



Private Member's Bill C-391

**Polytechnique and Dawson: never again!
Let us Keep the
Canadian Firearms Registry
In its Entirety**

**Memorandum Submitted to the
Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU)**

**By Afeas
(Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale)**

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May 3, 2010

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Introduction

The Afeas (Association feminine d'éducation et d'action sociale), founded in 1966, is an association of 12,000 Quebec women dedicated to promoting women and improving society through education and social action.

In addition to its mission of education and social action, the Afeas works at decreasing violence in all environments. Because violence, and its dramatic consequences on its victims, affects all of society. Because it tears apart numerous lives, attacks the integrity of people and endangers their physical and mental health. Because its victims isolate themselves and turn inward, abandoning their jobs, their studies or their social activities.

That is why the Afeas is opposed to *Bill C-391 - An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry)*. In fact, the Afeas is opposed to any change to the *Firearms Act* (Firearms Registration) that could weaken its ambit. Keep in mind that any firearm is potentially dangerous and, as such, should be registered. Keep in mind that opposition from farmers and hunters does not alter the fact that their firearms are dangerous. Keep in mind that the fact that criminals do not register their firearms is not an argument for destroying the Canadian Firearms Registry. Within the context of spousal and domestic violence, many cases of intimidation and numerous murders are caused by hunting firearms such as shotguns and rifles because those are the firearms that are available in the homes. Incidentally, the problem of the costs incurred in implementing the Registry is also not an argument for destroying it. In fact, in her 2006 report, the Auditor General of Canada confirmed, already four years ago, that the program was well administered, nevertheless.

This memorandum first gives a brief description of the Afeas. We then deal with the question of the safety of women and children as it relates to the control of firearms and we will present the situation regarding firearms in outlying regions. To conclude, we submit a recommendation for the members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU).

The Afeas, an association for education and social action

The Afeas, a non-profit organisation founded in 1966, represents 12,000 Quebec women who work as volunteers in 300 local groups distributed into 12 regions. Afeas' mission is to defend the rights of women and to work at improving their living and working conditions. It is through concerted education and social action that it contributes to building a society based on such values as peace, equality, fairness, justice, respect and solidarity. The Afeas is a member of Quebec, Canadian and international organizations or groups to promote its work.

Incidentally, the Afeas fulfills its mission due to the involvement of its 12,000 volunteer members, whose profile is as follows.

Age		Environment		Occupation	
16 to 44 years	8%	Rural	30%	Services, professions, other	28%
45 to 64 years	41%	Semi-urban	35%	Homemaker	24%
65 years and older	51%	Urban	35%	Retired	48%

Through its many actions and position statements, the Afeas is striving towards women's self-sufficiency socially, politically and economically so that they might be full participants in the democratic life in Quebec at all levels. Since its inception, the Afeas has been working in various spheres of the lives of Quebec and Canadian women especially on the recognition of unpaid work, said to be "invisible", of women in the home who are mothers and helpers, the

implementation of measures to reconcile home/work/studies, access to education, the implementation of adequate working conditions, access to non-traditional trades, access to quality health services in their areas, measures to counter violence against girls and women of all ages and in all surroundings, the implementation of measures to ensure women's financial security at retirement, access to democratic bodies at all levels, etc.

For 44 years, the Afeas has acted in the midst of Quebec and Canadian society in all areas. Due to its presence and the practicality of its interventions, it has acquired credibility as interlocutor with decision-making bodies and agencies in that area.

Women and children safe due to the control of firearms

As far as the Afeas is concerned, dismantling the Canadian Firearms Registry, which has proved its worth since it was created, seems incompatible with public safety and the protection of Canadian women and children. Supported by the Canadian Police Association, this registry is also considered to be a world-wide model. As far as the Afeas is concerned, its usefulness no longer needs to be proved. As evidence, the annual *Canadian Firearms Program Reports*, which was made public on November 7, 2009, indicated that, in 2008, the Registry was consulted on the Internet by peace officers more than 3.4 million times, an increase of 25% over 2007.

