

Moms take to the streets

By JENNY YUEN

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Instead of having a moment of silence for victims of violence, mothers who have lost their children to killers with illegal guns gave them a voice by making some noise yesterday.

United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere (UMOVE) held its sixth annual march in downtown Toronto, focusing attention on the gun violence plaguing the city.

About 40 people held banners, blew whistles and chanted "Stop the violence" as they walked from Yonge-Dundas Square to City Hall.

"The violence rages on and we have to deal with the challenge of healing," said UMOVE chairman Audette Sheppard, who lost her son Justin in 2001, when he was shot to death. "We are making some noise today because it will give a voice to the victims, like my son, who has been silenced. We also want to break silence in the communities," she said. "People continue to empower criminals by keeping silent."

Mayor David Miller proclaimed Oct. 21 as UMOVE day of non-violence in Toronto. The not-for-profit organization was formed in 2001 by a group of mothers who lost children to senseless acts of violence.

Besides giving the victims a voice, rally participants called on the federal government to ban handguns.

But a bill to disarm the gun registry is slated for debate in Parliament, and UMOVE is opposed.

"Every gun has the potential to kill," said Elaine Lumley, whose 20-year-old son Aidan who was shot in the back during a weekend trip to Montreal with friends in 2005.

"Owning a gun in Canada is not your right. Living and growing up is our right. We cannot let this bill pass."

Sheppard said awareness of the problem is growing.

"Justin was my heart, he was my life," she said. "Someone ended his dream (to be a professional athlete) on June 21, 2001. I hope another mother never has to go through what I went through."