup>140</sup>

- 90% of gun owners in Canada are licensed, and 90% of the nearly 7,000,000 guns in circulation in the country are registered, in accordance with the new law.<sup>141</sup>

Judicial statistics confirm the reduced rates: “Successive legal measures to control firearms led to a 50% drop in gun thefts from 1991 to 2001.”<sup>142</sup> According to the Canadian Justice Ministry, “the number and rate of gun deaths are at a 50-year low”.<sup>143</sup> This reality is quite different than that which is touted by pro gun groups, which accuse gun control policies in Canada to have failed.

## **United Kingdom: “Gun control fiasco”?**

Following the murder of 16 people at Hungerford, Berkshire, in August 1987, the Firearms Act of 1988 was introduced, which expanded the class of prohibited weapons to include most semiautomatic rifles and smooth-bore shotguns as well as self-loading or pump-action shotguns.<sup>144</sup>

In March 1996, in Dunblane, Scotland, Thomas Hamilton invaded a primary school and killed 16 children with a gun he often used at the shooting range. “The massacre shook the country,” said Dr. Mick North, the father of 5 year-old Sophie who was among the dead. North went on to become one of the most visible gun control activists in the country. The shock of the incident in Dunblane revealed the danger of carrying guns, and led the UK government to reform gun control laws and promote disarmament campaigns.

### **Legislation**

The Firearms Act, voted in 1997 by the British Parliament, banned guns over .22 caliber for civilians, reforming the previous law from 1968. An amendment in May 1997 extended the ban to this caliber, inclusive, with exceptions for hunting guns and for use in sporting events. “Guns for sports shooters were also included in the ban, because legislators were concerned about the fact that the child killer Hamilton was a sport shooter,” said North. The new law does not recognize “self defense” as a justification for civilians to carry guns. But it does not include in the ban replicas (imitation) guns, air guns, nor deactivated guns, which became a problem later on, as we will see.

### **Campaigns for disarmament and their results**

The United Kingdom has seen many voluntary weapons collection programs, with organizers paying market price for illegal handguns, accessories and ammunition, and establishing amnesties. In 1996, 22,939 guns and 695,197 rounds of ammunition were handed over.<sup>145</sup> From 31 March to 30 April 2003, 43,908 guns were collected.<sup>146</sup> From 1998, a total of 159,701 handguns were collected in the UK.<sup>147</sup>

In the United Kingdom, handgun homicides have not increased relative to past years: there were 74 homicides in 1993, 59 in 1997, 62 in 1999/00 and 81 in 2002/03. Recent research has shown that the country does not have a low rate of violent crime, but does have few crimes committed with firearms.

Firearms (including adapted air guns) were used in just 0.41% of all recorded crimes. Homicides represented 0.8% of all gun crimes (excluding those with air guns). Firearms were used in 8% of homicides. Guns are used more frequently in suicides: in 2000/01, 62% of the 417 gun deaths reported in the UK were suicides.<sup>148</sup> In more than 70% of gun crimes, there were no shots fired. Guns are generally used just to threaten the victim. The police believe that in many of these cases, they are actually replicas.<sup>149</sup> And why would criminals use imitation guns instead of real ones? First because it is difficult to get one, and second because they know that other people normally do not have guns on them. This explains the low number of deaths in such assaults.



This tendency has been attributed to gun control laws, as well as to the popular and notably efficient (unarmed) police forces, the Bobby. Recently, police began using guns in some more violent neighborhoods and policing areas. But as a rule, there is a specialized squadron mobilized to act quickly if it is necessary to use guns. Between 1992 and 2004, this squadron carried out 5,824 operations and fired only 28 shots. In 1994, the squadron fired just four times, which did not stop it from being one of the most respected and effective police forces in the world. The number of police killed by guns fell from 21 in 1994 to seven in 2000/01. From 1996 to 2002/03, no a single on-duty police officer was killed with a gun.<sup>150</sup> An opinion poll from Nottingham, London, found that 59% of respondents did not want police to begin using guns, and 34% said no. In response to the question, "If the police started to carry guns would that encourage criminals to arm themselves more?", 50% of respondents said yes, 7% said no, and 37% said "it would not make a difference".<sup>151</sup>

### **Loopholes in the legislation**

The increase in armed violence in England and Wales is in large part due to criminal use of replica guns, air guns and deactivated (altered so they cannot shot) guns, which can be modified to be lethal. Potent air pistols are made to be very similar to gunpowder guns. The brand Brocock can be transformed in less than an hour into a weapon capable of firing real ammunition. In 2002/03, 57% of guns crimes were committed with air guns.<sup>152</sup> Gun replicas, on the other hand, represent an additional concern for the police, since they are popular among collectors and can be legally purchased. These imitation artifacts are being converted into lethal guns that shoot real ammunition and their utilization in crimes is growing. In the Greater London area, as well as Manchester and Birmingham, more than 70% of guns used by criminals are replicas or air guns that have been adapted to fire real bullets. Profits from the replicas industry have doubled since the Dunblane massacre, and was estimated at £ 9,800,000 in 2003.<sup>153</sup> According to estimates, there are nearly 250,000 deactivated guns in civilian hands. These were not banned as part of the gun law, and are now being reactivated and used in crimes.<sup>154</sup>

Awareness of the role of these weapons in the persistently high levels of violent crime led to the 2003 Anti-Social Behavior Act. This law came into effect on 20 January 2004, banning Brocock weapons and increasing the minimum age for purchasing compressed air rifles from 14 to 17 years of age. The government is studying further restrictions on the sale of these guns as well as shotguns and revolvers that shoot blanks.<sup>155</sup>

There is much to learn from the United Kingdom. When some guns, but not all, are banned, crimes flow from the gaps left in the law. This also happened in the lead-up to the Disarmament Statute in Brazil. The gun lobby pressured Senate to overturn the requirement to remove the firing mechanism from collectors guns. Now when a collection is stolen, criminals get their hands on a real arsenal that can be used in crimes. At least the replicas or imitation guns were banned, although not compressed air guns.

In recent years, the number of crimes committed with guns has increased, in relation to the low standards in the UK. London police said that the majority of such crimes are committed by youth: "A new generation of British-born gunmen who have developed a

notion of ‘disrespect’ that justifies shooting over the smallest squabble [...] Two-thirds of the shooting investigated by Operation Trident officers occurred in just six of the capital’s poorest boroughs,” attributing this youth violence to “the well-documented but largely unexplained education failure of some black families, the lack of a father figure, poverty and crucially, exclusion from school”.<sup>156</sup> Even so, homicides without guns have grown more than homicides with guns, showing that strict legislation works.

Concerned with the growing influence of US culture in the UK, former cabinet minister David Mellor explicitly said: “What I want to see taken out are the Clint Eastwood-type guns which are an American accretion on our way of life. If we want to import the American way of life, we’ve got to come to terms with the American way of death”.<sup>157</sup>

### **Japan: Security without guns?**

Japan is one of the safest countries in the world and has one of the world’s strictest gun laws. The gun homicide rate in Japan is 0.03 per 100,000 residents,<sup>158</sup> by far the lowest on the planet. For the sake of comparison, in Brazil in 2002, this rate was 20.8 and in the United States, it was 4.1. In 2002, there were just 25 gun deaths in Japan, in a population of more than 127,000,000 people. The low levels of armed violence are due in part to the ban, since 1945, on handguns and rifles for civilians.<sup>159</sup> In 1958, a new Firearms and Swords Control law also required permits for rifles, shotguns and air rifles.<sup>160</sup>

There are less than 50 people authorized to use pistols (the Olympic shooting team, who do not own the guns they use) in the entire country.<sup>161</sup> Less than 1% of homes have guns. Handguns are restricted to police. Hunters may purchase a rifle or shotgun after going through a strict authorization process; these guns must be “stored out of sight of the family and are controlled by the police”. Those who are authorized to have guns must take them once a year to the police station to be inspected.

The extremely low levels of armed violence have links with the Japanese mafia. But even the mafia is affected by rigid control on ammunition. “Even mafiosos can misfire from more than three meters. They are bad aims because they cannot train, because it is very difficult to get ammunition, which is severely controlled. A police officer explained, ‘We have very few victims of gun violence not just because of control over these products, but also because we control the ammunition trade very carefully’.”<sup>162</sup>

Gun trafficking is beginning to be a concern for the country. The US is the first source of guns used by organized crime in Japan (32.9 %), followed by China (20,9 %).<sup>163</sup> This illustrates the importance of international treaties to control the gun trade.

## **8. What are the Causes of Urban Violence?**

Urban violence is a complex phenomenon, the consequence of causes and variables that combine to increase aggressiveness and gun use in conflicts and crime. Without guns, these confrontations would be resolved with far fewer deaths. While this is understood among specialists, ideological and emotional factors make most people feel that the

“only” way out of urban violence lies in reductionist proposals that ignore the multiple facets of the problem. But complex problems demand complex solutions that address each factor that contributes to violence. This does not mean that each variable should be given the same weight, but that we should choose priorities strategically. Disarmament, by itself, will not lower armed violence, but without it we will surely not see a reduction. Many factors combine to generate urban violence; the most frequent are:

- (1) Criminal: traffic and dissemination of drugs and firearms;
- (2) Institutional: corrupt, inefficient police; slow, ineffective justice system; inhumane prison system, that does not recuperate prisoners; antiquated legislation and impunity;
- (3) Structural: accelerated and disorganized urban growth, with marginalized ghettos, degradation of public services and cultural uprooting; poor income distribution; exclusion of wide segments of youth from the benefits of development;
- (4) Cultural and ideological: intensive exposure to violence and glamorization of criminals; violent male role models; prevailing consumer and egocentric values; alcoholism; family disintegration; ‘defense of honor’ culture in domestic conflicts and a tradition of paying for hired killers;
- (5) Political: lack of priority for public security; bureaucratic and repressive police forces who are resistant to participatory, investigative and preventative approach; lack of confidence in authorities and institutions; power of lobbies and corporations to stop the effective implementation of and reform of laws as needed.

Poor countries that strongly restrict gun use, and have relatively low levels of inequality, such as Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia, are less violent than countries that are more prosperous, but have permissive laws and greater inequality, such as South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland and Malawi. For example, Botswana recorded 15 murders per 100,000 residents, while South Africa, which only recently implemented a gun control policy, has 26 murders per 100,000 residents.

A large range of factors conflate to create conditions that favor violence. Solutions for urban violence must come from a range of perspectives, and address a range of issues including unemployment, poor education, inefficient policing, etc.

#### **“Drugs and alcohol lead to violence”?**

Some attribute the alarming increases in violence to drug and alcohol abuse, rather than proliferation and misuse of guns. Drugs, alcohol and guns are intertwined problems, which mutually reinforce one another when they are together. Consumption of certain drugs (uppers), and excess drinking may accentuate violent attitudes. But the presence of guns makes this violence lethal, and their absence tends to mean that the violence will result in lesser physical harm (see *Firearms and other weapons: a comparison*).

Studies show that there is a relationship between places where drugs and alcohol are consumed and violence. Research in the Brazilian city Caxias do Sul, which has high gun death rates, revealed that “the main victims of gun murders in the city in the last 11 years are men between 22 and 35 years of age, in fights at night in bars on weekends.”<sup>164</sup> In another Brazilian city, Diadema, authorities decided to close bars every day between 11 pm and 6 am. Combined with changes in the police command and social programs in

poor communities, this contributed to a 55% drop in homicides between 1999 and 2003. The much acclaimed experience of Bogotá, including a ban on drinking after 1 am, police reform and disarmament, brought about a 71% drop in homicides.

Drugs and guns have much in common: one guarantees a healthy trade in the other, and their conduits and bosses are generally the same. As narcotrafficking is clandestine, highly protected, and the production of guns is legal, a good investigation on the connections between the legal and illegal trade in small arms would contribute greatly to dismantling the groups that traffic drugs.

Campaigns against drinking and driving are the most popular, but other combinations are also fatal, such as alcohol and guns, or guns and very strong emotions. Legislation should include a provision to take guns off people under the influence of drugs or alcohol, as in Brazilian Disarmament Statute.

## **9. The Impact of Gun Violence on Public Health**

In many countries, studies on victimization by firearms – who is dying, how they die and why – are incipient or nonexistent. Statistics on gun death in cases of domestic violence are rare, information on stray bullets is unclear, suicides are underreported, the ethnic criteria used is debatable, etc. But countries that do have in-depth studies on this issue – and we can cite several – lay bare the devastating effects of small arms proliferation on accidents, suicides and homicides, especially among people who know one another.

### **Costs in the public health system**

While the median cost of treatment in public hospitals in Brazil is US\$179,<sup>165</sup> hospitalizations for gunshot wounds costs an average of US\$ 2,612. The average time of hospitalization for gun victims is seven days, at a cost of US\$373 per day. The total cost of treatment for gun-related injuries for victims hospitalized in the public health system in Brazil is US\$ 65,791,942 per year.<sup>166</sup> In Colombia, this cost is US\$ 38,000,000. In the United States, the total cost of firearms injuries, including loss in productivity and quality of life, is estimated at between US\$115,000,000 and US\$144,000,000. In El Salvador, treatment for gun injuries consumes 7% of the total health budget.<sup>167</sup> These enormous sums could be spent on much-needed treatment for diseases, in reforming hospitals, in education, etc.

In the US, during the Clinton administration, city governments and victims began suing gun manufacturers for costs and damages caused by their products. Twelve cities in California are suing different gun manufacturers, including the Brazilian company Taurus, which has a factory in Florida.<sup>168</sup> The basis of the city governments' lawsuits was that public funds were being spent to treat gunshot injuries. The private companies that profit from guns, they argued, should assume the cost of the damages they cause. They also alleged negligence on the part of small arms manufacturers and dealers, who do not take due precautions to prevent the weapons from falling into the wrong hands. These examples represent a challenge for replication by lawyers all over the world.

### **Lost years and life expectancy**

Men are killing each other and themselves. The last national census in Brazil revealed a growing disproportion between the male and female populations. In states with higher levels of violence, the difference is even greater: “In Rio de Janeiro, men live an average of 62 years, and women 74 – a difference of 12 years. In Brazil, the difference is half that, six years. Rio has 87 men for each 100 women.”<sup>169</sup> Soon, according to the slogan of the women’s disarmament campaign *Choose Gun Free! Its Your Weapon or Met*, “There won’t be enough men in this generation!”