- Unrestricted rifles and hunting shotguns are the guns that are most used in cases of domestic violence. They represent 93% of guns registered to Quebec owners, for a total of 1,546,069 firearms in 2008.¹
- The *Firearms Act* was devised to reduce the risk of abusive spouses having access to firearms by improving the process of checking applicants' backgrounds, a verification that also includes the opinion of spouses and former spouses from the two previous years, by making registration obligatory.
- The Canadian Firearms Registry allows the police to check if there are firearms at those locations at which they must intervene. According to the information on the Canadian Firearms Registry site, the Registry was consulted 11,085 times per day and 3,987,198 times for all four quarters in 2009.²
- The Registry is essential in cases of domestic violence when the presence of a gun in the home can radically increase the risk of danger to women and children. The Act allows removing all firearms that belong to an individual who is potentially dangerous or that are in a home when situations with a high risk of violence have been identified. The police speak of several cases in which the Canadian Firearms Registry was used to prevent tragedies or to solve crimes.
- The use of firearms within the framework of spousal homicides has decreased by 36% since the implementation of the *Firearms Act* in 1995. Several studies have shown that,

¹ "Facts and Figures (October-December 2009), Canadian Firearms Program" Available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>, accessed on January 21, 2010; RCMP, "Commissioner of Firearms – 2008 Report", 2009. Table 3 available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/rep-rap/2008-comm-rpt/2008-fra-pdf>

² "Facts and Figures (October-December 2009), Canadian Firearms Program" Available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>, accessed on January 21, 2010

when she is in an abusive or a violent situation, a woman has considerably greater chances of being killed if firearms are within reach. Even worse, children are frequently the victims of tragedies as the presence of a firearm increases not only the risk that a tragedy will be fatal but also the number of fatalities. Incidentally, we have little data on the number of women who are intimidated by, or threatened with, firearms.³

- Between 1999 and 2008, firearms controllers in Canada refused 23,537 firearm permits for reasons of public safety. More specifically, in 2008, 462 requests for firearm permits were refused and 1,833 firearm permits were withdrawn.⁴
- The reason identified in most cases when a request for a permit is refused is that the applicant had a Court-ordered prohibition or probation order against possessing firearms or that he constitutes a risk to others. Among the other reasons given, there are: a history of violence; mental problems; a danger to him/herself; the unsafe use and storage of firearms; drug offences and inaccurate information. When a permit is revoked, in 75% of cases, the person had a prohibition or probation order made by a tribunal.⁵
- According to the RCMP, in 2008, 254,036 Canadians received an order from the court prohibiting them from owning firearms.⁶
- The *Firearms Act* has made great progress by reducing, in particular, the number of armed attacks in cases of spousal or domestic violence. Thus, the number of murders of women shot fell by more than 50%, decreasing from 85 in 1991 to 32 in 2004.⁷ As for the murder of spouses with a rifle and a hunting gun, it decreased by 70% (see Table 1, p. 9).
- From another perspective, suicide is a major problem that can devastate families and those close to them. Studies have stressed the correlation between the implementation of firearms control measures, more especially the *Firearms Act*⁸, and the decrease in the number of suicides by firearm.

³ Campbell JC, Webster D, Koziol-McLain J, et al., "Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control study", *American Journal of Public Health*, 2003; 93:1089-97

⁴ "Facts and Figures (October-December 2009), Canadian Firearms Program" Available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>, accessed on January 21, 2010; RCMP, "Commissioner of Firearms – 2008 Report", 2009. Table 3 available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/rep-rap/2008-comm-rpt/2008-fra-pdf>

⁵ "Facts and Figures (October-December 2009), Canadian Firearms Program" Available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>, accessed on January 21, 2010

⁶ "Facts and Figures (October-December 2009), Canadian Firearms Program" Available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/facts-faits/index-eng.htm>, accessed on January 21, 2010

⁷ Kwing Hung, "Firearms Statistics Updated Tables", January 2006; Statistics Canada, "Mortality, Summary List of Causes, 2005", March 30, 2009; Sarah Beatty, "Homicide in Canada, 2008", *Statistics Canada Juristat*, vol. 29, no. 3, October 2009; Statistics Canada, "Police-reported crime statistics". *Juristat*, vol. 29, no. 3, July 2009.

