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Almost one in three people affected by gun crime

New International survey from the Control Arms Campaign: Amnesty International, Oxfam International and International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA)

A survey of people in six countries around the world released today reveals that on average, 30 percent of those surveyed have been the victim of gun crime or knows someone who has been in the last five years. The proportion rises to more than half in Brazil, Guatemala and South Africa.

Surveys in Brazil, Guatemala, Canada, South Africa, Britain and India found that, across the globe, many people are living in daily fear of armed violence. Nearly two in three people (62 percent) across the six countries said they “worried about becoming a victim of armed violence” with the proportion rising to a massive 94 percent of people in Brazil, 88 percent in Guatemala and 72 percent in South Africa. Even in Britain and Canada more than one in three people (39 and 36 percent respectively) worried about becoming an armed violence victim.

The study, conducted last month, also shows that the unregulated proliferation of firearms is the source of most people’s insecurity. An average 62 percent of all those surveyed said it was “too easy to obtain a gun” in their country while 63 percent cited the easy availability of guns as a main reason for fear.

The Control Arms survey demonstrates almost unanimous global public support for stronger international arms controls just one week before governments meet at the UN World conference on small arms that begins Monday 26th June in New York. The Control Arms campaign is calling on governments to introduce global principles to regulate the transfers of weapons and ensure they do not end up in the hands of human rights abusers. Up to 14 billion bullets are produced every year, yet there are currently no comprehensive global standards for governments’ regulations of arms exports.

“Unless governments act to stop the spread of arms, deadly weapons will continue to fuel violent conflict, state repression, crime, and domestic abuse,” said Jeremy Hobbs, Oxfam International Director. “With up to 14 billion bullets produced every year, enough to kill everyone in the world twice, isn’t it about time that governments agreed to regulate arms exports?”

An average of 87 percent of all respondents want “strict international controls on where weapons can be exported to”, with 93 percent of people in Brazil, 91 percent in Guatemala, 90 in both Canada and India, 86 percent of people in Britain and 73 percent of South Africans agreeing.

“Our survey shows that uncontrolled proliferation of weapons has blighted every corner of the globe, with millions of people living in daily fear of becoming a victim of armed violence,” said Irene Khan, Amnesty International’s Secretary General. “Governments meeting in New York next week must recognize the overwhelming popular call for tougher international arms controls and act.”

The survey also showed very strong 89 percent support for “better controls on arms coming into their country”. Country results of those in support were as follows: Brazil, 96; Guatemala, 94; India, 93; Canada, 92; Britain, 85; and South Africa, 73 percent.

Almost one third of Guatemalan and South African respondents said their families had been affected by gun crime (30 percent and 28 percent respectively). In both Britain and Canada, six in every ten people thought it was too easy to obtain a gun in their country and more than five out of ten South Africans also agreed.

“This research provides grassroots evidence that people in both developed and developing countries want much stronger arms controls to protect themselves and those in other countries,” said Rebecca Peters, Director of IANSA. “With nearly two in three people worried about becoming a victim of armed violence, the international community is clearly calling for action. When governments meet next week at the UN, they must agree on tougher arms controls to stop weapons falling into the wrong hands.”

The research showed that 91 percent of people in Brazil thought that obtaining a gun was too easy and the same number that gun proliferation was a main reason for fear in the country. In Guatemala, 77 percent thought getting a gun was too easy and 87 percent said the easy availability of weapons was a main reason for fear.

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The Control Arms Campaign is a joint initiative by Amnesty International, Oxfam International and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). It aims to reduce arms proliferation and misuse and to convince governments to introduce global principles to regulate the transfers of weapons and a binding arms trade treaty. Nearly 2 billion people live in deep poverty and this problem is intensified by the uncontrolled proliferation of guns and other weapons that also fuels human rights abuses and escalates conflicts. The time for world leaders to act is now. Weapons kill more 1000 men, women, and children per day. Many thousands more are maimed, or tortured, or forced to flee their homes.

There are around 640 million small arms and light weapons in the world today. Eight million more are produced every year.

The research was conducted by Ipsos MORI. An average of 1,000 respondents in each country was interviewed in April and May 2006. Quotas on age, sex and region were applied in Brazil Guatemala, South Africa, Great Britain and Canada. A purely random sampling method was applied in India and data was weighted to be nationally representative. We are confident that our sample percentage is accurate to plus or minus 3% at the 95% confidence interval.

For further information please see: www.controlarms.org