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## **Evidence of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, Hearing on Bill C-391, Thursday, May 6, 2010**

### **Ms. Nathalie Provost (Member, Group of Students and Graduates of Polytechnique):**

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. My name is Nathalie Provost, and I was born at a time when everything seemed possible. Man walked on the moon. Women could choose their own lives. I am an engineer and the mother of four children. I am happy to use my talents to serve the government. And I am convinced that, as citizens, we are responsible for making our community a good place to live and grow together. However, I am also one of Marc Lépine's victims.

Twenty years ago, on December 6, 1989, that man, who believed that women were responsible for his misfortune, entered my school and my classroom. He asked the men to leave, and then fired at my colleagues and me, killing my friends and wounding me with four bullets. Marc Lépine used a Ruger Mini-14, a very dangerous weapon, one that does serious damage, and one that I have seen and experienced. I was incredibly lucky on that terrible day. I suffered some minor physical after-effects, but that luck today confers on me a responsibility to tell you how important gun control is.

In the past 20 years, I have thought a great deal about the events at Polytechnique. I read the coroner's report and I have read analysis of the event itself, what motivated Marc Lépine, the immediate causes and the social issues of the time. I understand that it is not easy to identify all the issues and that many factors must be considered if we hope to avoid another such slaughter. But that, unfortunately, appears to be a faint hope, as proven by the events at Dawson College. Marc Lépine, like Kimveer Gill, had certain personal issues and was motivated by many different factors and events in his life. They were the main players in those dramatic events.

But one thing is certain: without a gun, their destructive capacity would have been infinitely less. As a society, we cannot disregard the instrument through which Marc Lépine expressed himself. That firearm has marked me forever. It is on this that I intend to focus today. I believe that Canada must be as vigilant as possible when it comes to controlling firearms—all firearms. Over the years, we have developed a mechanism that recognizes that it is a privilege, not a right, to own a gun—a privilege that makes those who would like to exercise that right accountable, and that prohibits the possession of certain firearms whose risks outweigh any benefit to society. It is important to me that we not relax that process, particularly as regards long guns, which represent the vast majority of guns currently in circulation.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Committee, I am here to attest to the fact that firearms are dangerous. The Ruger Mini-14 is currently an unrestricted long gun. That weapon, which killed 14 women and seriously wounded 13 others in the space of 30 minutes, would no longer be registered under Bill C-391. For me, that defies all logic. Every day, in the mirror, I remember the destructive capability of that weapon.

A firearm is a dangerous object that must be handled with care and attention. To own one is a tremendous privilege, one that entails a major responsibility it is incumbent on government to acknowledge and oversee. You are in the service of Canadians, as am I. As a citizen, I vote and rely on you to defend the public interest in safety matters. It is your duty and responsibility to legislate to reduce the risk of a slaughter, such as the one on December 6, 1989, ever occurring again.

According to all credible experts in this area, both police departments and suicide and spousal abuse prevention experts, the Firearms Registry is needed in order to reduce those risks. I am here today to add my voice to those of these groups: keep the firearms registry and retain its current scope, because I want to live in a country where people are accountable for their actions and their choices, and because I want to live in a country where it is possible to live without being afraid of guns.

Thank you.

 (1545)

[English]



**The Chair:**

Thank you.

You are sharing your time, so go ahead.

[Translation]



**Ms. Heidi Rathjen (Representative, Group of Students and Graduates of Polytechnique):**

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen members of the Committee, good afternoon.

We students of the École Polytechnique are often accused of being emotional, of having reacted emotionally and impulsively, of being well-meaning, but... We often hear it said, in a patronizing tone—and the same thing was said again today: we understand the way you feel; this is a symbolic crusade against firearms.

So let's be clear. Yes, we wept for our sisters. Yes, we hate violence and yes, we want to make the world a better place. And we are not the only ones. For years, we have worked alongside the families of the victims of the Polytechnique tragedy toward that end. But our effort has also been a rational one. We are, after all, engineers.

Allow me to introduce the groups on whose behalf we are appearing today and whose representatives are here with us: The Association des étudiants de Polytechnique de 1989-1990, the current Association des étudiants de Polytechnique, the Association des étudiants des cycles supérieurs de 1987-1988, the current Association des cycles supérieurs de Polytechnique, the Association des diplômés de Polytechnique and the 114th graduating class of École Polytechnique, who received their diplomas the year that the massacre occurred.

Because we are trained as engineers, what matters to us are the facts and the opinions of experts. But let's be clear that I am talking about the real experts—in areas like public safety, public health and suicide prevention. We do not consider gun owner groups or politicians to be experts on crime prevention; instead, they are police officers, women's groups and experts of that kind. We are up against members of Parliament and the gun lobby. They have tremendous influence, and are basically saying that long guns are not dangerous and that the gun registry is ineffective—hence, Bill [C-391](#).

But let's go over a few facts. Long guns are the weapons that have killed the most police officers on the job. Long guns are the ones most often involved in incidents of domestic violence and shooting suicides. At least six coroners' inquests have recommended that guns be registered. The main police organizations in the country are unanimous in saying that the registry is effective. The main public health and suicide prevention organizations also support the registry. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that registration is integral and necessary to the operation of the gun control scheme. Furthermore, shooting deaths have fallen by 43%, including suicide, homicide and accidents, since these measures were introduced. Murders with firearms have dropped by 40% and murders with long guns—the ones covered by the new measures—dropped by 70%. The number of women killed with firearms dropped by 66% and the number of robberies has declined by nearly 50%. Finally, suicides using firearms fell by 35%.

With respect to the costs, dismantling the registry would only save some \$3 million a year. Clearly, all the money spent implementing the system would not be recovered were the registry to be abolished.

 (1550)

There is no doubt in our minds that all these facts show—clearly, logically and rationally—that the Firearms Registry is both necessary and effective. Unfortunately, these facts have in no way lessened the Conservative government's intention to terminate the registry. Perhaps it would be useful to address the issue from the viewpoint of Bill C-391's promoters. Do they really want the police to no longer be able to link a long gun to its legal owner; to no longer be able to distinguish between a legal and an illegal long gun; to not know how many or which weapons they must seize when the courts issue a possession prohibition order for a potentially dangerous individual? Do they want gun owners to be able to sell their weapons illegally to anyone they choose, without any consequences? The fact is that it will be impossible to trace those guns.

[English]



**The Chair:**

Excuse me, you'll have to wrap it up.



**Ms. Heidi Rathjen:**

In 30 seconds I'll be done.

[Translation]

Do they want police to have no advance notice that there are guns in a home, or the number of guns there, when they answer a call involving a potentially violent incident? Do they want police to lose a critically important tool for criminal investigations, or that they no longer be aware that a gun owner has a massive arsenal of firearms?

Ultimately, the registration of firearms—all firearms—is necessary to ensure full and effective gun control. It must be maintained in its entirety. This is a matter of public safety, a matter of life or death. We can attest to that.

Thank you.

 (1555)