⁸ Gagné Marie-Pier, "L'effet des législations canadiennes entourant le contrôle des armes à feu sur les homicides et les suicides [Translation – The effect of Canadian legislation on the control of firearms on

Firearms: a problem in outlying regions

Statistics from industrialized countries indicate that death rates due to firearms are directly related to the possession of firearms. The reasoning that supports this correlation is explained by the following risk factors: a firearm in the house increases the risk of suicide⁹, family homicides¹⁰, and accidents, especially among young people.¹¹

- It is falsely believed that only major cities have a problem with death by firearm. The rate of death and injury by firearm is higher in outlying regions, where owning firearms is more frequent. For example, from 2000 to 2007, the average rate of death by firearm in a population of 100,000 inhabitants was considerably lower in the Quebec urban areas of Laval, Montreal, Montérégie and the National Capital (see Table 2, p. 10).
- The average death rate by firearm was more than triple the provincial average (24.43 per 100,000) in the Nord du Québec region (77.91 per 100,000) and double that number in the peripheral administrative areas of Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine (64.66 per 100,000), of Abitibi-Témiscamingue (62.55 per 100,000) and the Bas-Saint-Laurent (48.84 per 100,000).
- In Quebec, 81% of deaths by firearm are the result of suicide. Suicide has a devastating effect on families and communities. Once again, it is in the outlying areas that the suicide rate by firearm is considerably higher.
- Whereas the Quebec average of suicide by firearm for the period from 2000 to 2007 was 19 per population of 100,000 inhabitants, the following regions have a rate of 30 deaths per 100,000: Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine (60.42); Abitibi-Témiscamingue (57.69); Bas-Saint-Laurent (45.35); Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean (31.18) and Chaudière-Appalaches (31.24). By way of comparison, the suicide rate by firearm in Montreal is 7.06 per 100,000 inhabitants.¹²

homicides and suicides] », Memoir submitted to the Faculté des études supérieures as a requirement in obtaining an M.Sc in Criminology, Université de Montréal, August 2008.

⁹ Kellerman AL, Rivara FP, Somes G, et al., « Suicide in the home in relation to gun ownership ». *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1992, 327:467-72.

¹⁰ Campbell JC, Webster D, Koziol-McLain J, et al., "Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control study", *American Journal of Public Health*, 2003; 93:1089-97

¹¹ Grossman DC, Reay DT, Baker SA, "Self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and adolescents: the source of the firearm", *Arch Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 1999, 153:875-8.

¹² Statistiques, Bureau du coroner en chef, November 2009; Institut de la Statistique du Québec, "Population totale et logement privé total, régions administratives, Québec, 2006", September 24, 2009. http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/regions/lequebec_20/population_20/tpoplog20.htm

Recommendation

One must stop dividing firearm owners into two distinct categories. It is false to think that there are, on the one hand, farmers and hunters that respect the law and, on the other, bad firearm owners who knowingly use them for illegal purposes.

This Manichean division does not take into consideration that we can all be vulnerable during difficult times in our lives. For some, having access to a firearm can be a determining factor in leading to being injured by a bullet or to murder.

Registering firearms protects owners and those near and dear to them.

Owning a firearm is not a right! Owning a firearm is a privilege just like driving a car.

How can one justify wanting to abrogate the Canadian Firearms Registry year after year by claiming that the mechanism for registering firearms is cumbersome?

The argument used by farmers and hunters is weak. In fact, hunters and farmers can own long-guns (rifles and long-guns). The *Firearms Act* only requires that they register, one time, in their name, all their firearms. Moreover, the costs associated with registration procedures have even been revoked.

We say again, this registration allows the police to know who owns arms, how many and the kind of firearm, which allows saving lives.

PROTECT ALL CITIZENS

As a result, the Afeas recommends to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security:

- to contribute to the safety of women and children;
- to work at preventing tragedies such as those at the Polytechnique and Dawson in Quebec;
- to vote AGAINST all measures proposed in the Private Member's Bill C-391.

Conclusion

The Canadian Firearms Registry was developed by taking into consideration the safety of women and children. Any weakening of its ambit will have serious consequences that should not be minimized, not by firearm owners and especially not by members of the House of Commons, whatever their party of allegiance.

Every year, it is a matter of life and death for too many women and too many children in Canada and in Quebec.

