

May 27, 2008

## **MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT'S FOUR-POINT PLAN TO PROTECT ONTARIO COMMUNITIES FROM GUN VIOLENCE**

The McGuinty government has a comprehensive four-point plan to stop the proliferation of gun-related crime. This plan includes:

1. Anti-gun smuggling measures to prevent the flow of illegal guns across the Canada-United States border
2. Tougher, more effective laws relating to firearms, including calling for a national ban on handguns
3. Strengthening law enforcement, including more police
4. New community investments to address the causes of crime.

### **1. ANTI-GUN SMUGGLING MEASURES**

Today Ontario outlined three new ways the federal government can help to achieve the anti-gun smuggling part of this plan, building on Ontario-led initiatives already underway. The proposed federal measures would help stem the flow of illegal guns coming into Canada from the United States, without slowing cross-border trade.

#### **Require marking of imported firearms to help police trace illegal guns**

Gun marking helps police trace weapons used in crime to determine where they were diverted from legal use and to assist in breaking up gun smuggling rings. Once a firearm is legally imported into Canada, it should have to be marked by the importer, which helps police speed up gun crime investigations, trace the origins of guns used in crime, and identify trends.

Ontario urges the federal government to meet its obligations as a signatory to a United Nations Firearms Protocol and an Organization of American States Firearms Convention, both of which require the Government of Canada to mandate the marking of all imported firearms. Canada's gun marking laws are less stringent than the United States, which has required import marking since 1968.

In 2004, regulations requiring gun marking were created so that Canada could live up to its international obligations dealing with illegal manufacturing and trafficking of firearms. These regulations were to come into force in April 2006, but have been deferred twice by the federal government. The McGuinty government believes these regulations should be strengthened to require both manufacturers and importers to stamp firearms with additional information that will better assist with tracing.

The Canadian Police Association, Canadian Association of Police Boards and the Canadian Chiefs of Police have urged the federal government to move quickly to adopt the regulations.

## **Bring handgun parts regulations into sync with Canada's border rules**

As a result of a 1983 Supreme Court of Canada decision, a loophole exists in Canadian law that effectively allows the unregulated and legal possession of gun frames and receivers – the body of the gun to which all parts are attached. Even though border authorities check for unauthorized firearms, this loophole effectively encourages people to smuggle the building blocks of firearms into the country.

Once in Canada, these frames and receivers can easily be converted into functioning guns using other readily available parts.

Amendments to federal legislation would close this loophole. Ontario urges the federal government to amend the Criminal Code and Firearms Act and regulations to ensure that these handgun frames and receivers are fully regulated.

## **Assign federal prosecutors to Ontario's Guns and Gangs Task Force**

The federal government has not responded to Ontario's open invitation to join the province's Guns and Gangs Task Force, which brings together prosecutors and police to investigate and prosecute gun crime at street level. Seventy-two Ontario Crown prosecutors and six anti-gun smuggling Crowns work with police to provide early advice to help charge and prosecute gun-runners, smugglers and thieves. Since the creation of the Task Force in 2005, Ontario has had space available in its Operations Center for federal prosecutors to join the collaborative efforts.

Drug importing and trafficking is a significant element of many gun smuggling prosecutions. Approximately 40 per cent of the charges prosecuted by the Guns and Gangs Task Force are drug related. The federal government is responsible for, and has specialized expertise in, prosecuting drug crimes.

Assigning federal prosecutors to the Guns and Gangs Task Force would add an immediate working knowledge of complex drug prosecutions and advice on border issues, and would improve the overall effectiveness of gun crime investigations and prosecutions.

## **2. TOUGHER GUN LAWS**

Ontario is committed to getting handguns off its streets before they are used in crimes. That is why the Ontario government continues to press the federal government to **ban handguns now**.

Registered guns provide thousands of opportunities for theft and misuse, as collectors and target shooters can become targets for theft for gangs and organized crime.

The Toronto Police Service has estimated that 30 per cent of guns used in crimes in Toronto are diverted from lawful use.

According to the Registrar of Firearms, there are almost 194,000 registered handguns in the province with over 1,000 stolen, registered handguns unaccounted for at the end of 2007.

Ontario also strongly urges the federal government to continue to properly **maintain the firearms registry** in its present form in order to better protect and support police who access the registry thousands of times a day.

Ontario is disappointed that the federal government has extended the amnesty for a third consecutive year. The amnesty rejects police advice on gun safety, circumvents full parliamentary process and undermines existing gun laws. Under the amnesty, owners of non-restricted firearms (rifles and shotguns) are protected from criminal liability for possessing unregistered firearms and, in certain cases, for being unlicensed to possess firearms.

Ontario successfully advocated for changes to the Criminal Code that require mandatory penalties and reverse onus bail provisions for certain firearms offenses.

### **3. STRENGTHENING ENFORCEMENT**

In 2006, the federal government promised to put 2,500 more **police officers** on Canada's streets, including 1,000 new police officers for Ontario communities. To date less than half of the expected funding has been committed.

The Ontario government has helped put 1,000 new police officers on the street in communities across this province through the \$37.1 million **Safer Communities — 1,000 Officers Partnership Program**. Half of the 1,000 new police officers are assigned to community policing, including school visits, street patrols and increased traffic enforcement. The remaining 500 new officers are assigned to six priority areas:

- Guns and gangs
- Youth crime
- Organized crime and marijuana grow operations
- Dangerous offenders
- Domestic violence
- Protecting children from Internet luring and child pornography.

All 1,000 officers have been hired, trained and placed in communities across Ontario, including 250 in Toronto. Furthermore, the government is continuing to fund the \$30.7 million **Community Policing Partnerships Program**, which provides an additional 1,000 officers. Between these two programs, Ontario is investing \$68 million in over 2,000 additional officers in communities across the province.

The Ontario government has established a world class, state-of-the-art provincial **Operations Centre** that better allows for highly coordinated investigations and prosecutions of gun and gang-related offences. The centre houses the expanded Guns and Gangs Task Force, which includes several police services including the Toronto Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police, a team of specialized Crown prosecutors, support staff, probation and parole officers, and a victims' unit. These experts are now working side-by-side using the latest tools and technology.

## 4. INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES

Ontario is creating healthy neighbourhoods by investing in better housing, safe schools, after-school activities, and programs for under-served youths and adults. The McGuinty government has introduced a number of programs that focus on effective prevention and take aim at the causes of crime. They include:

**Youth Opportunities Strategy** — The government is investing \$28.5 million over the first three years of the strategy to help young people in under-served communities. In this, the third year, Ontario is offering programs in Toronto, Durham, Windsor, Ottawa, London, Hamilton and Thunder Bay. The strategy includes programs such as the **Summer Jobs For Youth Program**, **Youth Outreach Worker Program**, **Youth in Policing Initiative** and **YouthConnect.ca**.

**Youth Challenge Fund** — The Youth Challenge Fund is an innovative public and private sector initiative that invests in community projects that offer positive opportunities for young people growing up in Toronto's most under-served neighbourhoods. The fund makes direct, grassroots investments in youth-based initiatives that are aimed at building great ideas, creating youth spaces and providing opportunities for education, employment and leadership. Approximately \$15.1 million has been dedicated to 80 youth-led groups across Toronto since the fund was established in February 2006.

**Down with Guns Program** — The government has invested \$3 million in this community-designed initiative that helps youth in Toronto lead lives free of violence. Led by the African-Canadian Christian Network in partnership with the Toronto Community Foundation, this youth anti-violence strategy is focused on four key areas: family, education, employment and crime prevention.

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