



Canadian Federation of University Women  
Fédération Canadienne des Femmes Diplômées des Universités

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BRIEF TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL  
SECURITY

Bill C-391: An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act  
(Repeal of the Long-Gun Registry)

## Summary

The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) with the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) call on Committee members to oppose Bill C-391. This Bill, if passed, would eliminate a valuable tool that enhances public safety and protects women from violence.

## Introduction

CFUW and NAWL members are aware that long guns are a threat to women in violent situations and that unregistered guns pose a risk to front-line workers, such as police and other first responders.

We urge the Government of Canada to address the social conditions that lead to violence through education, rehabilitation programs and research.

### **CFUW and NAWL have no doubt that dismantling the gun registry will put women in danger:**

A 2009 Statistics Canada Report on Family Violence shows that firearm-related spousal homicide has decreased **three-fold** over the past decade, from 1.7 per-million spouses in 1996 to 0.5 per-million spouses in 2007. In 1996, there were **27** firearm-related spousal homicides compared to **9** in 2007.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1974, only one spouse per-million has been murdered by a handgun. Long guns however are the weapon of choice in crimes of passion, domestic and in spousal homicides. Long gun deaths range from a high of four per million spouses in 1974 to 0.5 per-million spouses in 2007. All firearms-related spousal-homicide was perpetuated by long guns in that year.<sup>2</sup> With the creation and implementation of the gun registry spousal homicide has dropped dramatically.

Statistics show that twice as many women as men become victims of spousal violence<sup>3</sup> at 61 percent for females to 32 percent for males.<sup>4</sup> The same study

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey. Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2009, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2009000/part-partie5-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Chart 5.3, Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



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found that almost four times as many women were killed by a current or former spouse as men.<sup>5</sup> Women are about eight times more likely than men to experience violence in relationships, especially choking, threats with a weapon and sexual assault. In 2004, 254,000 women in Canada<sup>6</sup> reported assaults.

In 1996 there were 27 firearm related spousal homicides, in 2007 there were 9.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to the implementation of stronger gun control, the spousal homicide rate has dropped to the lowest it had been in 30 years.

The Statistics Canada and Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey shows that in 1990, 237 women were victims of homicide, 101 people were murdered by a spouse, and 50.5 percent of all homicides were committed with a long gun.

By 2008, 146 women were victims of homicide, spouses murdered 62 people and long guns were used in 17 percent of firearm related homicides. In the past long guns were used in 50.5 percent of homicides, with greater regulation that number dropped by 33.5 percent, to 17 percent.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Registry provides an invaluable tool for police and first responders:**

Police officers and first responders use the Gun Registry. In the 2008 the Commissioner of Firearms Report, the RCMP states that the Registry provides police officers with up-to-date firearms information and warns them when firearms may be present at a location.<sup>9</sup>

In 2008 alone, the registry was used 3,441,442 times. This information makes police officers, social workers, and other first responders' work safer, do their job better and provide safer communities for Canadians.

RCMP Commissioner William J.S. Elliott has said; "On an international level, the CFP [RCMP Canadian Firearms Program of which the Registry is a facet] now sets a standard ...and other countries have chosen to emulate it."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey. Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2009, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2009000/part-partie5-eng.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2006

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey. Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2009, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/2009000/part-partie5-eng.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.

<sup>9</sup> Commissioner of Firearms - 2008 Report

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



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## **Dismantling the gun registry will compromise women's *Charter* rights**

Section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* safeguards the fundamental right of women in Canada to life, liberty and security of the person.

Section 15 of the *Charter* guarantees women the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law. In affirming the constitutional validity of federal gun control legislation in the *Reference re Firearms Act (Can.)*, [2000] 1 S.C.R. 783, the Supreme Court of Canada concluded that: "The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the *Firearms Act* are both tightly linked to Parliament's goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme."

The *Firearms Act* was adopted by Parliament, following the 1989 Montreal Massacre, as one means of addressing the systemic problem of violence against women in Canada. As the statistics set out above demonstrate, women in Canada remain disproportionately vulnerable to firearm related spousal violence and to firearm-related spousal homicide. Failure to take into account the gendered impact of *Bill C-391* and the dismantling the gun registry reflects profound disregard for women's rights to life, liberty security of the person and equality, and amounts to a clear violation of women's *Charter* rights.

## **Recommendations**

CFUW and NAWL recommend that the Committee on Public Safety and National Security oppose C-391. This bill will undermine public safety and place families in danger. It will also take away a tool that protects police officers, social workers, and other first responders. First responders need to know if they are about to encounter an incident that is inherently dangerous because a gun is present. Furthermore the impact of Bill C-391 will threaten women's rights to life, liberty, security of the person and equality; a clear violation of women's *Charter* rights.

Violence against women is a barrier to women's equality. Therefore we call on you to vote against Bill C-391 and on the Government of Canada to:

- Strengthen the Registry's compliance measures;
- Remove the 2006 amnesty and ensure that all gun owners have registered their weapons.
- Provide funding through Status of Women Canada for research into causes of violence against women and develop strategies to address violence against women.
- Increase funding for abused women and children at second stage shelters that allow them to remain safely housed while creating a new family future. These



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women also need increased funding and access to transitional homes, family resource centres, emergency shelters and safe home networks in rural areas.

The Gun Registry is a proven tool that has reduced homicide and spousal homicide, and enhanced public safety.

CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization of close to 10,000 women university graduates, students and Associate Members in 112 Clubs across Canada that works to improve the status of women and human rights, education, social, justice, and peace. CFUW holds special consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC) Commission on the Status of Women and belongs to the Education Sector of the Canadian Commission to UNESCO. CFUW is the largest of the 79 affiliates of the International Federation of University Women (IFUW).