



# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SMALL ARMS

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE  
16 DÍAS DE ACTIVISMO CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO  
16 JOURS D'ACTIVISME CONTRE LA VIOLENCE DE GENRE  
25 NOV - 10 DEC <http://16dayscwgl.rutgers.edu>



By the Center for Women's Global Leadership and IANSA Women's Network

**The Proliferation of Small Arms and their Role in Domestic Violence** - Perhaps most shockingly, the greatest risk of gun violence to women around the world is not on the streets, or the battlefield, but in their own homes. All over the world, in every class, race and caste, in every religion and region, there are men who subject their intimate partners to either physical or psychological violence, or in many cases, both.

Family killings are the only category of homicides where women outnumber men as victims. When a woman is killed in the home, it is her partner or male relative who is most likely to be the murderer, often with a prior record of domestic abuse. Gun violence can be part of the cycle of intimidation and aggression that many women experience from an intimate partner. For every woman killed or physically injured by firearms, many more are threatened. Why are guns so deadly in domestic assaults? One reason is the severity of the wounds caused by bullets, which are highly destructive of human tissue. Another reason is that the presence of a firearm, with its threat of lethality, diminishes a woman's capacity for resistance. The trauma of being threatened by a husband or partner is all the greater when he brandishes a gun and there is a very real danger of being killed. The wife of a US soldier told researchers, "He would say, 'You will do this, or ...,' and he would go to the gun cabinet."

The issue of guns in the home is fundamentally linked to the wider issue of disarmament. Of the nearly 900 million small arms in the world today, more than 75% are in the hands of private individuals - most of them men - and stored in homes. A gun in the home is much more likely to be used to intimidate or physically injure family members than be used against an outside intruder.

For the second year, the 16 Days Campaign is addressing one of the most serious aspects of small arms proliferation: the deaths and injuries caused by guns in the home. For example, in France and South Africa, one in three women killed by their husbands is shot; in the USA this rises to two in three. The home is traditionally considered to be a safe haven, but when a gun is present, the risk of death is multiplied. This is confirmed by a shocking statistic: women are three times more likely to die violently if there is a gun in the house. When considering violent crime, it's natural to focus on the role of illegal small arms. However, most firearms used in domestic homicides are legal. It is also important to consider the misuse of guns by the security sector, including police officers and soldiers, when off-duty.

Gun-related violence in domestic contexts also affects those in post-conflict countries, where guns circulate in the community, and post-conflict conditions, limited economic prospects, a reduction in basic services and a culture of violence combine to exacerbate the problem of domestic violence.

*"While male dominated societies often justify small arms possession through the alleged need to protect vulnerable women, women actually face greater danger of violence when their families and communities are armed."*

—Barbara Frey, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights

## Case example: Mexico

L.R. fled to the US with her children in 2004. Over the years, her partner forced her to live with him, raped her at gunpoint, tried to burn her alive when she was pregnant and threatened to kill her family. The police did not help and a judge even tried to seduce her. Her partner "told my sister he had school business to talk about with me so we needed to be alone in another room. I did not want to go with him, but he had a gun in his hand and flashed it at me. It was the first time he had a gun and it terrified me. When he had me alone in his room he pointed the gun at me and threatened to kill me if I did not have sex with him...He told me he would kill my sister's baby first so the others could watch and then he would kill my sister and her 3-year-old if I did not comply with his demand. I was scared of him and he had the gun. He raped me. I was too embarrassed and afraid to tell my sister what had happened...Afterwards, I waited to get on the bus to go to Mexico City with my final belongings. [He] grabbed me from the bus line and pointed the gun in his jacket. He made me come to his house, where he forced me to put on a baggy jacket so that he could hold the gun to me without anyone noticing. He then dragged me to a nearby pay phone and forced me to call my sister and tell her that I loved [him] and that I was staying with him. He took me to his house and held me captive there for several years...The police told me that it was a private matter and that my life was not in danger, so they could not help me."

## Suggested Actions

### The 'Disarm Domestic Violence' Campaign – IANSA Women's Network

This is the first international campaign to address one of the most serious, but least-known, aspects of violence against women – deaths and injuries caused by guns in the home. Learn more at [http://www.iansa-women.org/disarm\\_dv](http://www.iansa-women.org/disarm_dv).

- **Advocate:** Disarm perpetrators of domestic violence. Advocate for domestic violence laws that require the removal of guns. At a minimum, police should be required to consult the spouse or former spouse before approving a gun license application. Australia, Canada, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago are among the countries that have harmonized their legal frameworks on gun licensing and domestic violence. Such laws both shape and reflect values, specifically reinforcing values of nonviolence; they can also make a real difference. Canada tightened its gun laws in 1995 and by 2003 the gun murder rate dropped by 15% overall, and by 40% for women.
- **Treat intimate partner and family violence as a serious crime and protect and support women who report it:** Women often do not report intimate partner violence, either because they are too fearful or lack access to the police or the justice system. Governments must ensure that criminal justice systems encourage women to report violence in the home, provide support for them when they do, and penalize the perpetrators.
- **Train law enforcement officials to address armed intimate partner and family violence:** Local law enforcement officers are often the first to respond to, and intervene in, instances of domestic violence. Police should be trained to respond to such violence sensitively, effectively, and lawfully.
- **Require all guns to be stored safely:** Gun owners should be required to store guns securely and to keep the ammunition in a separate place. In Belarus, guns must be kept in locked boxes, disassembled and unloaded, with the ammunition stored separately.

## Resources

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