



**Canada's Firearms Licensing and Registration System is working
to make communities safer:
Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police**

(Halifax January 21st, 2004.) The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police called on the federal government to resist the attacks on Canada's gun control system, which is proving to be a vital tool in combating crime. Police Chiefs from across Atlantic Canada joined CACP President Edgar McLeod, to reaffirm their support for the law. **They also called proposals to scrap the gun control regime as wasteful and irresponsible and a serious threat to the public safety.**

"We cannot combat the misuse of guns without strong controls," said Edgar A. MacLeod, President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and Chief of the Cape Breton Regional Police Service "We just recently had a case where an individual made threats to staff at the Children's Aid. Because of the system we knew he had firearms and were able to obtain a warrant to seize them. I am receiving stories from police across the country about cases where the system has enabled them to take preventative action and investigate crime. There have also been cases where it has enhanced officer safety. While firearms violence remains a concern in Canada, rates of gun crime, homicide and death have fallen significantly over the last decade in part because of stricter controls. Dismantling our gun control system would be a step backwards."

"In comparison to other jurisdictions, firearms related issues are lower, and we want to keep it that way." said Chief Paul Smith of the Charlottetown Police and CACP Director for PEI. "The new legislation helps reduce the chances that people who are a risk to others or themselves will get access to firearms. It also increases the accountability of firearm owners. There is nothing in the law which prevents them from pursuing lawful activities - hunting, target shooting or even collecting. But firearms present a threat and without strong controls over legal gun ownership we cannot prevent misuse."

"There is no question that the system is working and that it is a valuable tool. Compliance rates are high - more than 2 million (90)% of gun owners are licensed and almost 7 million (85%) of guns are registered, said Chief Frank Beazley of the Halifax Regional Police and CACP Director for Nova Scotia. "We have problems with rifles and shotguns as well as with handguns in this region. It is obvious we need rigorous controls both. Gun theft is a significant problem and we need to ensure owners are accountable for their firearms. But we have also had cases of illegal guns in our community and the firearms registry has helped us prosecute those who have illegal guns. Police forces consider the registry a valuable investigative tool. Every gun tells a story. And the registration system often gives us a starting point in our investigations."

"In New Brunswick, we regularly respond to and investigate domestic violence," said Chief C.E. Cogswell, Vice President of the CACP and Chief of the Saint John Police. "Police also contend with violent acts by impulsive youth and people who threaten to or commit suicide. Often these people have easy access to legal guns and the system provides a tool to remove firearms from these high-risk situations. It is a mistake to think that firearms are only a problem in big cities. We get hundreds of domestic violence calls a

year and now are able to check for the presence of firearms. The new system may not be perfect but its far better than what we had before. A number of inquests, including one into the murder of Karen Marquis, concluded that licensing and registration are necessary. Women's groups have been clear about the importance of the system to reduce domestic murders. We need to work with the community to ensure that the risks are understood and that appropriate steps are taken to remove guns from people who present a risk to themselves or others. And we need to continue to promote the safe storage of firearms to protect our children."

Assistant Commissioner Atkins of the RCMP "H" Division noted: "The RCMP operate in a wide range of environments across the country. We work in rural areas where long guns are the major problem and where we need the tools to take preventative action. We are also actively involved in initiatives aimed at combating the illegal gun trade and cross border smuggling. Illegal guns begin as legal guns either in Canada or the US. Without strong controls on legal firearms we cannot prevent diversion to illegal markets. Without information about who owns firearms legally and the firearms they own, we can not charge individuals with illegal possession. It is true in some areas smuggling is a problem. We need BOTH: strong laws controlling firearms in Canada AND support for anti-smuggling initiatives. It is not a question of either/or."

Chief McLeod concluded: There has been a lot of discussion of scrapping the firearms registry, but what people have not understood is that "the registry" has become short form for the entire system of licensing firearm owners and registering guns. This is a KEY POINT! The Auditor General had identified financial problems and these have been addressed. Most of money spent has been on the screening and licensing firearm owners, not on registering guns. The Police need access to information about who owns what guns. The new system is not cheap but the old system, which was flawed, cost \$30 million, most of it from local police budgets. Critics calling to scrap the system have not told us what they would put in its place, how much it would cost and how it would address the gaps in the old system. If we dismantle gun control in Canada we will just make it easier for criminals to get guns legally - that is hardly the solution. The example we see south of the border is clearly one we want to avoid."

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police represents more than 90% of the police chiefs in Canada. Since 1990 it has called on the Government to license gun owners and register guns and it defended the firearms legislation all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

-30-

For additional information:

Sergeant Don Spicer:
Public Information Officer for the Halifax Regional Police
(902) 490-5154
Spiced@region.halifax.ns.ca