



United States Congress
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

Dear Representative:

The Small Arms Working Group (SAWG), an alliance of U.S.-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working together to promote more responsible policies of legal sales and international cooperation to reduce illicit arms trafficking, joins the world community in participating in the Fourth Annual Week of Action Against Small Arms to draw attention to the human toll of small arms proliferation and misuse. We join with NGOs in thirty other countries to demand that governments enact policies that put their citizens' security first.

As our nation conducts its war on terrorism both at home and abroad, one unassailable fact is conspicuously absent from that national dialogue: that terrorists and guns go together. For many terrorists around the world, the United States is the "Great Gun Bazaar" because our lax federal gun laws allow such easy access to powerful weapons.

Now, we join together with other organizations that are concerned about the safety of communities, both nationally and internationally, to urge your support for legislation to renew the 1994 ban on assault weapons and high capacity ammunition clips. As you know, the ban is scheduled to expire on September 13th, 2004, when Congress will again face the question of whether the floodgates will be opened once more to the manufacture and sale of new military assault weapons.

Since the law was put in place, we have seen the critical role these measures have played in ensuring domestic safety and reducing the proliferation of assault weapons around the world.

The ban has proven remarkably effective in reducing the use of assault weapons in crime. Since 1994, the proportion of assault weapons traced to crimes has fallen by a dramatic 66%.

International gun trafficking patterns tell us that weak domestic policies create a lethal ripple effect that crosses the globe. For example, almost a third of handguns smuggled into Japan between 1991 and 1995 were produced in the United States, more than from any other country (Japan National Police Agency 1996). Most guns seized by Mexican police are made and sold in the United States (Thomas and Anderson 1996; Weiner and Thompson 2001). Many seized guns in Canada have been traced back to dealers in Florida and Ohio (Toronto Star 1996). In Vermont one individual was convicted of smuggling 952 firearms into Canada. Fifty of the guns were linked to major crimes in Canada including five murders and 121 robberies.

Unless Congress acts now, the weapons of choice for terrorists, drug cartels and gang members will be back on our streets in unprecedented numbers and will be rapidly and efficiently funneled through our international markets as well. These banned weapons include the Colt AR-15, a

semiautomatic version of the M-16 machine gun used by our armed forces, the Uzi, as well as the TEC-9 pistol, whose manufacturer's advertisements hailed its "fingerprint-resistant" finish.

These are similar to the weapons that are being used by terrorist and insurgents against our own military forces in Iraq every day. Here in the United States, they have been used in countless murders – including of many police officers – as well as atrocities like the Stockton schoolyard and Columbine High School shootings. Public opinion polls show that upwards of 75% of the public supports keeping the ban.

Over the past decade, America has achieved great success in combating the scourge of violent crime. The ban on assault weapons and high capacity clips has been a crucial component of our national crime-fighting strategy. The last thing we should be doing is allowing brand new assault weapons and high capacity magazines to be manufactured and sold once again. It would be a giant step backward for law enforcement and public safety nationwide.

Our country cannot win the domestic war on terrorism or make substantial progress in reducing criminal violence without federal laws to deter easy access to assault weapons. The Small Arms Working Group supports the federal ban on military-style assault weapons and urges you to save this invaluable and life-saving law.