### **Is gun violence inevitable?**

One of the authors of *Brazil: the Arms and the Victims*, epidemiologist Dr. Luciana Phebo<sup>170</sup> said: “Contrary to popular belief, violence and accidents – or unintentional injuries – are preventable. Although people tend to understand these as unpredictable (and therefore uncontrollable) or banal (and therefore not worthy of public intervention), there is a clear need for focused policy attention here, particularly given that unintentional injuries and violence are the main cause of death among the youth population in Brazil. [...] A public health approach sees gun deaths and injuries as preventable as any other accident or illness. Gun violence is not an inevitable fact of modern times. We can prevent it.”

### **Mortality**

#### **Majority of gun deaths are homicides in Brazil**

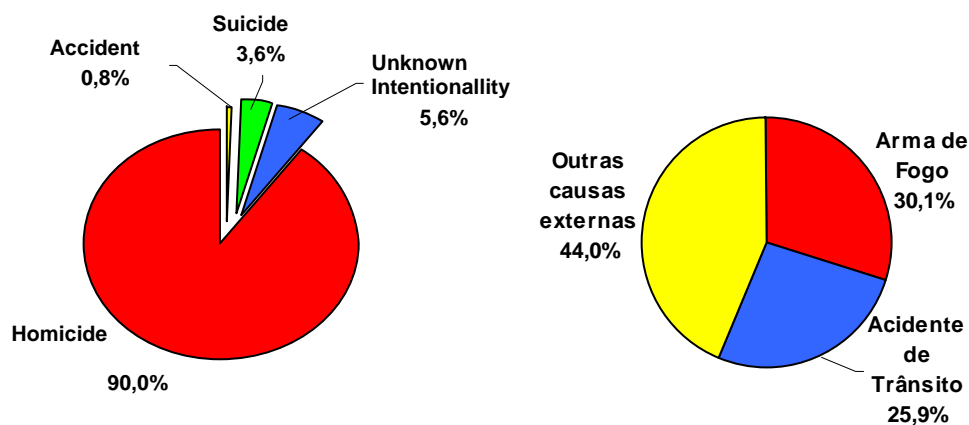
According to Phebo, “In 2002, in Brazil 90.0% of the firearms-related deaths were homicides, while 3.6% were suicides. Gun deaths where intent was not determined represent 5.6% and 0.8% of deaths were attributed to unintentional injuries. Each day, nearly 94 people die by homicide, 4 by suicide, and 1 due to unintentional injuries in Brazil – all victims of firearms. The firearms homicide rate is 20.8 and suicide rate is 0.8 per 100,000 residents. By comparison, in 2002 in the United States 58% of gun deaths were suicides, 39% were homicides, 3% were unknown intent or unintentional injuries. Rates for Brazil are in line with less developed countries, where there are more homicides than suicides. The vast majority of gun deaths are homicides,” as illustrated in the graphs below (*N= number of deaths researched; External causes are, for example, accidents, poisoning, drowning, burn, etc.*).

#### **Firearms deaths, by intent.**

**Brazil, 2002 (N=38.088)**

#### **Proportional mortality of external causes.**

**Brazil, 2002 (N= 126.550)**



### **Guns kill more than traffic accidents in Brazil**

Still according to Phebo, in 2002 there were 126,550 deaths as a result of unintentional injuries and violence. Of these, 30.1% were committed with firearms, whether the motives were unintentional (unintentional injuries) or intentional (homicides or suicides), and 25.9% were traffic or motor vehicle injuries. Although there is a great deal of travel on highways in Brazil and although gun use is more restricted than that of automobiles, the number of deaths by firearms (N= 38.088) is greater than the number of traffic or motor vehicle deaths (N= 32.753). In Brazil, guns kill more than traffic accidents.” Comparing 57 countries, UNESCO concluded that at least six countries in the world – one of them Brazil – can make this claim.<sup>171</sup> What is the situation in your country?

### **Suicides**

Real numbers for suicides are often higher than the recorded statistics, due to religion and embarrassment on the part of the families. Therefore the following numbers are underestimated.

In Finland, 23.7 % of homes have guns in them.<sup>172</sup> Between 1985-1999, 85% of gun deaths were suicides, 11% were murders, 2% were accidental and 2% were for unknown causes.<sup>173</sup> The United States has the highest suicide rate in the world. More than 30,000 people kill themselves each year, more than half of them with guns.<sup>174</sup> The Health Ministry in Brazil has said, “the number of youth 15 – 24 years of age that has attempted suicide increased by nearly 40% from 1993 to 1998. Suicide is already the third cause of death among youth after homicides and traffic accidents.”

Internationally, it is estimated that 93% of suicide attempts with guns end in death.<sup>175</sup> Available data confirms research by Dr. David Hemenway, of Harvard University: “Where there are more guns, there are more suicides.”<sup>176</sup>

### **“Substitution effect”**

You may think that if a person wants to kill themselves and they do not have a gun, they would use something else to do it. This would mean that the presence of a gun would not alter the outcome in this scenario: the so-called “substitution effect”. But research shows that guns do make a big difference. The Institute of Higher Education in Geneva, which analyzed the relationship between guns and suicides all over the world, concluded that: “Guns are the most lethal instrument for committing suicide: 93% of suicide attempts with guns are successful, compared to just 30% of those with another instrument.”<sup>177</sup>

Research from the United States confirms this:

- “Seventy percent of suicides with guns were committed with handguns. It has been proven that just 10% of gun suicides were committed with a gun purchased specifically for this purpose.”<sup>178</sup>
- “That the suicide rate has doubled in the past 30 years is mainly due to increases in gun suicides. The use of guns to commit suicides by adolescents was 74.5 times higher in homes where there was a gun than in homes that did not have guns. Even safe storage conditions do not stop a depressed person from committing suicide with a gun.”<sup>179</sup>
- “Attempted homicides with firearms end in death 85% of the time”.<sup>180</sup>
- “Attempted suicides with other weapons (hanging, carbon monoxide poisoning, poisons, pills, or cuts) are fatal in between 10 and 15% of cases.”<sup>181</sup>

### **Suicide among the elderly**

Uruguay went through a serious economic crisis and has a large elderly population, a combination that led to psychological depression and suicidal tendencies. According to Congresswoman Daisy Tourné, who presented new national gun control legislation in Uruguay: “85% of gun deaths occur in the home. Of the 450 suicides that occurred in 1999, half was committed with a gun. And nearly half of these were committed by a person over 50 years of age”.<sup>182</sup>

### **Injuries and accidents / unintentional injuries**

In the past, guns caused more injuries than deaths. Today, Brazil has twice as many gun-related deaths as injuries per year: 19,519 hospitalizations for bullet wounds, and 38,088 gun deaths in 2002. Guns are killing us more often than they are wounding us.

According to Phebo, “gun injuries are so severe that they usually require a hospital stay, even if they were caused accidentally, without intent to harm. In Brazil, for each three people hospitalized for gun injuries, one was due to an accident.” More than half (54%) of children and pre-adolescents (0 – 14 years old) hospitalized for gun injuries were wounded accidentally. The Brazilian Rehabilitation Association says, “Nearly half (174) of the 386 patients treated in 2004 were wounded with a gun. As a result, these victims became quadriplegic or paraplegic. The majority, nearly 70%, are between 20 and 40 years old and the vast majority (80%) are male.”

Accidents with guns may occur less frequently than homicides and suicides, but their main victims are children. As explained by Cukier and Sibel: “Despite efforts to educate or ‘train’ children not to touch a gun if they find it, many studies show that children who

find a firearm will play with it, in spite of prior firearm safety education, and that parents tend to overestimate the extent to which children obey instructions not to touch a gun.”<sup>183</sup>

## 10. “Women are Safer with Guns”?

Gun enthusiasts in the United States hold that “Guns are the safest and most effective means of self-defense. This is particularly important for women, the elderly, the physically challenged – those most vulnerable to vicious and bigger male predators”.<sup>184</sup>

Disarmament advocates respond: “The gun industry’s pitch to women is simple: you’re a woman; some stranger is going to try and rape you; you’d better buy a handgun. In truth, women are most likely to be victimized by people they know. According to the National Victim Center, 75 percent of all rapes involve offenders known to the victim – including neighbors, friends, husbands, boyfriends, and relatives”.<sup>185</sup>

### Armed violence against women in the United States

In the US, there are many studies on this topic. The Violence Policy Center, in Washington, summarized the main findings in an effort to find out whether women would be safer if they had guns.

- Many factors increase the risk of a woman being killed by her husband. Access to firearms increases the risk five times.<sup>186</sup>
- “Of the 554,700 women treated for violence-related injuries in hospital emergency departments in 1994, only 14% were assaulted by a stranger.”<sup>187</sup>
- In 2000, among gun homicides where the victim-perpetrator relationship was known, 8% of perpetrators were related to the victim, 16% were intimate partners, and 45% were known to the victim. Only 31% of homicide victims were killed by strangers. Among women homicide victims, 58% were killed by their intimate partners.<sup>188</sup>
- Research compared homicides among women and gun possession rates in 25 developed countries. The conclusion: more guns, more women killed. Thus, the United States has 32% of the total female population in these 25 countries, 70% of all female homicides, and 84% of all women killed by firearms.<sup>189</sup>
- “When a gun is involved, intimate assaults are 12 times more likely to end in death.”<sup>190</sup>
- “For each women killed by a stranger, four are shot by their intimate partners.”<sup>191</sup>
- “Gun trauma is a serious public health issue affecting women. Women have the right to feel safe in their homes and communities. However a gun in the home increases a woman’s chances of becoming a shooting victim. Therefore it is important for women to understand the danger a gun in the home may pose to her and her family if she is considering purchasing a gun for protection.”<sup>192</sup>

### Sleeping with the enemy

Many countries do not keep statistics on domestic violence, because it is considered a ‘private matter’ rather than a crime. But let us consider some available information:

- Globally, between 40 and 70% of women homicide victims were killed by their intimate partner;<sup>193</sup>



- In El Salvador between September 2000 and December 2001, 98% of female homicide victims were killed by their husbands or partners;<sup>194</sup>
- In South Africa, research reveals that women are more frequently killed in their homes, victims of domestic violence, than on the street, by strangers or in the home by intruders;<sup>195</sup>
- In Canada, since 1974 an average of 40% of women killed by their husbands were victims of firearms, almost always (88% of the cases) with a legal gun;<sup>196</sup>
- In Canada, 85% of female homicide victims are killed by their partners (compared to 15% of men).<sup>197</sup>
- In Brazil, guns were used in 46% of cases where a husband or lover killed a woman, according to data from a 1997 UN report.<sup>198</sup>

### **Impact of gun control**

In the new South African gun law, implemented in 2004, the right to have a gun is denied those who have a criminal record, including domestic violence. In Canada, a current or ex-spouse are consulted before a person is allowed to buy a gun. Because the guns are registered in a database, police can immediately confiscate the gun of someone accused of violent behavior. In New Zealand, it is required to have “authorization from the spouse or next of kin, as well as an additional reference over 20 years of age that is not a member of the family” (*Arms Act*, 1983). In Australia and South Africa, the police can consult partners to determine if a person wishing to purchase a gun meets all the criteria. It is normally a man who has and uses guns. These laws distribute the responsibility for lethal weapons and prevent men from threatening the safety of his family. Some results of this control include:

- In Australia, five years after the new gun control law of 1996, the female gun homicide rate fell 57%;<sup>199</sup>
- Between 1995, when Canada began to reform their gun laws, and 2003 the female gun homicide rate fell 40%.<sup>200</sup>

### **Feminine culture**

A woman is much less susceptible to the trappings of macho culture, which from a young age emphasizes the use of force and guns to resolve problems. Women, on the other hand, “do not see guns as an instrument of self defense, but rather as a threat to their physical safety. When faced with situations of conflict [...] women are more likely to resolve their problems through dialogue.”<sup>201</sup>

Gun violence is a male problem: it is most often men who die and kill with guns. But women are the secondary victims of men’s lapse in judgment: when men are killed with guns, or are imprisoned because they kill someone, the woman faces serious consequences. Alone, she must sustain the family, deal with suffering and trauma, and try to keep the family from falling apart. Behind each man killed by gun violence is a woman’s pain. Seeing what happens to the family after a violent death makes women more likely to fear guns. This attitude is often ridiculed by men, who disdain them as the “weaker sex”. In reality, women are more realistic and not at all weak when it comes to holding things together after the devastation caused by a man’s irresponsibility. Women,

who have concrete experience of the consequences of gun use, and a strong sense of protecting the family, are the great defenders of disarmament.

It is important to recognize that not all women are opposed to guns. While there is a lack of research on the issue, we can see that in environments where criminals are leaders, in the absence of other successful role models, girls may come to encourage gun use and guns, as a symbol of power. The glamorization of the *bandido* or gangster, in the middle and upper classes as well, is bringing about a change in values, different to the adverse reaction women have traditionally had to firearms.

### **“Choose Gun Free! Its Your Weapon or Me”**

When, as part of the disarmament campaign by Viva Rio in 1999, staff asked people handing in a firearm why they had decided to do this, most of them (mainly men) said a woman had asked them to. Some women handed in guns themselves, saying they belonged to their “late husband,” “son, who is hanging around with the wrong crowd,” or “brother who is getting into trouble”. This experience showed Viva Rio that women are more sensitive to the risk posed by guns, as well as strategic allies for disarmament.

In 2001, Viva Rio launched the campaigns, *Mothers, disarm your sons* and *Choose Gun Free! Its Your Weapon or Me* to provide women with information to convince men to give up their guns. The symbol of the latter campaign was a gun in the shape of a lipstick. Famous actresses, many considered sex symbols, filmed TV spots, some quite ironic, in which they said:



“Guys who use guns must have a little problem...”, using a gesture to insinuate that they may be overcompensating for a small penis. Another slogan was a play on words: “A good man is one who does not expire before his time”, mixing the ideas of premature ejaculation with dying young.<sup>202</sup> The idea was to ‘de-glamorize’ violent masculinity. Psychoanalysis has taught for some time that sexual insecurity is often at the root of aggressive attitudes of the ‘macho man’.

### **Firearms and feminism**

Most feminist institutions and publications are vehemently against gun violence. Many disarmament campaigns around the world have been or are led by women, such as in Australia (lawyer and journalist Rebecca Peters), United Kingdom (member of Parliament Ann Pearston), United States (Donna Dees-Thomases, a homemaker who led the Million Mom March in 2000), Canada (professor Wendy Cukier), South Africa (activist Adele Kirsten), Uruguay (Congresswoman Daisy Tourné) and Guatemala (activist Carmen de Leon and Congresswoman Roxana Baldetti).

