



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of Domestic Social Development

Confronting Armed Violence and Promoting Peace
February 2013

...[O]ne can only note with dismay the evidence of ... the flourishing arms trade, while the political and juridic process established by the international community for promoting disarmament is bogged down in general indifference. How can there ever be a future of peace when investments are still made in the production of arms...?"
-- Pope Benedict XVI, January 1, 2006

BACKGROUND:

The tragic shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, as well as the many other tragedies that have happened daily in our communities, homes and throughout the world, shatters the peace of us all. There are countless examples: Columbine, Virginia Tech, mall and cinema shootings in Oregon and Colorado, the assassination attempt on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, terrorist attacks in many countries, and the recent attack and killing of hostages by terrorists in Algeria. Sadly, gun violence, domestic violence, the global illicit trade of weapons and ammunition, terrorism and other acts that strike at the life and dignity of persons, are an all too common reality. More than ever, the Church and all people of good will must work together to confront the pervasive culture of violence.

The Church has been a consistent voice for the promotion of peace at home and around the world and a strong advocate for the reasonable regulation of firearms. The Church recognizes that recourse to self-defense is legitimate, but also that guns are simply too easily accessible. The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in their document, *The International Arms Trade* (2006), emphasized the importance of enacting concrete controls on handguns noting, "Limiting the purchase of such arms would certainly not infringe on the rights of anyone."

In February 2012, a representative of The Holy See expressed concern over what he described as an unregulated and non-transparent arms trade. In his intervention before the United Nations, Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikatt spoke in support of the UN Arms Trade Treaty and called for the international community to adopt a "strong, effective and credible legal instrument that is capable of regulating and improving transparency in the trade of conventional arms and munitions, including the trading and licensing of technologies for their production."

In December 2012, the chairs of three committees of the USCCB issued a statement in response to the Newton, Connecticut tragedy. On January 19, the Vatican's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, expressed solidarity with the 47 religious leaders--including the Chair of USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development--who signed a recent letter encouraging Congress and the administration to adopt reasonable policies to prevent gun violence. Rev. Lombardi said, "I am with them," and renewed the Vatican's appeals for disarmament and the adoption of measures to fight "the production, commerce and contraband of all types of arms" which stem from "enormous economic and power interests."

USCCB POSITION:

The USCCB has also been a consistent advocate for peace and the prevention of gun and other forms of violence that strike at the life and dignity of persons. In 1994, recalling the words of Pope Paul VI, "if you want peace, work for justice," the U.S. bishops issued their pastoral message, *Confronting a Culture of*

Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action. In their message the bishops stated, “We have an obligation to respond. Violence -- in our homes, our schools and streets, our nation and world -- is destroying the lives, dignity and hopes of millions of our sisters and brothers.” The USCCB was also a supporter of the Assault Weapons Ban initially passed in 1994 but which expired in 2004.

In 2000, the U.S. bishops issued their pastoral statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice.* In the statement the bishops called for all people to work for a culture of life and to do more to end violence in our homes and to help victims break out of patterns of abuse. In regard to gun violence prevention the bishops wrote, “We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer (especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children or anyone other than the owner), and we reiterate our call for sensible regulation of handguns.”

In addition to gun violence, the U.S. bishops have also addressed domestic violence. In their 2002 statement, *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women,* the bishops emphatically declared that violence against women, inside or outside the home, is never justified and that violence, whether physical, sexual, psychological or verbal, is sinful. The bishops also acknowledged the toll domestic violence takes on men but especially children who are particularly sensitive to the impacts of such evil acts.

Tragic events such as what occurred in Newton, Connecticut and which happen daily in our homes and communities and around the world, should lead us to live out what Pope Benedict calls “our innate vocation to peace.” Together we must confront the culture of violence with love and work together to promote a culture of life and peace.

ACTION:

The USCCB will remain engaged in the public debate on gun violence prevention. Please urge your Senators and Representative to support national policies that: control the sale and use of firearms, especially access to assault-style weapons; make guns safer; make a serious commitment to confront the role of addiction and mental illness in crime; strengthen regulations of firearms; and improve access to health care for those with mental health needs.

RESOURCES:

Intervention of H.E. Msgr. Francis A. Chullikatt, Head of the Delegation of the Holy See Fourth Session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty New York, 13 – 17 February 2012: <http://www.holyseemission.org/statements/statement.aspx?id=353>

Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, 2002.

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/criminal-justice-restorative-justice/crime-and-criminal-justice.cfm>

Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action, 1994.

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/violence/confronting-a-culture-of-violence-a-catholic-framework-for-action.cfm>

Call for Action in Response to Newton Tragedy: Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, December 21, 2012.

<http://www.usccb.org/news/2012/12-219.cfm>

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