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International Gun Destruction Day marked across the world

Guns are being destroyed around the world today by victims of gun violence marking International Gun Destruction Day. The grass-roots action comes as the Control Arms Campaign (Oxfam, Amnesty International and IANSA -- the International Action Network on Small Arms) publishes figures showing that there is now one gun for every ten people on the planet. On average 800,000 guns are destroyed every year, but the scale of the problem of unregulated guns remains enormous - for every one gun that is destroyed another ten new guns are created.

Weapons in the wrong hands cause hundreds of thousands of deaths and many more casualties every year. Unregulated guns are involved in crime, killings, forced displacement, rape and torture across the world.

"Gun Destruction Day is a time when ordinary people across the world take positive action to tackle the gun problem head on. But with ten new guns produced for every one destroyed, ordinary people's efforts are being undermined by governments' refusal to act - a case of one-step forward ten steps back. Without an international Arms Trade Treaty, local efforts to address the problem will continue to be sabotaged by government inaction and guns will continue to get into the wrong hands" said Barbara Stocking, Director of Oxfam.

Figures show that:

There are approximately 640 million guns in circulation -- one for every ten people.

Around eight million new guns are made every year.

Approximately 14 billion rounds of military ammunition are made every year -- two bullets for every person.

Small arms are produced by 1249 companies in more than 90 countries. In some of these countries trade controls are almost non-existent.

For the two biggest arms producers -- USA and Russia -- production of military style guns is increasing. Far from destroying old and surplus weapons, most states resell their surplus weaponry thus ensuring the ever-increasing proliferation of guns across the world.

Only three countries in the world (Nigeria, Latvia and South Africa) have a policy of destroying all surplus or confiscated weapons. There are well-documented cases of sold-off weapons ending up in the hands of criminals and rebels.

On average, around one million guns are lost or stolen every year.

Hundreds of thousands of guns are lost by state forces every year.

Iraq was the most extreme example, when millions of weapons were looted in 2003. At least 650,000 tons of weaponry and explosives were captured by US and Allied forces from abandoned military depots across Iraq, but this was barely guarded and much was looted.

"Every day millions of men, women, and children live in fear of armed violence. The proliferation of unregulated guns not only jeopardizes people's fundamental right to life, but also denies millions the right to a decent standard of living, health services and education. The global trade in arms must be brought under control," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

Survivors of gun violence, victims' families and arms campaigners are destroying guns across the world:

In **Brazil** 6,500 illegal firearms confiscated by police will be destroyed by Viva Rio, the Brazilian Army, and the Rio state government. Oscar Niemeyer, the famous Brazilian architect, will use the destroyed guns to make a monument to peace.

In **South Africa** gun control groups will be working with the government to publicly destroy a cache of illegal arms. This will mark the coming into force of the new firearms control act - aiming to drain the pool of arms in communities.

In the **UK** families who have lost their children to armed violence will be using a steamroller to crush 300 symbolic guns in London.

In **Cambodia**, a flame of peace ceremony will be held at which 4,000 illegal and surplus weapons will be destroyed.

International gun destruction day marks the culmination of the Global Week of Action Against Small Arms, in which groups in over 40 countries across the world have taken the initiative to challenge armed violence in their communities.

"It is conventional weapons that are the real weapons of mass destruction. It's about time that governments put as much effort into controlling the arms trade as they do trying to stop the spread of WMD" said Rebecca Peters, IANSA Director.

Notes:

International Gun Destruction Day was established by the UN in 2001. The figures above are based on the Small Arms Survey 2004.

For more information visit www.controlarms.org

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