The NRA has a commercial based on manipulation of women’s fear of being attacked or raped by strangers with slogans such as “Refuse to be a victim,” or “Rapists don’t use condoms”.<sup>203</sup> Some women believe that to be strong and stand up to male violence, they should behave like men and defend themselves with guns. This version of ‘feminism’ incorporates negative aspects of macho culture and does not contribute to building more

equality between the sexes. Even in strictly practical terms, this approach does not achieve the desired result – having a gun in the home make women more insecure, not less. This is proven in the research.

It is not surprising, however, that many women still ask the question: “Should we carry a gun to protect ourselves from rapists?” If a woman has a gun, what are the possible scenes that could play out, at home or in the street? She could defend herself if she senses the attack before it happens, which is rare. It is more likely that her attacker would have a gun and would surprise her, a situation in which the woman would not stand a chance. If the attacker is not armed, then she may be able to defend herself, but only if she knows how to shoot well and if the attacker does not take her gun. If she is attacked in her home, she will have to consider all the other risks that a gun brings to her family.

As one analyst says, “Women are often fearful of being attacked by strangers in the streets when the real threat to women is more often their intimate partners. Similarly, in industrialized countries, children are more likely to be killed by their parents (often caught in the cross fire of domestic violence) than they are by random violence.”<sup>204</sup>

Often men do not even need to shoot a gun to harm a woman; it is enough just to have one within their reach, as a constant threat. Sometimes, a man will clean his gun in front of her so the woman does not forget the dangers she risks if she goes against him.

The international White Ribbon Campaign,<sup>205</sup> focused on male violence against women, came about after an episode on 6 December 1989, in Montreal. A young man, angry that he had been rejected for a place in the engineering school, broke into University of Montreal with a Mini-14 Ruger. He made the men leave and then opened fired on 14 women, because he was angry that they were taking up places in this “man’s” field, which he had not been able to get into.

On International Women’s Day, 8 March, Amnesty International released a report highlighting the many ways that women’s safety is jeopardized by guns. Being a woman in a world where rights are not respected and the arms trade is not controlled is doubly insecure for women. Guns and violence against women can be a lethal combination.<sup>206</sup>

## **11. Culture of Violence**

### **Media and Violence**

There is heated debate about to what extent the media, in particular TV and video games, influences violence. Some specialists hold that the constant stream of violent programs condition behavior, especially of children. Others contend that children are perfectly able to distinguish between fantasy and reality, and that fictional violence works as an escape for people’s natural aggression. Perhaps the influence of the media is mitigated by other factors, such as coming from well-to-do families, going to good schools, and others that help children develop a critical consciousness help put fantasies in their place.

Fifteen years of research on children exposed to violence on TV in the United States concluded that those who became violent in their adolescence were those who could identify with aggressive people, with their circumstances and saw advantages in the use of violence.<sup>207</sup>

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “by the time they turn 18, youth in the US have already seen an average of 200,000 violent acts on TV”, which, they argue, can have a “strong influence on children and youth”.<sup>208</sup> The Brazilian polling institute IBOPE found that people between four and 17 years of age watch an average of 3.5 hours per day of TV in Brazil.<sup>209</sup> It is difficult to imagine that some of them will not be more susceptible to violent attitudes after they are intoxicated with so much destructive stimulation. Even adult men allow themselves to be caught up in the fantasy of cinema. And what of children, who are at the age to mix magic and reality, with their cops and robbers games, and with their fascination of everything forbidden? Children are very curious. In the same way they will probably find the *Playboy* magazine that their father hid, they will also find the hidden gun.

We have seen the enormous effect of media on children, who may end up imitating the behavior of TV characters in the absence of good adult role models. In the US, FBI investigations concluded that the man who tried to kill President Reagan and wound up wounding his aid Brady had been inspired by the film *Taxi Driver* by Martin Scorsese. Charles Manson diabolically killed a pregnant Sharon Tate, inspired by the movie *Rosemary's Baby*. The two students who killed their classmates in Columbine were fans of the video game Doom and, in a video they taped prior to the horrific murders, they lauded the movie *Natural born killers* by Oliver Stone. One of the latest videogames, *JFK Reloaded*, allows the player to simulate Kennedy's 1963 murder. In Brazil, a student named Mateus Meira killed nine people while watching *Fight Club* by David Fincher. He had seen the film earlier and “liked it a lot” according to his testimony.

The influence of violent video games, or at least the violence of those who play them, was again confirmed in a tragedy in Canada as this Guidebook went to print. On 13 September 2006, in Montreal, Kimveer Gill, 25 years old, attacked Dawson College with semi-automatic firearms, killing a 20 years old student and wounding 19, six of them seriously. According to police, Gill was surrounded by authorities and shot himself. He had a blog on a ‘gothic’ website, where he called himself the Angel of Death, the same as evil doctor and Nazi Josef Megele. The blog had photos of him using guns, and statements like “*Live fast, die young and leave a mutilated body*” and “*I hate working. I hate studying. I hate my life. What else can I do? Revenge is coming. Soon I will be the Angel of Death. I want to die like Romeo and Juliet, or in a hail of gunfire.*” Gill said he was a fan of the video game “Super Columbine Massacre”.

Some schools in California are taking students to visit morgues to see people killed with firearms. They see real death – not the ‘clean’ and glamorized death of fictional media. Seeing the bodies of real gun victims helps them understand the difference between fantasy and reality. Heads destroyed, appendages torn off, lacerated intestines provide some insight into the brutal effect of modern guns, which almost literally blow victims

apart. At the morgues, youth find themselves face to face with real death: they smell it, they see the deformities caused by bullets. Then they understand the carnage, the screams of pain, the awful face of death, very different from emotional soundtrack and the silver screen. Students come out of the morgue and do not want to know about guns.

Research<sup>210</sup> has demonstrated a link between violence and sex which, repeated ad nauseum in theaters and TV commercials, becomes acceptable as a legitimate means to get what one wants. Glamorization of violence in movies and TV has done a great deal of damage over the generations, making guns at once banal and cool. Before, there were westerns, John Wayne and James Bond. Today these have been updated by Rambo, Schwarzenegger, Clint Eastwood, Bruce Willis and Tarantino movies, applauded as “progressive intellectuals” that confuse crime and violence with transgression and rebellion.

More than four decades ago, Martin Luther King had already pointed to the role of the media in developing a culture of violence: “By our readiness to allow arms to be purchased at will and fired at whim; by allowing our movies and television screens to teach our children that the hero is one who masters the art of shooting and the technique of killing... we have created an atmosphere in which violence and hatred have become popular past-times”.<sup>211</sup>

#### **Democratic media: *Women in Love***

If the media encourages violence, which constantly exalts the use of violence, the great ally in building a more peaceful society must also be the media. Turing the tide of violence can only be achieved by touting the values of democratic and peaceful ways of resolving conflicts through massive informational campaigns. While in other countries, the gun lobby buys the silence and complicity of big communications companies, in Brazil the majority of journalists have acted independently, disseminating studies and information produced by research centers on the effects of the use of firearms.

TV Globo, in particular, has exposed a wide audience to the controversy and risk of using guns. In addition to news reports, the soap opera *Women in Love* included gun violence and gun control in the plot, taking the debate to millions of homes. The actors and actresses participated in a real-life march for a Gun Free Brazil organized by Viva Rio. On 14 September 2003, in spite of cold and rain, the march led nearly 50,000 people to Copacabana beach to demand approval of the Disarmament Statute. The international and national response to the episode revealed that the media can contribute to raising awareness and strengthening a good cause, such as armed violence reduction.

#### **Firearms in history**

Recent militaristic histories, such as in Latin America, or of wars, such as in Africa and Middle Eastern countries, shape violent behaviors. Violent processes of social change, such as revolutions, can lead to a conflation of guns as ‘instruments of freedom’, which then often become the tools of social and individual oppression under the new regime. Suicide and domestic violence with guns are more frequent among professionals who use

guns in conflict resolution, such as police and members of the military, than the total population. A 1995 study found a rate of 29 suicides per 100,000 for the New York City Police Department, versus 12 per 100,000 for the general population.<sup>212</sup>

The Americas is not a traditionally peaceful or socially stable region. The exception is Costa Rica, which in 1948 abolished their armed forces, invested massively in public education and peace culture, and as a result has a very low gun homicide rate: 3.3 homicides per 100,000 residents in 1998.<sup>213</sup> By contrast, the rate for Latin America and the Caribbean is 15.5 per 100,000 residents.<sup>214</sup>

The legacy in the Americas is brutality, intolerance and the use of force. As the Mexican essayist Octávio Paz says, “in Latin America, the state is strong with the weak and weak with the strong”. This tradition was exacerbated during the long periods of dictatorships, in many Latin American countries. This past of despotism has shaped a region with values typical of slave economies or countries engaged in war. Exterminating natives, beating slaves, subjugating women, the brutality of war, created a prototype of the ‘macho’ man, much like a cowboy for North Americans. This man uses force to resolve problems and guns are his preferred tools. The macho man is out of place in the urban and democratic society of today.

### **Deconstructing *machismo***

The “Farewell to arms” campaign<sup>215</sup> from Spain was a pioneer in deconstructing this model of masculinity. As the European parliamentarian Raul Romeva wrote, the model “glorifies the use of force, represses feelings, stupidly associates courage with risk, and is incapable of understanding the value of life.”<sup>216</sup> Openly virile mystique as a byproduct of sexual or professional insecurity, stands in contrast with a new kind of ‘democratic man’, who values solidarity, is sensitive and puts dialogue and persuasion before brute force and beatings. Spain, with one of the most macho traditions in the West is today is one of the most advanced countries with respect to human rights legislation. In Brazil, psychologist Maria Tereza Maldonado has asked: “A man is someone who flirts with girls by pulling their hair to kiss them forcefully? Who beats up a guy who looks at his girlfriend as a means of defending his property?”<sup>217</sup>

In general, education for men seeks to convince them that their role is to protect women, when in reality they are their most frequent attackers: “While male-dominated societies often justify small arms possession through the alleged need to protect vulnerable women, women actually face greater danger of violence when their families and communities are armed.”<sup>218</sup>

### **Rural society and modern life**

People who believe guns are a good form of self defense are motivated often by a nostalgic feeling about a less violent past, even if there has always been violence in politics and social conflicts. At the end of the day, these people are imagining an agrarian society in which security is much more private than public and where guns in the holster and a horse are an integral part of a male identity – to defending his property, against wild animals and Indians, and in the nearly total absence of police. But this is an

idealized vision of the past, as violence against women, ethnic and sexual minorities, poor people and political opposition were considered 'normal'.

In some countries, urbanization is leading to a certain deceleration in the cult of the gun, which are associated with a rural economy, whether for hunting or for protection. The hostility of large cities today could lead to erroneous comparisons with a rural society. If we live in overpopulated cities, or if we do not build satisfactory public security systems, either we will succumb to the degradation of human relations or the loss of our liberty, in the name of security. And it is here that the democratic proposals to modernize police, control guns and develop a culture of peace come into play. On the opposite extreme, the individualist solutions of self defense and private revenge, glorification of the gun and the bellicose cultures – all lead to freedom-killing regimes and violence.

### **Education and violence**

In retrograde segments of society, there is a persistent mentality that the wife and children are the "property" of the man. This possessive relationship can be seen as a violation of their basic rights. In addition to being cowardly, abuse of minors by parents ignores modern pedagogy. It leads to a fearful submissive personality that accepts imposition by fear instead of obedience by conviction. This brings about hesitation and the desire for revenge; it teaches children to resolve conflicts, impose will and get over frustrations using violent means, which will be reproduced for the rest of their lives. As the Catholic Church in Brazil has said, "Those who hit to teach, are teaching to hit."

Abuse of children is at the core of the violent behavior of many adults. Research from Harvard University shows that "the chances that an adolescent will commit an act of violence with a gun is practically doubled if as a child he or she witnessed this type of violence. The violence factor in childhood is much more important in determining the aggressive behavior during adolescence than poverty, drug use, or having been raised by a single parent."<sup>219</sup> A study from the University of Michigan concluded that "adolescents who witnessed armed violence are twice as likely to engage in violence compared to others."<sup>220</sup> Research shows that childhood experiences, such as being the victim of abuse, or witnessing fathers beating their mothers, teaches children to become adults that seek to resolve problems using violence. This environment is the precursor to crime.

### **Toy guns**

Worryingly, women, who are the main victims of male violence and normally opposed to guns, often teach their sons, "as men", to value guns and the use of force. The importance of reaching children directly through children's disarmament campaigns, seeking to trade the paradigm of the armed, violent and destructive hero, for a hero that disarms, dialogues and acts in solidarity with others.

In many countries, NGOs and churches have projects in which children trade toy guns for peaceful games, books and comic books. In 1999, Viva Rio organized a competition in which children in public schools in Rio de Janeiro made up slogans or phrases in support of disarmament. The winners and their teachers won computers. Children who

understand the risk of firearms will not only be future peace builders, but also will help to raise awareness among their parents.

### **Tradition or backwardness?**

Too many people are still in the habit of thinking of guns as just another household instrument, such as a watch or a knife, without understanding that it is a weapon that was made to kill quickly and easily. It is like leaving poison in an easily accessible place. There are some good traditions and there are obscure, outdated traditions. The former should be preserved but the latter prolong outdated customs, set in myths, ignorance and prejudices. These should be overcome so that society may progress.

In the context of urban violence, there is a certain nostalgia for more peaceful times, because in those times attacks and homicides were more rare. However, not understanding the transformation of society can make us repeat habits that are inadequate in an insecure world, such as not closing the door, not avoiding dark streets, keeping guns in isolated houses in regions with high rates of violence.

There is resistance to change because of ignorance and habit, or because of fear of new unknown things. The routine has a certain force, and innovating sometimes demands courage and an open spirit. We have the example of the mandatory use of seatbelts in cars. Although available information shows that the risk of being seriously injured in a collision is reduced 70%, people were incredibly resistant to the change at the outset. Today, wearing a seatbelt has become a habit, reducing deaths in traffic accidents.

### **“Guns do not kill people. People kill people”?**

This is the most repeated slogan of the US's National Rifle Association. At a first glance, it is convincing. The trap is, first, in affirming the obvious, such as saying, “if a car is driving too fast, it's not the car's fault, but the driver's”. Second, in focusing exclusively on a point on which there is unanimous agreement: the need for people to take responsibility for their actions. According to the NRA, responsible people will always use guns carefully; not only are they apt to use them, but they should use them for self protection. Let us analyze this argument.

