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Press Release

Americans Against Gun Violence Responds to Shootings in Poway and Baltimore This Past Weekend

Sacramento California, April 29, 2019: Americans Against Gun Violence extends heartfelt sympathy to the friends, family, and fellow worshippers of the victim who was killed in a shooting at a synagogue in Poway, California, on Saturday, April 27; and to the friends, family, and fellow community members of the victim who was killed in a shooting at a neighborhood cookout in Baltimore, Maryland, on Sunday, April 28. We also extend our sympathy and wishes for a prompt recovery to the other victims who suffered non-fatal injuries in these attacks.

There is no uniform definition of a mass shooting in the United States.¹ The FBI defines a mass shooting as one in which at least four people, not including the shooter, are killed.² The website, Gun Violence Archive, by contrast, defines a mass shooting as one in which four or more people, not including the shooter, are wounded but not necessarily killed.³ Using the Gun Violence Archive definition, both the Poway synagogue shooting, in which one person was killed and three others were wounded,⁴ and the Baltimore neighborhood cookout shooting, in which one person was killed and at least seven others were wounded,⁵ qualify as mass shootings. According to the FBI definition, on the other hand, neither attack was a mass shooting. Using the Gun Violence Archive definition of a mass shooting, on average there is almost one mass shooting a day in the United States.⁶ Using the FBI definition, there are about four mass shootings a year.⁷ Regardless of the definition of a mass shooting, on an average day in the United States, more than 100 people are killed with guns,⁸ and two to three times this many people are wounded.⁹

The shootings in Poway and Baltimore demonstrate contrasting aspects of the gun violence epidemic in the United States. The Poway city website boasts of the city having the lowest crime rate of any city in San Diego County and one of the lowest crime rates in all of California.¹⁰ The Poway synagogue shooting was clearly a hate crime.¹¹ The gunman, a white supremacist who was arrested without incident shortly after the shooting, shouted anti-Semitic rhetoric during the attack. He had also posted both anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim rhetoric on social media prior to committing

the crime. It's reported that he committed the shooting with an AR-15 style rifle which "miraculously jammed," probably preventing the shooter from killing and wounding many more people.¹²

In contrast, Baltimore has one of the highest crime rates, including the highest homicide rate, of any city in the United States.¹³ The motive in the neighborhood cookout shooting, which was reportedly committed by an unidentified "black man," is unknown.¹⁴ The weapon used by the shooter is also unknown, but given the reports of many shots being fired in rapid sequence, it was almost certainly a semi-automatic handgun or rifle. The attacker may have fled when someone participating in the cookout began shooting back.¹⁵ A 25 year old man had been shot and killed in the same block one month earlier, and participants in the cookout reported that the sound of gunshots was commonplace in the neighborhood.¹⁶

The Poway synagogue shooting received considerable attention in the news media, with the emphasis being on the hate crime aspect of the shooting and the resilience of the Jewish community in Poway. The Baltimore shooting received far less attention outside of the Baltimore area. The media attention that the Baltimore shooting did receive focused on the culture of violence within the low income community of color in which the shooting occurred and the distrust that the community has for law enforcement officers.

The common factor in both the Poway and Baltimore shootings, as well as the common factor in the more than 200 other gun related deaths and two to three times that many gun related injuries that occurred in the United States this past weekend - if it was just an "average" weekend in the USA - is that all these deaths and injuries were committed with guns. The other common factor in the aftermath of Poway and Baltimore shootings is that the issue of gun control as a means of preventing such shootings was hardly mentioned.

Other countries deal with hate crimes; racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance; mental illness; poverty; socio-economic disparity; social injustice; and cultures of violence. But the United States is not an extraordinary outlier in any of these areas. In fact, the rate of violent assault by any means in the United States is lower than the average for the other high income democratic countries of the world.¹⁷ Where the United States is an extreme outlier, though, is in the rate of homicide, which is seven times higher in the United States than the average for the other high income democratic countries of the world, driven by a gun homicide rate that is 25 times higher,¹⁸ and driven in turn by the extremely lax gun control laws in the United States as compared with all other high income democratic countries¹⁹ and the related extraordinarily high number of guns in circulation and ease with which almost anyone can obtain a firearm.²⁰

It is appropriate to address the root causes of hate crimes and other forms of violence, as New Zealand has done following the mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch on March 15, 2019, in which 50 people were killed and 50 more wounded.²¹ But it is both inappropriate and inexcusable to fail to address the final common pathway by which all mass shootings and other forms of gun violence are committed – with guns.

It took New Zealand parliament just over two weeks to adopt a complete ban on assault rifles by a vote of 119-1 following the Christchurch mass shootings.²² It took the Australian government just 12 days to agree to ban all semi-automatic rifles following a mass shooting in that country in 1996.²³ It took the United Kingdom a little longer – two years – to decide to ban all handguns after a mass shooting in an elementary school in Dunblane Scotland in 1996.²⁴ Despite innumerable horrific mass shootings over the past five decades, the United States has failed to enact gun control regulations that come even close to being as stringent or effective as the laws in all other high income democratic countries.

It is the position of Americans Against Gun Violence that the United States should adopt a complete ban on civilian ownership of all handguns and all automatic and semi-automatic rifles. In order to ban handguns, we must first overturn the rogue 2008 *Heller* decision²⁵ in which a narrow 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court reversed over two centuries of legal precedent, including four prior Supreme Court decisions,²⁶ in ruling that the Second Amendment conferred an individual right to keep a handgun in the home. Until we adopt stringent gun control regulations comparable to those in other high income democratic countries, we should not ask ourselves why our country continues to suffer from an epidemic of gun violence, but rather why we fail to take the obvious steps necessary to stop this epidemic.

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