

**United Nations Biennial Meeting of States
to Review Progress
Made in the Implementation of the
Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in
Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
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**By Gary Mauser
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Mr President, distinguished delegates,

I am Gary Mauser, Professor Emeritus, of Simon Fraser University in Canada. I represent the National Firearms Association. For over 20 years, my academic research at SFU has involved studying firearms and crime. A study I did with constitutional lawyer and criminologist Don B. Kates has been recently published in the **Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy**. I will briefly report on our findings.

We analysed publicly available data from United Nations studies and the Small Arms Survey to examine the link between civilian firearm ownership and rates of homicide and suicide. Our findings contradict claims that firearms availability is problematic.

Mr. President, it is a myth that more civilian guns mean more murders. My analysis of a UN survey of 33 nations found no meaningful relationship between homicide rates and gun ownership. It is utterly false that most murderers are ordinary people who went wrong because they had guns. The overwhelming majority of murderers have life histories of violence, restraining orders, substance abuse problems, or psychopathology. It is generally illegal for such people to have guns, but unlike good people, they ignore gun laws—just as they ignore laws against violence.

In Europe, there are very few instances of nations with high gun ownership having higher murder rates than neighboring nations with lower gun ownership. If anything, the reverse tends to be true. For example, though Norway has one of the highest rates of firearm ownership per capita in Western Europe, it nevertheless has the lowest murder rate. And Luxembourg, despite its total handgun ban, has a higher murder rate than Norway or Austria.

Mr. President, bans are rarely effective. In nations where guns are less available, criminals get them anyway. After decades of ever-stricter gun controls, Great Britain banned nearly all handguns in 1997 and forced permit holders to turn them in. Yet from 1997 to 2005, both total homicides and gun homicides had increased by more than 25 percent. Despite the enforced collection and destruction of almost all legally owned handguns, the Metropolitan Police are reported as saying, “Gun crime is out of control”.

Even if gun bans did work, many alternative weapons are available to would-be murderers. Eight decades of police-state enforcement of handgun prohibition have kept Russian gun ownership low, resulting in few gun murders. Yet Russia's murder rates have long been four times higher than those in the US and 20 times higher than rates in countries such as Norway.

The "more guns mean more murders" mythology also flies in the face of history. Europe had low murder rates before World War I despite high gun ownership and virtually no controls. Severe European gun laws appeared (for political reasons) in the tumultuous post-World War I era. Despite ever-stricter gun laws, both political and apolitical violence has increased apace in Europe.

A review of the European experience actually demonstrates more guns correlating with less murder. Nine European nations (including Germany, Austria, Denmark, and Norway) have high rates of civilian firearm ownership. Nine others (including Luxembourg, Russia, and Hungary) have virtually disarmed their civilians. But the aggregate murder rates of these nine low-gun-ownership nations are three times higher than those of the nine high-gun-ownership nations.

The reason that nations (or regions) with more guns tend towards lower violence is political rather than criminological. Gun ownership generally has no effect on how much violent crime a society has. Politicians often think that banning guns will be a quick fix. But gun bans don't work; if anything, they make matters worse. They disarm the law-abiding, yet are ignored by the violent and the criminal. Nations with severe violence problems tend to have severe gun laws. For example, countries as diverse as Jamaica and the Republic of Ireland banned legal civilian possession of virtually all firearms in the 1970s, but homicide and gun homicide rates have more than tripled. By the same token, the murder rates in handgun-banning US cities including New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC are far higher than in states like Pennsylvania and Connecticut, where handguns are legal and widely owned.

In sum, Mr President, research shows that banning civilian guns increases people's vulnerability, fails to reduce violence, and merely empowers criminals and terrorists at the expense of the innocent. These research studies are available on my website, garymauser.net

Thank you.