### **The limits of education and “deviant behavior”**

Discussions on peace education should not naively imagine that education, although it is essential, can take care of everything. Education is limited by human nature. According to the psychoanalyst Gláucia Helena Barbosa, psychology defines “deviant behavior” as the moment a person ‘loses their head’, when emotions overcome rationality, when ideas and principals are dominated by uncontrollable feelings like jealousy, for example. This is a very powerful feeling. Courts even consider its strong influence as a factor in crimes.

Regardless of culture or education, there are moments in life where emotions get the upper hand and we get carried away, such as in a fight in traffic, in which law-abiding citizens suddenly become aggressive and violent beings. There are in situations such as intimate partner conflicts, where a gun within easy reach makes all the difference. With no gun, we may hurt people verbally or even physically. But if we have a gun, we may



shoot without thinking, causing a tragedy, or killing someone we love. In the following moment of clarity we regret this bitterly. Armed aggressions are almost always fatal, given the potency of today's weapons. Regret does not stop the drama and disgrace that follows, for both victim and aggressor.

These are the consequences of not differentiating between emotion and reason. These are two very different universes, as Freud has shown. If we only take into account the rational human in explaining behavior, we wind up believing in myths. One such myth is that 'normal' men will always act rationally and carefully, even with a gun in their hand. We forget that highly emotional moments – feelings of fear, hate, jealousy, depressive anguish – muddy reason. A good upbringing will only kick in when the irrational shock of the passionate moment has passed. In that time a tragedy could already have occurred.

The Brady Amendment (see *USA: guns and violence* ), requires a waiting period of five days between buying and receiving the gun. This is to protect against impulsive impetuses to commit suicide or kill someone. The waiting period “significantly reduces the cases of suicide with guns among those under 55 years of age.”<sup>221</sup>

The argument that “good people will not misuse guns” ignores the complexity of individuals. It disregards the psyche, as if humans were emotionless beings, and its influence on our behaviors. It is also worth considering what kind of ‘good upbringing’ we are talking about here. Democratic or fascist upbringing? What is the result of children who learn to shoot from three years of age, that are convinced that they are members of a ‘superior race’, and that guns can resolve conflicts and guarantee rights? When we allow a collective culture of intolerance in which people arm themselves against that which is different, we reap violence.

#### **“Guns are innocent”?**

Disarmament supporters are often accused of ‘demonizing’ guns, making it seem as though these are ‘responsible’ for the crime, rather than the criminal. The gun is an inert object, like any other, and does not require special attention (see *Demonization of guns*). However, in reality, the blame is not taken off murderers. In fact, strict legislation like the Disarmament Statute in Brazil increase sentencing for gun crimes compared to the previous law. Disarmament campaigns are usually run together with campaigns for a culture of peace, for more investment in education and integration policies for youth. But we also fight for gun control, just as public health experts advocate for controlling dengue mosquitoes to reduce the effects of malaria, and just as drug trafficking should be combated and not only worried about addicts. We are not talking about a gun as if it were an inoffensive instrument, because it is not: it is a product made exclusively to kill and it does this very well. In a heated discussion, the presence of a gun may determine whether a fight will end with a dead body on the floor.

Guns should be classified as ‘dangerous products’ such as dynamite, explosive or flammable chemical products or agro toxins. They must be controlled; control over the chemical industry did not lead it to bankruptcy. No one claims that such products, which could kill, are ‘passive’ and that ‘the problem is the people’ who use them.

We can counter the statement “Guns don’t kill people. People kill people,” with, “Guns don’t kill people. Neither do people. People with guns kill people.” Or a good-natured question, such as “Guns kill more and more people. Either we can get rid of guns or get rid of people. Which is easier?”<sup>222</sup>

## 12. Religion and Violence

Some people cite the Bible, which mentions the duty of a father to defend his home, to justify armed self defense. We are all in favor of defending our homes. What is debatable is whether firearms are a recommendable means to do so. For some, it is the only way in today’s circumstances; for others, defending the family is not getting a gun and getting prepared to kill someone, because people who do this are increasing the risk to them.

The Bible speaks to ancient times, when the population did not have others alternative aside from self defense. That there is no mention in the Scriptures of guns should already reveal the huge difference between the ancient world and our own. The Bible is a work that expresses the reality of that time. It is true that some of its teachings have a universal and timeless value, such as the words of Jesus, “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (John 15,9-14), which is the essence of Christianity, and its corollary, the VI Commandment, “Thou shall not kill” (Exodus 20/3-17). Its stories and metaphors are typical of those remote societies. If we were to automatically apply them in modern times, we would throw stones at prostitutes, hang rebels on a cross, threaten to cut a child in half whose maternity is disputed, etc. This type of non-historical interpretation has made some societies revert to barbaric and patriarchal customs. Some branches of Islam, in reading the Koran out of context, advocate cutting the hand off a thief, stoning adulterers to death, not allowing women to be educated, and exterminating those who do not believe in their religion. These are antiquated customs that are rejected by humanist Muslims.

There will always be blessings for war cannons. In colonial times, “behind the cross came the sword”. Although we live in different times, violence has frequently been justified in citations from the Catholic church at the time of the inquisitions. The Pope did penance for this violent policy of intolerance. As Frei Beto, a Catholic writer, said, the message of Christ is clear: “Love thy neighbor as thyself and do not arm your neighbor as yourself.” People who negate the founding principal of Christianity, peace and love among men, are distorting their religion. This doctrine is clearly expressed by Christ, by his apostles and profits, such as in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,” or in Isaiah 2:4, “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares”. This was the slogan of the disarmament campaign in Mozambique, where churches encouraged members to trade guns for agricultural tools. It is not without reason that the Christian wisdom says, “He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword” (Apocalypse 16.5-7), which in popular wisdom has become “violence breeds violence”.

### **The role of the churches**

According to the Catholic priest Gabriele Cipriani, “As Christians we work for peace, and we do this through contributing to disarm our society. If we plant arms, we will harvest violence. Guns are an illusion.”<sup>223</sup> The Brotherhood Campaign of the churches in Brazil in 2005 said, “By using violence, we are transformed by the aggressor into his equal. In this, the victory of evil, violence topples our convictions and hopes. And violence does not end, because when it is thus fed, it comes back later, strengthened by the impulse we have given it. The only antidote against violence is solidarity.” To those who say churches should not get involved in public security issues outside of war situations, we remind them gun death rates in some countries, like Brazil, are equal or higher than those in contexts of war. Further, “peace does not live simply in the absence of war, but in the absence of violence.”<sup>224</sup>

In South Africa, the Methodist Church, together with the NGO Gun Free South Africa, in 1994 organized a voluntary weapons collection campaign. The same occurred in Mozambique in 1995 – 2000. In Brazil, the role of the church has been decisive. In 1999, 50,000 Evangelicals marched to the Maracanã football stadium, where together with Viva Rio they held an emotional and beautiful event: to the sound of peace music, they held the first public gun destruction in the state, introducing an original and fairly low-cost method of smashing guns with hammers.

At the international level, to raise awareness about the importance of gun control, the World Council of Churches has played a fundamental role. In the negotiations during the two UN conferences in 2001 and 2006, the Quakers United Nations Office (QUNO) had a strong influence on the mobilization of civil society. Two of its members, David Atwood and David Jackman, were pioneers in studies and debates on the complex problem of “demand for guns”, holding workshops in three continents. Norwegian Church Aid and the Dutch ICCO, as well as the Swedish ecumenical peace organization SWEFOR have had a relevant role in supporting international arms control initiatives. In this they have complied with a main mission of the churches: to build peace and solidarity among men.

### **13. Youth and Armed Violence**

Between 70,000 and 100,000 young men between 15 and 29 years of age are killed each year with guns. In 70 countries, these young men die four times as much as the rest of the population.<sup>225</sup>

Lawyer Felipe Dantes says: “Because I am Brazilian, the risk that I will die by guns is 2.6 times higher than the world average. Because I am from Rio de Janeiro, my risk of dying is twice as high as in the rest of Brazil. Because I am young, it is seven times more likely that I will die than the rest of the population of Brazil. Because I am a man, my risk of dying in Rio de Janeiro city is 30 times higher than a woman in my age range.”<sup>226</sup>

According to UNESCO, these are the countries with the highest rates of youth violence:

#### **Highest homicide rates in the 15 to 24 year old population**

Country	Year	Ranking	Rate /100,000 Residents
Colombia	2000	1	116.0
Virgin Islands (USA)	1999	2	66.7
El Salvador	1999	3	61.0
Venezuela	2000	4	57.1
Brazil	2002	5	52.2
USA	1999	10	13.2

Source: Map of Violence IV, UNESCO, 2004

The recent UNESCO study concluded that “of the 550,000 deaths by firearms that occurred between 1979 and 2003, in Brazil 44.1% were youth between 15 and 24 years of age. The true dimensions of this statistic can be seen if we consider that youth account for just 20% of the population. [...] In 1979, gun deaths represented 7.9% of the total deaths among youth, and in 2003 they were 34.4%. This means that one in three young people who die in the country is a result of gunshots [...]”.<sup>227</sup>

Anthropologist Luke Dowdney, former British youth boxing champion, developed the Fight for Peace Project, which resocializes young drug traffickers in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro through their attraction to the violence of boxing. Dowdney helped place the problem of armed youth involved in crime on the international agenda. They had been ignored by support programs of international organizations, dedicated exclusively to the situation of child soldiers. While these are a serious problem in Africa, the drama of children and youth in the periphery of major cities, in countries in the Americas, and even in many African and European countries, is their involvement in armed gangs.<sup>228</sup> The research says that “the number of children and adolescents killed by guns between 1987 and 2001 was eight times higher in the city of Rio de Janeiro than in the Israel Palestine conflict during the same period. The war between Jews and Palistinians led to 467 underage victims in this period, and the drug trafficking war had 3,937.”<sup>229</sup> Considering youth between 15 and 29 years of age, 21,369 men compared to 1,205 women in Brazil in 2002, that is 17 times more.

### **Firearms and traffic accidents**

Young males are at the heart of the gun death drama. They are both the biggest threat for committing violence, as well as the most likely to die, being massacred as if on a battlefield. The demographic and economic consequences can already be felt.

Guns are the first cause of death among young men in Brazil, more than illnesses, traffic accidents or any other external cause. In Rio de Janeiro in 2002, among youth 15 to 19 years of age, 60.5% were killed by guns and 8.4% by traffic accidents.<sup>230</sup>

### **Why are the youth dying?**

Analyzing the low-income and violent populations in nine countries, Dowdney concluded that youth arm themselves to gain respect and status in their communities. Excluded from the labor market, and persecuted by the police, ‘invisible’ and

disrespected by society, these youth find their place in the sun with a gun in their hands. As one young man from Jamaica said, “Guns are good, guns are protection. When you have one, no one will disrespect you”.<sup>231</sup>

So much death among youth is a typical phenomenon in countries where guns are easily available. For this reason, it is crucial to increase the minimum age for those wishing to buy a gun, for example to 25 years old, as in Brazil under the Disarmament Statute. Some critics say that youth should be able to buy a gun at 18, the age they are allowed to vote in most countries. They do not understand the motivation of the lawmakers, which were not strictly legal, but needed to respond to the urgency of the task of preventing deaths among the greatest risk group for gun crimes, and those who most often kill and are themselves killed, making it more difficult for them to obtain guns. In 2003 the German city of Erfurt also raised the minimum age to 25 years old, following a mass murder committed by a student who was also a sport shooter.

Research has shown that male youth violence is not biological or demographically inevitable, but has social causes. Alternatives for study, sports or work, education in humanist values, and repressing delinquency are factors that work to protect against the emergence of ‘angry young men’. They generally represent the minority, though they have more visibility, among youth. Programs such as “Gun Project” in Boston, or “Sports for Peace”, in *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, have been successful in winning over young people, taking them out of trafficking and violent crime.

#### **14. “The Right to Self Defense with a Gun”?**

For Flavio Bierrembach, Minister of the Military Supreme Court in Brazil, “no government has the right to interfere in the private sphere of citizens’ right to use guns or other means to protect themselves and their families. Above all, unconstitutional, against human rights, and age-old uses and customs that assured equality of all before the law, the sanctity of the person, the sacred right of defense and protecting the home as an inviolable shelter of the citizenry”.<sup>232</sup>

This opinion flies in the face of jurisprudence in many countries, which see possession of firearms not as a citizens’ right, but as a concession by the relevant authorities in exceptional situations, such as if the person’s life is at risk. This is the situation, for example, in Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Colombia, Brazil, South Africa, New Zealand, and the Philippines. This is also understood in international humanitarian law, in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on defense of the right to life, freedom and security. According to Cukier and Sidel, “As firearms cause death, injury and fear to human beings, their unregulated presence in society affects the most fundamental of human rights.”<sup>233</sup> Only three countries have constitutions that seem to give citizens the right to have guns: Haiti, Mexico and United States. In Mexico, the state exercises rigorous control on possession and carrying firearms. In the United States, the Second Amendment to the Constitution, according to the National Rifle Association, guarantees a citizen’s rights to possess a firearms, but this is contested by laws in several

states, and was understood on several different occasions by the Supreme Court as insufficient to guarantee this right (see *Only Dictators Disarm the People*).

When the Disarmament Statute in Brazil was passed, there were attempts to declare the new law unconstitutional. Responding to these attempts, two ex- Justice Ministers, Miguel Reale Junior and José Carlos Dias, affirmed: “Using guns to protect the right to life and security goes against common sense. Although intuitively we can believe that guns increase security and protect life, the facts demonstrate that the opposite is true. Guns only increase the chance of fatal outcomes and conflicts that will always exist in any community. Firearms do not reduce public security, but they also open the possibility that the person who carried them – or those who live with them – will be victims of the potential fatal violence that is inherent in them. We must decide if this interest in using guns should take precedence over the right to public security and the very right to life, recognized in our Federal Constitution”.<sup>234</sup>

### **Private justice or state monopoly on violence?**

The basis to the ‘right to self defense’ with guns logic can be found in theories that political science calls ‘social darwinism’, which compares humans to animals and emphasizes the primacy of instinct over culture. According to this line of thinking, it is in the nature of human beings to defend oneself instinctually and we would be naïve to think that we could legislate change. Two other perspectives challenge this ‘naturalist’ philosophy. The first, from a humanist or Christian perspective, emphasizes cultural influences. Cannibalism and cruel practices, such as torture, were also typical of the ‘original’ man. But they were gradually phased out with the emergence of new values, such as solidarity and compassion, and new standards of behavior. In this view, criminals can be recovered, because humans evolve beyond their instincts, through culture.

