

injuries at \$6 billion per year in Canada.<sup>35</sup> This does not take into account the costs to economic development to business and tourism of cities which have lost control of firearms. Nor does it take into account the costs to the families and communities of the victims which are inestimable. In Canada, victim advocates played a critical role by forcing us to put a face on the statistics.

Canadians have a constitutional right to life, liberty and security and Canada's Supreme Court has consistently upheld the right of the government to regulate firearms in order to protect public safety.<sup>36</sup> Similarly in Australia, improvements to gun control have been regarded as protecting fundamental human rights - the right to be free from the threat of violence. All citizens of the world have this fundamental right.

*Recommendation 7: The declaration of principles should explicitly acknowledge the obligation of United Nations and member states to protect civilians from the threat of firearms violence. Not only do member states have an obligation to protect citizens within their borders but they also have an obligation to ensure that their regulatory schemes do not jeopardize the safety of citizens in other countries. Regulatory schemes must, therefore, be supported by effective implementation and enforcement.*

## Conclusion

The UN study provides a wealth of new and important information. But even prior to the study it was clear that the issues in Canada are not unlike the issues in many other parts of the world. In the United States of America, firearms violence has been called a "public health epidemic" and many groups are working to reduce the problem.<sup>37</sup> In some countries, such as Australia<sup>38</sup> and New Zealand<sup>39</sup>, the problems with illegal trafficking are less acute but the proposed solutions are similar. In other countries such as South Africa<sup>40</sup>, it is impossible to separate the problem of crime and peace-building. Yet, the need to regulate the agent, firearms, is seen as essential. In other countries such as Japan<sup>41</sup> and Great Britain<sup>42</sup>, the problem of firearms seems infinitesimal compared to Canada yet they are determined to lose the peaceful and civil societies they currently enjoy. Yet many of the efforts to improve domestic regulations of firearms are similar and certainly the role played by Non-Governmental Organizations has been important in terms of providing expertise, in promoting public participation and in forging political will.

While there are those who will continue to argue that there is no evidence that improving firearms regulations will have any effect, we know there are also many who argue that we have insufficient proof that nicotine is addictive or that smoking causes cancer. In addition, there is a sense of urgency because the longer we wait the more difficult the task becomes. As the esteemed Dr. Martin Killias, University of Lausanne pointed out, "any further waiting for more convincing evidence may jeopardize more rigorous approaches to gun control since beyond a certain point [it] becomes a hopeless task."