

Stopping gun violence

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The "Knotted Gun" sculpture at the U.N. Some rights reserved by [Jim, the Photographer](#).

Twenty-eight dead in Connecticut, most of them first graders. Days earlier, three people killed in an Oregon mall. More than 500—including many children—shot down in Chicago in 2012.

In the aftermath of a horrific shooting, some object to any attempt to address the problem as “political.” But the issue of gun violence has a political dimension—as do such issues as funding for school security, access to mental-health services and the social conditions and popular culture that breed violence. Silence is political too. And when it comes to gun violence, silence serves one especially dreadful status quo: America’s astonishing number of firearms, their extravagant deadliness and their widespread legal availability.

America’s allergy to gun control isn’t the only cause of gun violence, but it’s a big one. State to state, stricter gun laws mean fewer gun deaths. The United States overall has by far the highest per capita rate of gun homicides of all developed countries. The nation witnesses most of the world’s worst mass shootings—crimes generally committed using weapons legally obtained.

Other countries have enacted large-scale restrictions and seen large-scale results. Following a 1996 mass shooting, Australia passed aggressive gun-control legislation that included buying back 600,000 semiautomatic weapons. Gun homicides and

suicides plummeted, and Australia hasn't seen a mass shooting since.

The U.S. lacks the political support for a law anything like Australia's. The 1994 assault weapons ban targeted only future sales, not existing owners, and this modest restriction expired in 2004. In gun-riddled Chicago, a federal appeals court recently struck down Illinois's concealed weapon ban, the last such statewide policy in the nation. The pro-gun lobby has won many victories, and it keeps expanding its goals to justify its continued existence.

Still, steps can be taken to begin to reverse the tide of violence. Congress should renew the assault weapons ban—and include tougher restrictions on the large-capacity magazines that enable shooters to kill so many so quickly. People who buy guns from unlicensed sellers are exempt from background checks; this massive loophole should be closed. And more funding should go to groups like Chicago's CureViolence, which recently changed its name (from CeaseFire) to emphasize its successful public-health-oriented approach to stopping gun violence.

In the wake of the Newtown shooting, political will is growing to do something. Several pro-gun members of Congress have expressed support for new gun-control measures, and President Obama has signaled that this is now a priority for him. This is exactly the right time to push for change. This is a moment when people are moved to act—and we must act.

Addressing Newtown's mourners, Obama said that "these tragedies must end." We can take this one step further: they *will* end. For Christians, who proclaim the imminent reign of the Prince of Peace, the question isn't whether anything will ever be done about gun violence. It's what we're going to do now to bring forth that reality.