The second approach also starts from a ‘savage human instinct’, but observes that society constantly invents new forms of socialization. Thomas Hobbes, said that individuals have to give up part of their freedom to the state (Leviathan), so they can be protected from the aggressions of others. In this way, he transferred the power of the state to the power of force so that this could guarantee the security and maintain peace. The state is the incarnation of the ‘societal pact’ (*pactum societatis*), assuming a monopoly on violence and using it against those who go against it.

Social darwinism is conservative and individualistic and there is nothing pejorative about these terms. It is conservative because it holds that human nature is innate and immutable, and individualistic because it does not accept that society or the state limits the actions of an individual, whose autonomy should prevail. As a result, self defense with a gun should be a sacred right, a way to uphold freedom. Critics of this view believe that to be human is to have a ‘malleable nature’, and the rules of socialization should limit individual interests, so that the strong cannot exterminate the weak, and so that absolute freedom of one person does not eliminate the freedom of others. ‘Naturalism’ leads to the substitution of public justice for private justice and its radical manifestation of lynching, revenge and actions of ‘vigilantes’. However, public security should be reached by a public policy for everyone, and not for just those who can pay, nor by who

wishes to have private self defense, in detriment of the security of others. The republican solution is collective and not individual, thus it is a duty of the state.

### **Rule of law**

As opposed to ‘naturalism’, ‘culturalism’ does not agree that that you can have justice with your own hands, or we would go back to the ancient law, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”. Meting out justice should be a rational act, made by an impartial judge, that seeks to repair the damage, protect society, punish and recuperate the criminal. It should never be an emotional reaction, or a sentence that aims only to punish and not recuperate, through retaliation equally cruel and inhumane. Is this not the role of the democratic state, whose pedagogical function is to perfect society, and not to perpetrate an antisocial act by a criminal by reproducing it. Thus, the state denies its citizens the possibility of ‘justice by your own hands’, precisely to take away the judgment of any emotional problem, and so that the judgment reflects the greater collective good (of protection) which should come before the impetus for revenge of the victim and family members. This is one of the distinctive features between the rule of law and dictatorship, civilization and barbarity.

### **“If you want peace, prepare for war”?**

This statement, although very current, is an old manifestation of social darwinism; from Roman times, in Latin it reads *si vis pacem para bellum*. This policy, on which military expansions are based, has encouraged citizens to arm themselves to guarantee their protection and freedom. It is in line with Bush administration policies following September 11th, which brought about a huge increase in arms sales in the United States, making gun manufacturers happy. The current representative from Spain on the Defense Commission of the European Parliament, Raul Romeva, said, “Conventional weapons have become the tools of destruction and death, due to their ease of their use, ease of manufacture, and relative cheapness, and above all the lack of control on their production and exportation. There is no doubt that the logic of *si vis pacem para bellum* will not only not bring peace, but will fill the arsenals of the world with missiles and very powerful weapons, that represent a major threat, and that take away important economic and human resources for something that, in the end, will only bring about total destruction”.<sup>235</sup> Those who want peace, and prepare for war, mobilize interests and create a dynamic that will push us towards war, as history has shown. The UN recommends that “if you want peace, build peace”. Those who arm themselves should prepare for confrontation, sooner or later will misuse their guns, or will see them fall into the wrong hands. As experienced specialists will tell you, “people with guns cannot resist the temptation to use them”.

### **‘Legitimate defense’ and its limitations**

In most countries ‘legitimate defense’ is defined the constitution; in Brazil this definition is found in Article 25 of the Brazilian Criminal Code: “Legitimate defense can be understood as using moderately the necessary means to repel unjust aggression, immediate or imminent, at the your discretion or another’s.” Contrary to popular belief, this definition is highly restrictive, as self defense is seen as the last resort. Determining whether a response was in ‘legitimate defense’ demands a concrete analysis of each case.

If someone uses a gun against unarmed criminals, for example, or less armed, they could be convicted for homicide, going from victim to delinquent, and transforming the pretense of self defense into ‘justice with your own hands’. There is numerous jurisprudence convicting people for what is called “excessive use of legitimate defense”.

For those who defend armed self defense, this right is unquestionable because it comes from the essential right to life. Protecting life is more than a right, it is a duty – particularly in defense of the family. Others believe that if self defense, or legitimate defense come from the right to life, they must not put any lives at risk. When statistics show that guns are more of a risk that a protection, the alleged right to self defense to use a gun violate the family’s right to security. In some countries, a spouse must give consent before a person can buy a gun, such as New Zealand (see *Are women safer with guns?*). In spite of transmitting a false sense of security to their owners, it is far more probably that the gun “be used by an angry husband, a depressed youth, or a curious child,” according to Rubem César Fernandes, of Viva Rio. In addition, it is difficult to sustain the use of guns ‘to protect life’ when they are leaving a trail of blood all over the world. Already in the 1990s, the famous medical researcher Arthur Kellermann had revealed that, in the United States, “in homes where guns are kept, the risk is four times higher that a member of the family will be accidentally shot, seven times higher that the gun will be used in an intrafamiliar murder, and 11 times higher that the gun will be used to commit suicide than that it will be used to defend the family”.<sup>236</sup>

This is not unlike the conclusion of the Sou da Paz Institute in São Paulo: “We can see that the ease in obtaining and using guns in big cities has transformed fights into murders, injuries into deaths, arguments into tragedies, every day. Even if the new law reduces only these homicides, it will have already done a great service to the nation, and could save thousands of lives every year”.<sup>237</sup>

Some people see self defense as a last resort when faced with the inefficiency of the police. But if the institutions – police, justice system, prison system – are weak and problematic, the solution is to fight for them to improve, become stronger and more efficient, and not make the problem worse by distributing more guns.

#### **“The right to own and trade in firearms”?**

In Brazil, as we will see, a referendum was held to decide whether to ban small arms and ammunitions sales for civilians. The Brazilian Arms Trade Association said, “with regard to prohibiting the sale of firearms, we consider it to be unconstitutional: it wounds the right to property, and to personal security.”<sup>238</sup>

To the accusation of unconstitutionality against the Disarmament Statute, the defense team responded: “The Statute does not harm free initiative and trade because the very Constitution includes the possibility to restrict the exercise of economic activity. In truth, our Constitution imposes that economic activity, free initiative and trade will only be constitutional if they guarantee the existence and dignity of all people, which, as has been fully demonstrated by the facts, is not the case of the arms industry. [...] In



restricting access to firearms, the Statute does not limit the right to life and security as gun defenders maintain, but increases overall security and reduces the risk of death”.<sup>239</sup>

It has been argued that “forcing disarmament is pushing good citizens into the clandestine market, and inducing them to illegal activities”. In fact, if guns for civilians were made against the law, only those who do not respect the laws and public security would have guns. And that is how it should be. The measure would facilitate repression of illegal arms trafficking, among other benefits. In addition, if the collective, to protect itself, decides to prohibit an activity that a minority engages in, this minority must adapt to the new law and not the other way around.

Some have alleged that “you cannot impose disarmament on people who want to use guns; it is a violation of their right to choose”. To have a gun in the house is far from being an absolute and unquestionable right, given the dangerousness of the product, just as one cannot stock up on explosives, poisonous gas, or radioactive material. Irregardless of how well kept and safe they are, they can cause serious damages to the owner or to others if they are misused or if they are stolen by a criminal.

From a legal point of view, when rights come into conflict, the most fundamental are the ones that should be prioritized. Today, the right to property is conditioned on the well being of the collective, or is limited in favor of preserving the family. Thus, a husband cannot sell a home without consent from the spouse; a company cannot cause damages to the environment; a property cannot be built taller than a certain height; these imposed limitations are easily accepted by those who drive cars, because of the risks of this activity, and nobody feels put out of their freedom to come and go because they are made to drive at a safe speed or keep their car in safe conditions.

People who are against prohibiting carrying firearms allege that this is “treating good citizens like criminals, disrespecting the principal of ‘innocent until proven guilty’.” According to Felipe Dantes, “Making it illegal to carry guns is not meant to punish good citizens, but to take a preventative measure, considering the risk to individuals and to the collective safety. Nobody contests control, or even prohibition, of certain drugs in order to avoid harm by dangerous products. The state does not wait for that harm to occur, which has nothing to do with ‘presumption of innocence’.” He adds, “We do not always understand the sense of a legal limitation, but the law exists to impose these limits for the greater good. Absolute freedom for one is slavery to another. To allow the use of guns is to favor the violation of the right to security, and society pays the high costs of treatment of gunshot victims in public hospitals”.

#### **“The right to carry guns”?**

In many countries, guns laws are weak with regard to carrying firearms. In Brazil, Article 6 of the Disarmament Statute makes it illegal for civilians to carry guns. Before this law, it was easy and quite commonplace for any public authority, businessman, salesperson, or anyone who paid – to buy a license to carry a gun. Having this license was seen as a status symbol. Because state police authorized the licenses to carry guns, in addition to the resources obtained, it was used as a currency to trade favors.

In comparison, Colombia is the most violent country in the world. There, 86% of homicides are committed with firearms. A specialist in victimization, Andrés Villaveces, developed research in Cali (1993-94) and Bogotá (1995-97). Carrying guns was banned on certain days when most gun crime occurred: paydays, holidays and elections, and the police had checkpoints to enforce the law. In order to evaluate the impact of the bans, Villaveces compared the homicide rates on these days, with similar days and schedules, but on days that the ban on carrying guns was not in effect: “In Cali, homicides fell 14% on the days when the ban was in effect, and in Bogotá 13% compared to the days when it was legal to carry guns. From this we can conclude that making it illegal to carry firearms in certain cities led to a strong reduction in homicide rates.”<sup>240</sup>

### **Shooting into the sky – what goes up must come down**

In many countries, it is common for men to shoot into the sky to celebrate. In Turkey, they shoot off guns to celebrate weddings; in Mexico, before gun restrictions came into place, they were used to celebrate anything; in Brazil, to commemorate football victories. Even Brazilian police shoot into the sky with real ammunition, at the funerals of partners killed in combat, to demonstrate their indignation – although in ceremonies such as these it is required to use blanks. The problem is that bullets go up, come down and are going to hit innocent people. This is one of the causes of ‘stray bullets’ which in Rio kill a person every six days.<sup>241</sup> For this reason, those who shoot in residential areas or on public streets must be punished, a measure that is criticized by those who find it excessive to punish only those who are just ‘having fun’ but putting their lives and the lives of others at risk.

### **15. “Only Dictators Disarm the People”?**

In the US, there is a debate about the Second Amendment to the Constitution, from 1791, which establishes: “A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” For some, this guarantees the use of guns throughout the country, for others it does not, because it is illegal to carry guns in some states, or even to own certain guns. The amendment related this right to the organization of state militias, concerned with preserving the autonomy of states that had only recently gained their independence from Britain. The Constitution speaks of the right of a regulated militia to have guns, not individuals. The Supreme Court, on many separate occasions and unanimously, has sustained that the Constitution does not guarantee individuals the right to bear arms.<sup>242</sup>

The discourse that favors the ‘constitutional right to have a gun’ in the US affirms that “a free man is an armed man,” referring to a ‘heroic’ past when the enemy was the English invader and the Indians were expelled from their land and massacred. Radical sectors of the National Rifle Association have updated this discourse by creating conspiracy theories during the Clinton government, and discussing imaginary dangers, such as the threat represented by the “intervention by the communist UN, which wants to disarm the people,” and by the “democratic party, which threatens private property and individual freedom of Americans.”

### **Improbable threats or real danger?**

As a result of this delirium, extremist factions of the National Rifle Association formed communities to conduct guerrilla trainings on ranches in the United States, preparing to fight a hypothetical ‘revolution of blacks, Latinos, and communists’. This departure from reality led to terrorist actions such as the bombings in Oklahoma. On 19 April 1995, Timothy McVeigh, a fanatical member of one such militia, ex-combatant in the Gulf War and obsessed with the ‘interference of the state in the suppression of individual liberties,’ and with the ‘complicity’ of the Clinton government with the UN, exploded a governmental building, killing 168 people, among them 19 children and wounding 500.

To encourage the use of military arms, members of the NRA highlight the need to prepare themselves to confront ‘insurrections’ in the United States: “When faced with multiple assailants, mob and gang violence, terrorism or civil insurrection, it is precisely high capacity ‘assault weapons’ that are necessary for good people to defend themselves – particularly when police resources are stretched to the breaking point.”<sup>243</sup>

Why should we ‘prepare to confront insurrections’ that are improbable when we have to face a very real criminality, which does indeed threaten us with death? When we could be sleeping with the enemy. Aside from that, military coup and insurrections that were never contained with individual initiatives, but with militarized organizations aht were constituted for this purpose, as we learned the hard way with the stories of peoples that have succumbed to the dictator. In Brazil, in 1964 uprising, students had some small arms; these did little good, however, when confronted with military tanks.

### **Hitler and disarmament**

Pro gun militants base their beliefs on the following sentence, attributed to Hitler: “This year will go down in history! For the first time, a civilized nation has full gun registration! Our streets will be safer, our police more efficient, and the world will follow our lead into the future!” The phrase was supposedly published in the newspaper the *Berlin Daily* on 15 April 1935. According to the pro gun Jewish organization, Jews for the Preservation of the Right to Bear Arms, “the article mentioned in inexistent, and the date does not make sense, because Hitler’s gun control law is from 1938”.<sup>244</sup> Much earlier, the German constitution of 1919 already did not recognize the right to carry firearms. In 1928, the Weimar Republic passed a new, stricter gun control law, precisely to repress armed militias from the Nazi party.<sup>245</sup> Defeated in their attempt to hold a violent coup, Hitler rethought his strategy, as explained in his book, *Mein Kampf* and comes to attempt to use parliamentary means to take power, confident in the fact that the economic crisis and the division among democrats and communists would end up taking the power to vote from the majority of Germans, which did indeed occur. It was only later that he would close the *Reichstag*, the parliament, within a policy of gradual implementation of dictatorship and extermination of the opposition. Clearly this increased even more the controls on guns, but the control had already existed.

There is also the idea that “if the Jews had been armed, they would not have been massacred by the Nazis”. This theory completely abandons the context of the facts, when Jews, as well as some gypsies, were an ethnic minority in Germany and in the occupied

countries. It is naïve to think that they would have had a chance for armed civil defense against the powerful and bellicose repression of the Third Reich. Further, it is disrespectful to the memory of the armed revolution of the Jewish prisoners that led to the massacre of the Warsaw Ghetto.

