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Press Release

Americans Against Gun Violence Responds to the New Zealand Mass Shootings

Sacramento California, March 15, 2019: Americans Against Gun Violence extends heartfelt sympathy to the friends, family, and fellow worshippers of the many victims who were killed in the mass shootings at two Muslim mosques in New Zealand yesterday. We also extend sincere wishes for a prompt and complete recovery to the many other victims who suffered non-fatal injuries in the attacks. We condemn the shootings in the strongest terms along with the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, white supremacist ideology that apparently motivated them.

Opponents of gun control in the United States will claim that the mass shootings in New Zealand, a country with much stronger gun control laws than our own country, are evidence that gun control is ineffective. In fact, the New Zealand experience is evidence in support of the effectiveness of stringent gun control laws.

The mass shootings in New Zealand yesterday were the first mass shootings in that country since 1990.¹ Using the narrow definition of a mass shooting as one in which at least four people, not including the shooter, are killed, there have been more than 3 mass shootings per year over the last 53 years in the United States.² Using a broader definition of a mass shooting as one in which at least four people, not including the shooter, are killed **or** injured, there is almost one mass shooting per day in the United States.³

As a result of our weaker gun control laws, the estimated number of privately owned guns per capita in the United States is almost four times higher than in New Zealand.⁴ The rate of gun homicide in the United States is more than 22 times higher than in New Zealand.⁵

Although New Zealand's gun control laws are much stronger than those in the United States, they're not nearly as stringent as the gun control laws in many other high income democratic countries.⁶ As noted [a fact sheet](#) prepared by Philip Alpers, Executive Director of GunPolicy.Org and Assistant Professor at the University of Sydney's School of Public Health, a

number of measures to strengthen New Zealand's gun control laws were proposed following the 1990 mass shooting, but none of these measures was enacted. Had the proposed measures been enacted in New Zealand, it is more likely than not that yesterday's mass shooting would not have occurred. We anticipate that in the aftermath of yesterday's tragedy, the government of New Zealand will react swiftly and definitively to strengthen its gun control laws in order to prevent future mass shootings.

In the United States, Congress has not enacted any new gun control legislation since the horrific mass shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012; at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California in 2015; at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida in 2016; at the open air music festival in Las Vegas, Nevada, in 2017; or at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in 2018. The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed H.R.8 and H.R.1112, bills to expand background checks for gun purchases, but it is unlikely that the Senate will pass similar measures, and neither H.R.8 nor H.R.1112 comes close to being as stringent as current gun control laws in New Zealand. We should not be surprised when the next horrific mass shooting occurs in our own country.

Americans Against Gun Violence calls for the urgent adoption of stringent gun control laws in the United States comparable to the laws that have long been in effect in most other high income democratic countries of the world. Specifically, we call for a complete ban on civilian ownership of all handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic rifles; for universal registration of all firearms and licensing of all gun owners; and for placing the burden of proof for firearm purchases on the person seeking to acquire a gun to show why he or she needs one and that he or she can handle one safely, not on society to prove that he or she meets certain narrow criteria for being prohibited from possessing a gun. In order to adopt such stringent gun control laws, we must overturn the rogue 2008 *Heller* decision, in which a narrow 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court reversed 217 years of legal precedent in ruling for the first time in U.S. history that the Second Amendment conferred even a limited right for an individual own a gun unrelated to service in a well regulated militia.

References

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- ¹ The New York Times, "New Zealand Shooting Live Updates: Attack on Christchurch Mosques Leaves 49 Dead," *The New York Times*, March 15, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/15/world/asia/new-zealand-shooting.html>.
- ² Bonnie Berkowitz, Denise Lu, and Chris Alcantara, "Analysis | More than 50 Years of U.S. Mass Shootings: The Victims, Sites, Killers and Weapons," *Washington Post*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/national/mass-shootings-in-america/>.
- ³ "Mass Shootings," *Gun Violence Archive*, 2018, <http://www.shootingtracker.com/>.
- ⁴ "Compare the United States – Rate of Civilian Firearm Possession per 100 Population," *GunPolicy.org*, accessed September 19, 2016, http://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/compare/194/rate_of_civilian_firearm_possession/10,280,31.
- ⁵ "Compare the United States – Gun Homicides," *GunPolicy.org*, accessed March 15, 2019, https://www.gunpolicy.org/firearms/compare/194/number_of_gun_homicides/128.
- ⁶ "Gun Law and Policy: Firearms and Armed Violence, Country by Country," *GunPolicy.org*, accessed December 3, 2017, <http://www.gunpolicy.org/>.