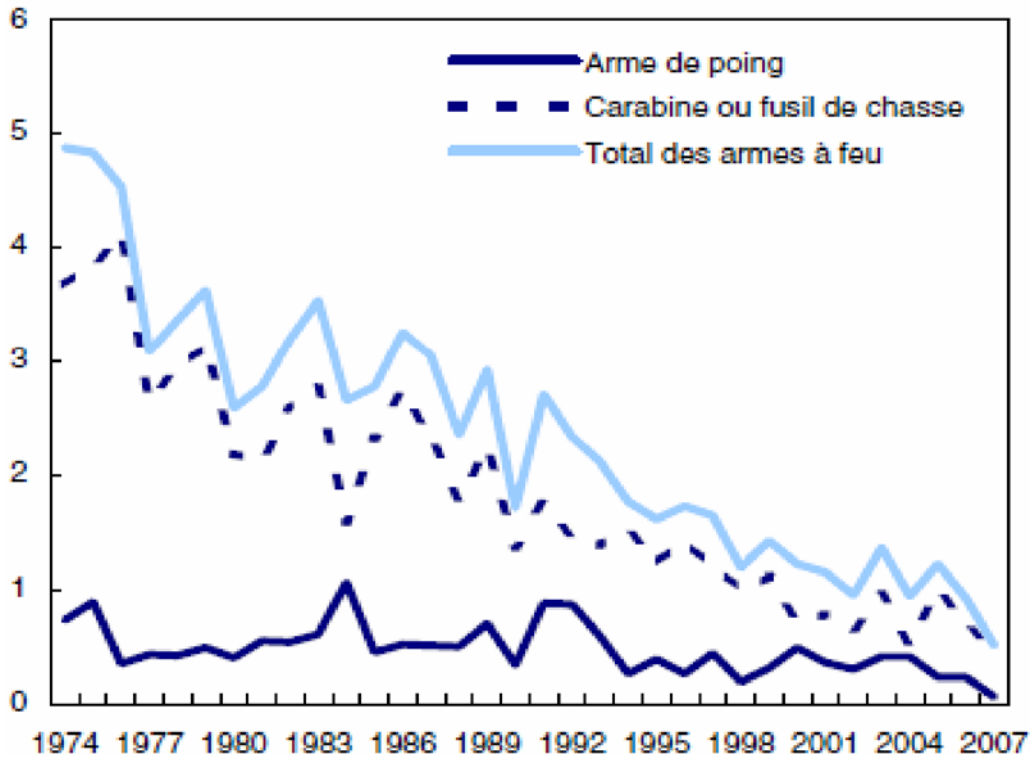
Ending violence towards women and children and preventing tragedies, such as those at the Polytechnique and Dawson in Quebec, requires more than wearing a white ribbon on December 6 of each year. It requires concrete acts day after day.

The Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security's taking a clear and firm position AGAINST Private Member's Bill C-391 and all future modifications that aim to restrict the ambit of, or to abolish, the Canadian Arms Registry will contribute to maintaining the safety of Canadian women and children and to work so that such slaughters as the Polytechnique or Dawson never happen again.

Table 1

Rate of Homicide of Spouses Committed with a Firearm: 1974-2007

taux pour 1 million de conjoints



(Translation of elements on graph)

Rate per one million spouses

Handguns

Rifles or hunting rifles

Total of firearms

Source: Statistics Canada, "Family Violence in Canada: a Statistical Profile", October 2009

Table 2**Average Rate of Death by Firearm by Quebec Region, 2000-2007**

Region	Average Rate of Death by Firearm (2000-2007) per 100,000 inhabitants
Laval	14.91
Montreal	14.93
Montréal	15.83
National Capital	19.51
Province of Quebec	24.43
Lanaudière	26.10
Mauricie	29.35
Estrie	29.78
Laurentides	30.51
Outaouais	31.07
Centre-du-Québec	31.66
Saguenay--Lac-St-Jean	33.56
Chaudière-Appalaches	34.80
Côte-Nord	46.82
Bas-Saint-Laurent	48.84
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	62.55
Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine	64.66
Nord-du-Québec	77.91

Source: Statistiques, Bureau du coroner en chef, November 2009; Institut de la Statistique du Québec, "Population totale et logement privé total, régions administratives, Québec, 2006" September 24, 2009.

http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/regions/lequebec_20/population_20/tpoplog20.htm