### **Gun control in dictatorships and democracies**

Some people associate disarmament with dictatorships. In the ‘virtual war’ during the gun ban referendum in Brazil, a list of dictators was successfully circulated, starting with the Nazis, which had been able to come into power, supposedly because the populations had been disarmed. A pamphlet from this campaign said, “Disarmament supporters raise your right hand! Before you order the killing of the Jews, communists, gypsies and all their opposition, Hitler did the logical thing: he disarmed the population. Without guns there is no way to resist tyranny. Don’t risk Brazil’s future. Say NO to disarmament” and “Only dictators disarm the people”.<sup>246</sup> They take it as a ‘fact’ that dictators disarm people while democracies arm them, but this is not true. Most dictators in Arab countries are tolerant with gun possession, which does not happen in the majority of advanced democracies, which exert considerable control, or even prohibit, guns.

Even if the theory mentioned was true, it is not because the measure is taken by authoritarian governments that the measure itself is negative. For example, dictators tend to prioritize discipline and order above all things. In Salazar’s Portugal, the streets were cleaner and the buses more punctual than in democratic Portugal, when freedom became the greater good. The punctuality of the trains in Nazi Germany became an ‘expression of efficiency’ of the regime. This does not mean that cleanliness, discipline and punctuality are bad in and of themselves. In the same way, it is not because some dictatorships disarm civilians (but arm civilian paramilitary groups in defense of the regime), that democracies should not promote disarmament. To the contrary, the tendency of democracies is increasingly to disarm societies, creating an environment that is favorable to peaceful coexistence of its citizens. At the same time, disarmament in dictatorships and in democracy seek different objectives. Dictators disarm the population to defend state security, while democracies promote civilian disarmament to guarantee human security. In a dictatorship, disarmament aims to impede violent responses to the regime. In democracy, it seeks to increase people’s safety.

The strategy of the NRA, successfully exported to many other countries, is to identify the use of guns as a right or ‘freedom’. This line of reasoning says that to be free, a citizen should have a gun that protects him from the dangers of state intervention and others. Charlton Heston, ex-president of the NRA, believed that having a gun is a God-given right, and coined the following emblematic phrase, “You may not be absolutely free by owning a firearm... but I guarantee that you will never be free when you can’t”.<sup>247</sup>

### **“People who don’t use guns are cowards”?**

The NRA also used the aggressive term “coward” in the debate with those who disagree, to describe people who are not up to the ‘heroic’ standards of the pioneers, and condemn the US to turn into a “nation of cowards”. But what is being a ‘coward’ or being ‘courageous’? It is very basic to identify ‘courage’ with the use of force, to throw oneself

in harm's way with an easy heart, shoot without taking stock of the consequences. Do such attitudes reflect courage or irresponsibility? And it is not because men are psychologically insecure or fearful that they tend to arm themselves, that you should say that all those who have guns have these characteristics. Misinformation about the risk of guns is at the heart of most decisions to use guns. Pro gun people are not 'cowards' because they use guns. We must understand why they use guns.

In addition to the misinformation and the macho culture, psychological factors may also contribute to this attitude. Educators study child behavior, in which impotence in a world they don't yet understand or dominate, leads children to develop fantasies about Superman or Flash Gordon, to imagine guns as having magical powers to confront threats and obstacles to making their dreams come true, such as in *Star Wars*. The most sophisticated and covered up way, as the psychoanalyst Gláucia Barbosa points out, adults also appeal to their supposed super powers as with fast cars, a powerful weapon, when they don't trust their own capacity to seduce or to confront problems. In 1998, when the actor Charlton Heston was elected president of the National Rifle Association because of his cowboy image, adopted the slogan, "A man without a gun is naked". This is more than explicit recognition of the feeling of impotence, with a call to arms to recruit insecure men, the psychoanalyst says. Or, in the words of psychiatrist Jiosef Fainberg, "the weaker a person, the more powerful they want to be. Omnipotence is correlated to impotence." It is ironic that men, who need to be armed to feel more secure, call others cowards, even though they don't need guns to handle life's problems and risks. The use of guns by individuals with low self-esteem, which use guns to feel that are 'someone' and to impose their will on others, is well illustrated in the script written by Lars von Trier for the film *Dear Wendy* by Thomas Vinterberg. The most recent multiple murder, committed by the solitary and unhappy Canadian Kimveer Gill, only confirms that guns bring men a feeling of 'power' to counter an inability to deal with life's complexities.

On the other hand, since when does brute violence, and not intelligence, bring down criminals? To associate cowardice with good sense, with a responsible attitude of someone who is well-informed about the counterproductive use of guns as an instrument of defense, is nonsensical. To accuse a good father of being a 'coward' is offensive. When he gets rid of his gun, he is thinking about the security of his children or grandchildren, or being sensitive to pressures from his wife, who feels the danger the gun could bring into the home. When a culture of violence and the inefficiency of police push men to get guns, resisting the false sense of security that guns bring shows lucidity. In this case, courageous is he who gets rid of his gun.

## **16. Ammunition, Collectors, Sport Shooters and Private Security Companies**

### **Controlling ammunition**

Guns do not shoot, do not hurt, do not kill, without ammunition. Illegal ammunition is much easier for police to apprehend – for example, ammunition that remains in the ground after shootouts with criminals – than illegal guns. Criminals can go for longer periods without replacing their guns than they can without replacing ammunition, which

requires constant refilling and therefore constant illegal trafficking. At the same time, the international community has been debating the need to control illicit small arms trafficking, without discussing the same control for ammunition.

South American delegations proposed to integrate ammunition into the agenda of the UN Plan of Action in the Review Conference in July 2006. The proposal was rejected, and control of ammunition continues outside the agenda of the UN, as well as out of control.

Some countries, such as Austria, France, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Brazil and Colombia, as well as NATO, have already started marking ammunition, so that it can be traced. During negotiations on the new gun control law in Brazil, Viva Rio pushed for mandatory marking on the casing on bullets, not just the boxes. This would have facilitated tracing efforts, because most ammunition used by narcotraffickers is diverted from the corrupt police. The ammunition manufacturer CBC, which has a near monopoly on producing ammunition for small arms in Brazil, alleged that it was “unviable and uneconomical”. But Viva Rio presented to the Brazilian Congress five bullets that had been produced by CBC in 1950 and 1952, which had been duly marked (see photo).



Parliamentarians were outraged at CBC’s manipulative techniques and voted the measure in, though not as Viva Rio had originally advocated. Ammunition sold to the armed forces and police (rather than all small arms ammunition) is marked, as of January 2005.

The Delegacia Legal project, of Rio de Janeiro police, developed a system to control from this marking, that allows to control not only to which police station or military barracks the ammunition was sold, but even what ammunition was distributed to each police officer or soldier, a system that could be adopted by other countries.

Following the UN Conference on Illicit Small Arms Trafficking, in 2001, there were improvements in some 50 countries illicit gun trafficking controls, according to IANSA.<sup>248</sup> At the same time, little has been done to control ammunitions trafficking.

In January 2006, one of the authors of the Guidebook and a team of researchers did field work on both sides of the Brazilian borders with Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay, to analyze the impact of the Disarmament Statute, and of the new gun control policy in Paraguay, against gun and ammunitions trafficking. The team visited gun shops in 38 cities, returning to the same region where, in 2000, a similar investigation had been carried out. At that time, five years ago, gun shops were full of guns and ammunition, mainly Brazilian, that were sold to Brazilian narcotraffickers. The contraband was so great that in 1996, in response to a request from the Justice Ministry of Brazil, the US

State Department suspended the export license to Paraguay, alleging that guns “cross the Paraguayan borders illegally, arming criminals in Brazil.”<sup>249</sup>

In 2006, we found a totally different situation. The number of guns on sale had fallen drastically, although there were still guns from Spain, the Czech Republic, Italy and Hungary, instead of Brazilian guns, which had disappeared. European guns, however, continued arriving, going against the Code of Conduct on Arms Trade of the European Union, which recommends against exporting to countries that resell these products on the clandestine market. But on the whole, the scene on the border had improved considerably, largely due to the new policy of repression of DIMABEL, the arms control body of the Paraguayan government, to the difficulties in importing Brazilian guns imposed by the Disarmament Statute, and mainly to the establishment of an 150% tax on Brazilian guns exported to Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>250</sup> Because of this tax, Brazilian ammunition disappeared in shops on the borders with Brazil. But they were substituted by ammunition from Mexico (Aguila), the Tchech Republic (Sellier & Bellot), Spain (Armusa e Saga), the Philippines (Armscor), Hungary (MSN), Italy (Fiocchi), Israel (Samson) and Argentina (Fabricaciones Militares). With these new beneficiaries, Brazilian narcotraffickers continued well stocked with contraband ammunition. This clearly demonstrates the need to control international traffic of this product, which started by the policy on marking.<sup>251</sup>

Considering the difficulty to control gun and ammunition shops near the borders, Viva Rio asked the Special Committee on Transnational Organized Crime of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States on November 2005, to consider a ban of small arms and ammunition within a 100 km wide strip along national border in order to facilitate police and customs controls regarding illicit arms trafficking and gray.

Ammunition is easy to produce, even easier to load, and is like ‘gasoline’ that makes guns ‘run’. Some countries have started to control ammunition. Some only allow ammunition for guns licensed to the buyer, such as United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Japan, France, New Zealand,<sup>252</sup> Brazil and Argentina. Others limit the amount of ammunition, such as some Southern Asian countries, or related this number to the gun licensed to the buyer, as in Thailand and Brazil. In Brazil, the new law, limits the amount of ammunition to 50 rounds per year for an individual buyer.

### **Collectors**

In many countries, a source of guns that for organized crime are those stolen from gun collections. This is made easier by the fact that in many countries collectors are allowed by law to collect modern military weapons in good working condition, to the delight of criminals. In the Brazilian capital Brasília, a collector has more than 25,000 collector items, including war tanks. Efforts to introduce a new law limiting the type of gun that can be considered part of a collection, or even greater security measures – such as taking off the firing mechanism – ran up against a strong lobby of collectors, composed of influential businessmen and members of the military.

But in many countries greater control and security measures for gun collections have been achieved. In Japan and the UK, guns must be kept locked and separate from ammunition. In Canada, guns must be kept without the firing mechanism or with the trigger locked; and without ammunition, with ammunition separate from the gun, and each of them placed in locked and safe containers. In addition, in Australia, when the collector has a license to have a gun that is not allowed for civilians, their firing mechanism must be destroyed. In Belarus, guns must be taken apart and their pieces held in different safe recipients. In the majority of countries that control firearms, police inspectors are often in the homes of collectors and sport shooters. In mostly all developed countries, the law stipulates that guns should be kept in safe containers separately from ammunition, to prevent accidents, mainly with children. Exceptions are the United States, Liechtenstein and Finland.

### **Sport shooters**

Several mass murders – such as when 14 young women were killed at a Canadian university in 1989, or when 35 people were killed in a bar in 1996, when 16 children were killed in a school in Scotland that same year, or when 14 parliamentarians were killed in Switzerland in 2001, as cited earlier in this text – were committed by sport shooters, who trained on shooting ranges. After the tragedies, these countries increased control on such clubs, and the UK even made sport shooting illegal.

At the same time, in many countries, control is precarious or inexistent. Shooting ranges, which are meant for sports or leisure, become commercial centers where guns and ammunition are diverted to the clandestine market. In Brazil, the Congressional Hearing Commission on Illicit Arms Trafficking, recently found that organized crime in São Paulo, received assault rifle ammunition from the trainer at a shooting range, which had a machine to refill ammunition. The investigation was a result of disturbances in the city May 2006 by leaders of drug traffickers who had been put in prison, which led to the death of more than 400 people in 10 days. In Rio de Janeiro, professional murderers have been arrested with competition guns, which are not very powerful but are extremely precise. Some countries are debating the need for sport shooters' guns to be stored in the safe of the club to increase security and control, both of the weapons and the ammunition, as well as their clients conduct.

### **Lack of control on private security companies**

Exaggerated privatization in public security sectors, plus the public security crisis in many countries, have made selling private security big business. In South Africa, there are four private security guards for every one police officer, totaling nearly 4,500 private companies, with 500,000 vigilantes.<sup>253</sup> In Nicaragua, private security companies went from one, in 1990, to 52 in 2001; in Panama, from 14 in 1990 to 108 in 1999; in Costa Rica, from 28 in 1994 to 754 in 2001.<sup>254</sup> In Brazil, according to the Federal Police, there are 1,120,842 private security guards working for 2,865 legal companies, with an estimated 413,994 guns.<sup>255</sup> We calculate that illegal private security companies are twice as numerous as the legal ones, and that the total number of private security companies, including both legal and illegal, is more than 2.3 times the number of public security forces in the country.



This rapid increase, in addition to revealing the failure of public policies, reflects the distortions of a deeply unequal society. Those who can pay, have security, and those who cannot, are exposed to danger. But to pay for private security, individual or collective (such as in a gated community or residential complex) is expensive. Public security is much cheaper. The solution, naturally, is not to provide private security for everyone, but to implement an efficient collective security that protects both rich and poor.

In Brazil private security companies are not well controlled by the federal police. This lack of control has made them one of the biggest sources of guns for criminals. It has been estimated that in Rio de Janeiro in 1998 alone nearly 13,101 guns have been diverted from these companies and classified as “lost”.<sup>256</sup> The Disarmament Statue made private security companies’ owners responsible for loss and theft of gun, among other measures. While this is progress, there is still much more work to be done.

## 17. Economic Impact of Firearms

### Costs of the ‘industry of fear’

“Public and private security costs absorb between 13 and 15% of the GDP for Latin America, more than money spent on social assistance programs.”<sup>257</sup> Twenty-five percent of Colombia’s GDP is taken up by violence, while Brazil spends 10%.<sup>258</sup> Public and private spending on security in Brazil are impressive: public investments were estimated at US\$ 17 billion and from the private sector US\$ 32 billion in 2001.<sup>259</sup> Again, these are resources usefully be put towards social projects or development.

### “Gun control will lead to unemployment”?

In countries where weapons and ammunition are produced, there is a fear that controlling these products (mainly reducing or banning supply) will force companies to close and put their employees out of work. Sometimes they exaggerate the consequences. In Brazil, during the campaign for the referendum to prohibit gun sales, members of congress linked to these industries made affirmations like the following, from Alceu Collares: “People who are against gun production are in favor of unemployment and at service of criminals. Prohibiting the sale of guns will cause 200,000 people to lose their jobs in my state”.<sup>260</sup> In truth, this industry in Brazil is responsible for just 0.02% of the formal employment, and the state to which the congressman was referring has less than 1,000 jobs in the arms and ammunitions industry.<sup>261</sup>

Under pressure because of the growing restrictions on the domestic firearms market, the biggest Brazilian producer, Forjas Taurus, began investing in production of tools, petrol exploration equipment and other security products, such as helmets, shields, bullet-proof vests, etc. Perhaps they were taking the biblical advice to turn swords into ploughshares. These shifts helped the company out of financial trouble, as well as expanding the labor force it required. If gun control reduces the market for small arms products, then these should be replaced by other more profitable products. This is also what happened in Rio de Janeiro, with a law to ban the arms trade in 2001. Although it was later revoked as unconstitutional (the change would only come with the federal law in 2003), during the

months in which it was in place, half the gun shops were forced to shift to fishing, sporting and leather goods products – and were able to keep their jobs.

Supposing that there is a loss of jobs because of gun control, no matter how important employment policies are, there are greater goods, such as preserving life and combating illicit activities made possible by firearms. If protecting jobs is an absolute good, then narcotrafficking should be legalized; it employs around 250,000 people in Brazil alone.

People who work for gun control, or disarmament, should pressure their governments to help arms and munitions factors to get funding so they can undergo a conversion process to produce and sell peaceful products, as recommended by the UN.

#### **“Banning gun sales bolsters the clandestine market”?**

The experience in Brazil has not shown that tighter gun control does not increase illegal markets, as we can see in the following police declaration: “The parallel gun market has shrunk with the disarmament campaign. According to the Santa Catarina Federal Police, a .38 caliber revolver which previously had been negotiated by criminals for around US\$ 40, now costs US\$150.”<sup>262</sup> In the illegal market in Paraguay, a 9 mm Taurus pistol, the favorite for Brazilian criminals, which used to be abundant, are more difficult to obtain today and as a result they are more expensive. All as a result of the reduction in supply, because control was passed to DIMABEL the gun control body of the Paraguayan army, and because of the increase in taxes on exportation of Brazilian arms to other Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Will prohibition increase illegal markets? Sociologist Gláucio Soares, responds to this question: “The illegal market already exists. Or did you think that all the guns in criminals’ hands are legal? The majority are illegal, stolen or contraband. But if the price increases, as is likely, that should reduce availability. We could expect this measure to reduce perhaps 5% per year in the number of deaths. This, projected over the nearly 40,000 people killed by guns each year, would mean saving 2,000 lives. I think this number alone is really worth it.”<sup>263</sup>

As seen in the research *Brazil: the Arms and the Victims*, Brazil has a huge number of illegal guns and a smaller number of legally registered firearms. The illegal market has more than 8,000,000 guns. Legal guns in the hands of ‘honest’ civilians are less than ¼ of all weapons in circulation. Thus, the best way to control them is not to increase the legal market, which is small but feeds arms into the illegal markets; it is to reduce it, so that this negatively affects illicit trafficking. We would have been able to see this more clearly if the gun ban referendum had passed, but will partially happen if there is more control on the legal sales of these products.

#### **“Bans lead to illegality, like during Prohibition” ?**

Whenever we speak of banning something, we come up against the argument of the failure of Prohibition (banning alcohol) in the United States: Prohibition made the clandestine market stronger and will make good men get guns in illegal markets. As we have already seen, the restrictions are increasing the price of illegal guns. In addition,

good policing has been made easier: people who have a gun without authorization are criminals – they are breaking the law.

The difference between banning guns and the prohibition of alcoholic drinks is in the degree that society agrees with the measure. In the United States, the legislation to prohibit drinking alcohol (the 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Amendments) in force between 1919 and 1933, went against most public opinion. Its initial rigidity was quickly softened with more flexible laws in the majority of states. Making it illegal to carry guns in Brazil, through the Disarmament Statute, had 78% support of Brazilians<sup>264</sup> and was democratically voted in Congress.

Let us consider, for example, the numerous products that are banned from our markets, such as certain solvents, or that are restricted or controlled, such as some agro toxins, medicines or explosives. The products are controlled, but still sold in small numbers, because they are considered dangerous. From this we can conclude that it is very important to have measures that restrict the use of guns that are the fruit of a far-reaching process of public debate and raising awareness, of a democratically voted law and implemented with support of civil society.

## 18. Gun Control and Disarmament Activities

### Voluntary weapons collections campaigns

The United Nations encourages voluntary weapons collection campaigns. Although they are not well-liked by gun defenders, they are usually accepted because they are voluntary, and allow people to get rid of unwanted and unneeded guns. A common example is when families want to get rid of a gun after the owner dies.

Voluntary weapons collection campaigns have occurred in more than 30 countries. Most have been held in the Americas, in 13 countries (US, Honduras, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Haiti, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Paraguay and Mexico), followed by Africa, with seven (Angola, Somalia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa), then Europe, with six (United Kingdom, Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo and East Slovenia), and Asia and Asia Pacific, with five (Australia, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq and Taiwan). In the United States, 32 states have held gun collection campaigns. The most popular slogan is “one gun, one life”.

In countries where such campaigns have been held, results have varied, from ineffective to excellent. Short-term campaigns, such as the first of a series of arms destructions in South Africa, generally collect few guns. Longer campaigns, at least one year, or repeated several times, are generally more effective – such as in Australia, England, and South Africa. Another important factor is the type of payment that is given in exchange for the weapon.

1. The most interesting is **collective compensation**, introduced in Albania in 1999. That year, the population of Gramsch rebelled, taking weapons and ammunition from police stations. Following the rebellion, the government offered the population neighborhood

improvements in exchange for handing over the stolen weapons. These included paving the roads, installing lights, telephone, etc. The result was not only disarmament, but also community cohesion and improvement of community relations with the police. In another example from Mendoza, Argentina, some neighborhoods got electronic communications with the nearest police station in exchange for handing in guns.

2. Campaigns may also involve trading small arms for **other goods**, such as food baskets, tickets to concerts and sporting events, computers, construction material, agricultural tools, etc. In the United States a network of restaurants traded hamburgers for guns. In Argentina, organizers gave gift certificates to grocery markets for compensation.

3. The most common form of payment is in money. The advantages of “**buy-backs**” as they are known, is that they require less bureaucracy and organizers do not have to find donated goods. But the quantity paid must be decided carefully. In Haiti, because the compensation was higher than black market prices, people bought guns in neighboring Dominican Republic and handed them in to turn a profit. In the United States, several old guns were traded in order to purchase a new one. Australia and the United Kingdom paid market price. In Brazil, the sum given in exchange for a weapon was low enough not to create a parallel market, but high enough to motivate people. At the same time, opinion polls showed that most people participated in the campaign not only for the compensation, but also because they support disarmament to reduce gun violence.

Established in the Disarmament Statute and led by the government, with technical support from Viva Rio, the Brazilian campaign was originally to last for six months and aimed to collect 80,000 guns. But in the end it went on for more than a year, from July 2004 to October 2006, and collected more than 459,855 guns. Payment varied between US\$30 and US\$100 per gun, depending on the quality. At first guns could only be handed over in police stations and military posts. But civil society became increasingly involved, and churches, unions and other entities also started collecting small arms. This was a decisive addition to the campaign, because people who do not trust the police do not want to give their guns to them. Guns relinquished at civil society posts and more than 400 churches were crushed with a hammer in front of the person who brought it. This also helped build confidence, as the inexpensive method allowed people to be certain that the gun would not be diverted or reused. It also made the collection points safer, many of which were located in at-risk areas, as criminals would not be interested in trying to steal smashed guns. At the end of the campaign, the guns were registered by the Federal Police and melted in enormous ovens.

Viva Rio collected nearly 15,000 guns. An analysis of these weapons shows: 91% were illegal, 90% were in working condition, 84% were short-barreled, and 14% were long-barreled, 60% were revolvers and 13% pistols and 4% were restricted use military weapons. In addition, five grenades, four .30 caliber machine guns and 77 assault rifles were also handed in. Considering that Rio de Janeiro is an urban metropolis that is not at war, it is surprising that ‘honest men’ would have war-grade weaponry in their apartments in Copacabana, as we saw in the campaign.

### **Impact of the voluntary weapons collection campaign**

The effectiveness of these campaigns to reduce gun death and injury rates has been widely discussed. Evaluating collection efforts is complicated by the fact that in general, the campaigns were not closely monitored. On the other hand, there are many variables that explain gun death rates and it is not easy to isolate just one of them. At any rate, countries like Australia and Brazil, which held campaigns that collected the greatest number of firearms, had drastic reductions in the numbers of gun deaths.

According to the Brazilian Justice Ministry, as a result of the voluntary weapons collection campaign, combined with the ban on carrying guns imposed by the new law, there was an 8.1% reduction in the number of deaths by firearms in 2005 as compared to 2004. This was the first drop in more than a decade, and UNESCO calculated that the projected impact of the reduction was a 15% decrease in gun deaths, or more than 5,000 lives saved.<sup>265</sup> Due to the success of the campaign, the Brazilian government is studying the possibility of doing campaigns every year, for shorter periods, following the example of countries like United Kingdom and Taiwan.

In Argentina, after a similar campaign in 2001, the use of firearms in homicides fell 18% in one year. Previously, guns were used in 80% of homicides, and in 2002 guns were used in 62% of the murders.<sup>266</sup> In Australia, as we have already seen, gun homicide and suicide rates were cut in half over 10 years (1988 – 1998); between 1996 and 2001, the total gun deaths fell 36% (see *Australia: the world's greatest disarmament effort*). In Cambodia the combination of several public gun destructions, initiated in 1999 with voluntary weapons collections campaigns, led to a sharp drop in crimes committed with firearms. The use of guns in crimes and accidents fell from 80% in 1994 to just 30% in 2004; gun injuries fell from 93.65% in 1993 to just 2.6% in 2004.<sup>267</sup>

These kind of campaign are meant to reduce homicides among people who know one another, suicides and accidents with guns. We should not expect them to greatly reduce crime rates. Although taking guns out of circulation does reduce the chances that they will be stolen by criminals or diverted to illegal markets.

### **Arms destructions**

The UN encourages governments to destroy excess weapons stockpiles in order to stop them being diverted illicitly. Public destructions are generally considered to be the best, because they help teach the population, raising awareness and generating debate on gun use in society. Public destructions, whether steamrolling or burning guns, have been carried out in many different countries in recent years, such as South Africa, Congo, Mali, Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Nicaragua and Honduras.

In 2001, the UN appealed to governments to destroy guns to draw attention to the upcoming small arms conference. In response, the government of Rio de Janeiro, with the support of Viva Rio and the army, organized the destruction of 100,000 guns, the

largest single public destruction ever held. Before that, in 1999, 50,000 Evangelicals destroyed guns in the Maracanã football stadium, in an impressive demonstration.

Photo: André Porto



50,000 destroy firearms in Maracanã

Photo: Kita Pedroza



Destruction of 100,000 guns in Rio de Janeiro

#### “Destroy or reuse?”

Critics of gun destructions have said “guns handed over in disarmament campaigns are just rusty old relics”, or contradictorily, they say, “the government is throwing money away by allowing guns to be destroyed.”

As mentioned earlier, research by Viva Rio found that 90% of the guns handed in at collection points were in working condition. In destructions in Brazil, guns that had historical value were separated out and donated to museums. Under the 2003 Disarmament Statute, all the guns handed in during the campaign, or seized by the police, are to be destroyed. This has proved a controversial point. Should historical guns be preserved? Probably yes, given that they are generally obsolete and held in museums to preserve our history. And what of more modern weapons, that could be used by the police? There are strong arguments for and against reusing guns instead of destroying them. Ill-equipped police and armed forces want to see them incorporated into their units, especially given that organized crime have better and more sophisticated weapons. In Brazil, the decision was to destroy them, in light of recent experiences, such as that of Mozambique, in which many of the guns collected and stocked in military units were stolen and wound up on the street again. The Brazilian government also alleged that it wants to standardize police weaponry; increased heterogeneity in the types of firearms would make this process more difficult.

In the 2001 UN Conference, in spite of our efforts, delegations from many countries refused to support a gun destruction policy, alleging that “guns collected should go to

police and armed forces”. Destruction of excess arms should and can be carried out, while saving those that are needed to equip the state. Many countries have already destroyed excess guns and ammunition, which the UN encourages as an important measure for governments and NGOs to work together to improve public security.

Destroyed guns can also be given to artists and sculptors, who transform them into works of art or public monuments for peace. At the entrance to the UN building in New York, there is a sculpture of a huge revolver for non-violence, known as the “knotted gun”. Donated by the government of Luxemburg, the sculpture was created by Fredrik Reuterswärd, a friend of John Lennon who had just been shot to death in New York. Mozambique built large sculptures and furniture with pieces of destroyed guns. The Argentine province of Mendoza had a contest to choose the best sculpture designed from destroyed guns. A Swedish sculptress held international expositions with jewelry made from ammunition.



Photo: André Porto  
**Knotted Gun, UN**

### **Popular referendums**

Progress in gun control policy in Brazil came about because of strong popular support, the only way to challenge the power, influence and money of the gun and ammunition lobby. In negotiating the Disarmament Statute, politicians came to an impasse on the proposal to ban small arms and ammunition sales for civilians. The solution was to put the measure to a popular vote, which happened in October 2005. This was the first time that gun control policies had been put to a popular vote at the national level.

Three months before the referendum was held, opinion polls showed that 81% of the voters were in favor of the ban, an approval rating higher than that for the Disarmament Statute (76%) two years earlier. However, this support declined rapidly, and the proposal was rejected by 64% of voters; 36% of the population voted in favor of the banning small arms and ammunition sales for civilians, representing 33,332,000 votes.

The main causes of this drastic change in attitude were likely: (1) dissatisfaction with the Lula government, then in the midst of a corruption scandal, which openly expressed support for the ban; (2) a lack of progress on reducing violence, little investment or reform, which ‘betrayed’ the government’s stated commitment to prioritize public security, today the highest concern among the population; (3) the effective though unscrupulous publicity campaign against the ban, which associated ‘freedom’ and ‘defending the right to legitimate self-defense with a gun’ to the struggle for democracy and other rights in Brazil. Propagandists even co-opted the image of Nelson Mandela as a legendary freedom fighter, though his lawyers later protested against the misuse of his image. In spite of the results, the referendum encouraged far-reaching national debate on

public security and arms control. Opinion polls after the referendum showed that support for voluntary disarmament held at around 80%.

The following month, on 8 November, the same arguments for and against the gun and ammunition ban in Brazil were repeated in San Francisco, California. This time, 58% of voters approved Proposition H which prohibited the manufacture, distribution, trade and possession of guns and ammunition in the city of San Francisco. However, in June 2006 the courts reversed the popular decision alleging the issue had to be decided at the state level. The city of San Francisco plans to appeal the decision.<sup>268</sup>

### **The case of Brazil: the Disarmament Statute**

New national gun laws in Brazil, the Disarmament Statute (Law 10,826) passed on 23 December 2003. The legislation is advanced and far-reaching: It makes it illegal for civilians to carry firearms, with small exceptions; it raises the minimum age to buy guns to 25 years old; it makes arms trafficking a crime; establishes a sentence of up to 12 years in prison for illegal possession or carrying of firearms, without the possibility of bail; it creates a unified firearms registration system, which can be accessed online by the police; and it makes it mandatory to mark ammunition sold to the armed forces and the police, among other measures.

Radical by Latin American standards, the law passed in spite of the strong national and international gun lobby, because civil society had worked hard to mobilize popular support for gun control. For five years, NGOs, churches, TV personalities and congressmen worked to pass the law, by disseminating research in the media and holding demonstrations. The media also played a decisive role; as opposed to other countries, where the media increases the gun lobby's influence, most Brazilian media promoted even-handed debates on the issue. In 2003, large popular marches occurred in different cities throughout the country, culminating in the Gun Free Brazil march, which brought 50,000 people together on Copacabana beach on 14 September 2003. Popular support was at 76% for reforming the gun law, which was finally voted and signed into law by President Lula as a gift to the population just before Christmas.

## **19. The International Gun Control Movement**

In the past decade, with the unprecedented growth in urban violence, governments, NGOs and research centers, as well as international organizations, have closely studied the phenomenon. Analyses show that a lack of control on the international arms trade is a main factor in this problem. Small arms cause more deaths than weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological), among other reasons, because they are used regularly, both in contexts of war and peace. Although the small arms agenda has received less attention, than for example, terrorism, there is growing acceptance that small arms are the real weapons of mass destruction. It is not more clear that where there are violent deaths, there are usually small arms, whether in war or post-conflict situations, in ethnic massacres, crime, accidents, suicides and murders.

### **Civil society: International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)**



In May 1999, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)<sup>269</sup> – “a network of networks” – was officially launched by 120 NGOs at the Hague Appeal for Peace. Essentially, IANSA facilitates communications and information exchange on controlling small arms and ammunition, as well as on successful experiences and research; influences policy at the national and international level to prevent gun violence; and promotes public awareness campaigns and activism for micro disarmament.

Today IANSA is directed by Rebecca Peters, a journalist and lawyer who led the successful disarmament efforts in Australia and helped organized the Million Mom March (MMM) in the United States. In Brazil, the gun lobby often characterizes IANSA as a “rich multinational”, and denounces their “external interference” in our problems. But IANSA is actually a small office in London with modest resources. Its strength lies in the ethical commitment to reducing gun violence and solidarity of NGOs on all continents, in developing good relationships with governments that support gun control, and in its competence to inform and encourage its members. There is a great contrast between IANSA’s scarce resources and the wealthy National Rifle Association of the United States. The NRA brings together small arms producers, traders and owners, and was one of the pillars in the Bush candidacy. The group has an annual budget of US\$100,000,000, of which US\$35,000,000 go to lobbying and advertising.<sup>270</sup>

### **Parliament: Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons**

A welcome addition to the work to control small arms and ammunitions, parliamentary exchange and support for this issue has grown since the end of the 90s. The main vehicle for this dialogue is the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons,<sup>271</sup> established in 2002. Today the Forum brings together more than 50 parliamentarians from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. It seeks to push the parliamentary agenda for gun control and disarmament, with capacity-building activities and awareness-raising activities, among others. It aims to strengthen the role of parliamentarians and improve their capacity to gun control policies, for example, improving national legislation, ratifying international instruments, controlling international arms transfers, and also holding and participating in disarmament campaigns, as well as in public firearms destructions.

### **The current agenda**

Many people had fairly pessimistic expectations for the United Nations Review Conference of the Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in all its Aspects in July 2006. The outcome was even worse than expected: led by the US, a handful of countries that profit from illicit trafficking in small arms and ammunition, blocked advances. Governments failed to agree a revised Program of Action, in spite of the accumulated knowledge and experience since 2001.

In recent years, more successful efforts have taken place at the regional and subregional levels. Africa has seen great progress, from the Bamako Declaration, in 2000, to the Nairobi Protocol in 2004. The Americas has advanced small arms control legislation, the CICAD Model Regulations, approved by the OAS in 1998. In addition, most South

American countries cooperate to prevent gun violence through the Mercosur Small Arms Working Group. NGOs from Latin America and the Caribbean linked to IANSA have just launched the Latin American Coalition against Violence (*Coalición Latino Americana contra la Violencia Armada, CLAVE*)<sup>272</sup>, and the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO) established legal standards for control of small arms and ammunition in the region. The European Union seeks to make the European Code of Conduct legally binding and has made progress on transparency of arms exports.

We must admit that the heterogeneity of the range of problems associated with gun violence makes this work more difficult. Some US states are still struggling to impose a 20-gun limit per month, while in other countries small arms are completely banned for civilians. The United States has a big problem with gun suicides, as well as interpersonal violence. In Latin America, Africa, Russia and other ex-Soviet countries, guns are mainly used in homicides and organized crime. Asian and Arab countries are engulfed in violent conflicts. For our youth, the sad reality in Africa is child soldiers, while at the margins of cities across the world, it is gang-related activity or crime that kills them.

There are new possibilities for progress at the global level, such as efforts to implement an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which has won new supporters. In October 2006, the First Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations will debate a proposal for the ATT presented by Costa Rica, Australia, Argentina, Kenya, the UK and Japan. We believe a working group of experts will follow up on the content and moving the ATT forward. The work of parliamentarians and NGOs will be essential to this process, in promoting the ATT at the national, regional and international levels.

## **20. Conclusions**

Years of research helped us deconstruct some of the major myths around using guns for protection. For example, the widely-held but inaccurate belief that street crime – guns in the hands of strangers – is the most dangerous threat, when in reality, most gun deaths actually occur in the home, often at the hands of family members or friends. Or the misguided notion that the guns of ‘honest citizens’ are completely separate from criminals’, when legal markets are actually one of the major sources for illegal guns. These assumptions meant that people may have felt more safe or better protected with a gun – but, in reality, firearms are more of a risk than a protection. Propagating these myths, whether out of ignorance or disbelief, is playing with the lives of others. This is why it is so important to inform public opinion about the conclusions of this research.

The more we analyze the relationship between guns and violence, the more we are convinced that small arms proliferation is not just a technical or secondary aspect of the escalation of armed violence. It is a central aspect, and helps explain why, for example, neighboring countries that are less developed than the United States, South Africa, Brazil, Venezuela and Russia are also less violent.

A person who uses a gun for protection believes that violence in society requires or justifies this decision. It does not occur to them that this violence is made possible by

easy access to firearms. If arming people increased security, Brazil would be a paradise of tranquility, with 90% of its more than 17,000,000 guns in the hands of civilians.

The World Health Organization affirms that increasing armed violence, a major problem for so many of the world's countries already, has the characteristics of a pandemic. UNESCO, referring to the case of Brazil, said that, "AIDS killed 11,276 people in 2003 – an extremely worrying number. Guns alone killed 3.5 times more: 39,284 Brazilians. There is much concern and warranted mobilization against the scourge of AIDS. But for the scourge of small arms, which kill 27 times more youth, not enough resources and energies are put into policies and responses to the problem. We are still discussing whether it is fair and legally justified to allow guns to decimate entire populations whose only crime is living in a country that is very lax with the circulation of firearms."<sup>273</sup>

It is only natural that individuals in any society will have interpersonal problems and conflicts. Every day, couples, neighbors and schoolmates have misunderstandings. Every day, drunken men argue over bets or sports. Every day people get into fights over traffic disputes, in nightclubs, or in the office. These may even escalate into physical violence. But the presence of a gun in a scenario like these, whether in the street or at home, makes all the difference in assuring a tragic ending. Without a gun, arguments or depression would be just another disagreeable moment; with a gun, the result could be one of many awful things: someone dies, someone becomes a murderer, a family destroyed... The presence of a gun transforms banal fights or emotional crises into irreversible tragedies. Guns change the nature of personal conflicts, making them lethal.

At the international level, Bush and his policies of militaristic hegemony have seriously hindered efforts to build a less violent world. But there is still hope. One example is Sarah Brady, whose husband, an aid to president Reagan, was paralyzed after being shot in the attempt on the then-president's life. A republican who became an important part of the gun control movement, she writes, "We as a nation, criticize some countries for not being aggressive enough to stop the flow of weapons of mass destruction. We criticize other nations for not halting the flow of drugs. We have to stop supplying the world's criminals with cheap handguns."<sup>274</sup>

The US agenda aside, the trend globally has been to adopt at least moderate measures to control guns and ammunition, such as making specific weapons illegal or and taking measures to prevent guns from falling into the wrong hands. Other countries went even further with disarmament initiatives to raise awareness and to reduce risks: public gun destruction events, voluntary weapons collection campaigns, transformation of guns into works of art or children's games, and referendums to decide gun control policy. In South Africa, a civil society movement led by Gun Free South Africa, achieved a law making it illegal to bring guns into certain schools, bars, workplaces and other areas known as Gun Free Zones.

The challenges of arms control are huge, as seen with efforts to limit nuclear arms or ban landmines. With small arms, even countries that have made progress in controlling illicit

trafficking can see their safety sabotaged by other countries whose laws are lacking. As we have seen, guns flow from unregulated markets to legal ones. Thus, permissive laws allow US guns to inundate Mexico, Canada, the Caribbean and other further-off countries, such as Japan and Northern Ireland, confounding security efforts there.

With the end of the Cold War, many believed that the world would enter into another era, an age of peace. But what we are seeing now is the opposite: an explosion of localized wars, expanding terrorism and urban violence ravaging most large cities. At the epicenter of this social drama, a historic backslide in contrast with technological advances, small arms spread death and leave a trail of blood. If bolstering human rights, social justice and democracy are important objectives, curbing the massacre and suffering caused by firearms is one of the most urgent challenge of the beginning of this century.

## Annex

### Campaign slogans

- “*You’ve got a gun, you’ve got a problem*”, campaign in Uruguay
- “*Guns are made to kill*”, campaign in Mendoza, Argentina
- “*Less guns, more lives*”, campaign in Paraná, Brazil
- “*Secrets that kill*”, campaign in Spain for transparency in arms exports
- “*Small arms are a big problem*”, campaign in Finland
- “*One gun, one life*”, campaign in the US
- “*If you love someone, disarm someone*”, Viva Rio women’s campaign
- “*When there are guns, there are no winners*”, campaign in El Salvador
- “*Guns in the trash – make your life and safety last*”, campaign in Bogotá, Colombia
- “*Goods for guns*”, campaign in the US
- “*Disarm Paraná – the best reward is your safety*”, campaign in Paraná
- “*Small but deadly*”, campaign in Spain
- “*Trade in your gun for a hamburger*”, campaign of restaurant chain in US
- “*Arms do not bring security, but create insecurity*”, Amnesty International
- “*A farewell to arms*” (allusion to Hemingway), campaign in Spain
- “*Our child knew where we hid the gun*”, text with photo of mourning parents, campaign in Uruguay
- “*I swore the gun was not loaded*”, idem
- “*My husband decided he wanted a gun for protection. Then my son decided to use it kill himself*”, idem
- “*My husband never knew he was depressed. Now, he will never know*”, text with photo of grieving wife, idem
- “*A thief would not hesitate to kill someone. But you would*”, idem
- “*Gun free hands! Hands free of violence!*”, campaign in Guatemala
- “*Get rid of your guns before they get rid of you*”, campaign in Brazil
- “*Guns: it doesn’t matter where they come from, but where they are going*”, weapons collection campaign, Instituto Sou da Paz, São Paulo, Brazil
- “*A gun can change a lot of things, for the worse*”, idem
- “*There won’t be enough men in this generation!*”, Viva Rio women’s campaign
- “*Choose gun free! Its your weapon or me*”, idem
- “*This is not about just collecting guns, but building a culture of peace*”, Brotherhood of Brazilian Churches campaign
- “*Guns don’t make you cooler, they make you a criminal*”, “*Guns don’t make you more powerful, they make you a criminal*”, “*Guns don’t make you safer, they make you criminal*”, campaign in Pernambuco, Brazil
- “*Gun Free South Africa*” the South African campaign
- “*They shall beat their swords into ploughshares*” campaign in Mozambique

### [Publicidade para a última capa]:

Written by two specialists, this Guidebook seeks to provide straightforward answers to the questions you wanted to know about the advantages and disadvantages of using guns for self-defense and did not know who to ask.

This international edition in three languages (Spanish, English and French) is meant as a source of information for people deciding whether to buy or keep a gun, for people who want to advise their community or electorate on this issue, for policymakers and advocates on gun laws, and for teachers or formers of public opinion.

The world has never been so well armed. Some 600,000,000 small arms are in circulation: 37.8% belong to the armed forces, 2.8% to police forces, 0.2% to rebel groups, and the greatest proportion – 59.2% -- are in the hands of civilians. Guns kill 300,000 people a year in wars, assaults, suicides, and accidents. However, attention and resources are focused on preventing kidnapping of famous people, terrorism and serial killers, which happen less frequently but cause more of an impact on public opinion.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> “Firearms”, or “guns” are used interchangeably to mean “small arms and light weapons”. These are weapons that can be handled by just one person, such as revolvers, pistols, rifles, small machine guns, etc. Guns such as pistols, revolvers and shotguns are usually called “handguns”, and are different than longer-barreled firearms, such as hunting and assault rifles. Small arms are one of the types of “light weapons” that include other conventional weapons and that can be handled by more than one person and transported in small vehicles, such as anti-air machine guns, up to 100 mm mortars, etc.
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- <sup>268</sup> *Snapshot of Federal, State and Selected Local Gun Laws*, Legal Community Against Violence, 2006, [www.Icav.org](http://www.Icav.org)
- <sup>269</sup> *International Action Network on Small Arms*
- <sup>270</sup> Diário de São Paulo, 20.10.02
- <sup>271</sup> For more information on the Forum, see Alvarez, Daniel Luz and Lundberg, Maria J.: *Observatorio Parlamentario: Control de Armas Pequeñas e Ligeras*, Vol I, Stockholm, Abril 2006; or the site [www.parliamentaryforum.org](http://www.parliamentaryforum.org)
- <sup>272</sup> See [www.clave-lat.org](http://www.clave-lat.org)
- <sup>273</sup> Waiselfisz: *Mortes Matadas...*, op. cit.
- <sup>274</sup> Cited in Cukier, Wendy and Sidel W. Victor: *The Global Gun Epidemic...*