



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by International Foundation Witnesses Ashoora, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **School Mass Shootings in the United States of America**

The right to life is a fundamental and basic human right. The Declaration of Independence begins with the statement that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are unalienable rights. The use of firearms by civilians harms access to human rights. In many instances, civilians acquire firearms illegally. Civilian access to firearms has an impact on the right to life because it facilitates the commission of homicides.

Gun violence is a chronic disease in the United States of America. Over the last two decades, the number of shootings at schools in the United States of America has doubled. With its interplay with gun culture, individual rights, interest groups and partisan politics, it has long plagued American society and gravely violated people's right to life, leaving an indelible stain on the country's human rights record. Research indicates a higher rate of antidepressant use among those exposed to a school shooting in the years following the gun violence. School shootings also lead to an increase in student absenteeism and the likelihood of needing to repeat a grade in the two following years.

One gunshot after another have shattered the American Dream that all men are endowed with the unalienable rights to life and liberty, and lead people to reflect deeply on where the American-style human rights really are. Some politicians in the United States of America have long treated the American people's right to life with indifference. Faced with growing gun proliferation, they have done nothing more than prolonged debates, while pointing fingers at the human rights conditions of other countries. The most important thing that they are duty-bound to do is face up to and address their own problems, and let the American people enjoy true freedom from the fear of gun violence.

We would like to draw your attention to some horrible facts:

- Each day 12 children die from gun violence in the United States of America.
- Another 32 are shot and injured. Guns are the leading cause of death among American children and teens.
- 1 out of 10 gun deaths are age 19 or younger.
- Since Columbine in 1999, more than 338,000 students in the United States of America have experienced gun violence at school.
- There were more school shootings in 2022 -46- than in any year since Columbine.
- This mirrored the United States of America's broader rise in gun violence as it emerged from the pandemic.
- An estimated 4.6 million American children live in a home where at least one gun is kept loaded and unlocked.
- These improperly stored weapons have contributed to school shootings, suicides and the deaths of family members, including infants and toddlers.

Researchers have been analyzing the impacts of exposure to shootings on the growing number of students experiencing them in American schools. While many students are physically unharmed, studies have consistently found consequences to their mental health, educational, and economic trajectories that last for years, and potentially decades, to come. A large interdisciplinary body of research characterizes the neurological and physiological mechanisms through which trauma from exposure to violence can impact young people. In brief, such trauma can affect both the biological stress system as well as young developing brains.

Gun violence is one of the acutest social problems in the United States of America, with ramifications not only for the victims and their families, but also for the entire society and country. In addition to the casualties caused and the threat to public security, it has also resulted in enormous economic losses and social trauma for the nation.

Civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms can have a substantial impact on the right to education. The United States of America, for example, has seen repeated mass school shootings for many years, causing serious trauma to the American society.

The mass shooting at the Columbine High School in Colorado in April 1999 killed 13 people and left more than 20 injured. In April 2007, the shooting at Virginia Tech resulted in the death of 32 students and faculty members. GVA data show that, over the past decade, 27 mass school shootings took place in the United States of America. The deadliest shootings among them are: December 2012, Connecticut, Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, 26 killed including 20 children aged six to seven; October 2015, Roseburg, Oregon, Umpqua Community College shooting, 10 killed; February 2018, Parkland, Florida, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, 17 killed (14 students and 3 faculty members) and 17 injured; May 2018, Houston, Santa Fe High School shooting, 10 killed. In May 2022, an 18-year-old gunman entered the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, and killed 21 people including 19 children. This last incident was the 27th school shooting in the United States of America in 2022. It was also one of the worst in recent years.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Recent data suggest continued upward trends in school shootings, school mass shootings, and related deaths over the past 5 years. Notably, gun violence disproportionately affects boys, especially Black boys, with much higher gun deaths per capita for this group than for any other group of youth. Implications for policy and practice are provided. We urge the human rights council to take appropriate measures to end this gun violence in schools.

- Increased civilian access to firearms, including lawfully acquired weapons, leads to increased levels of violence and insecurity which negatively impact human rights.
- In particular, civilian acquisition, possession and use of firearms pose direct risks to the rights to life, security of person, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom to enjoy one's culture, religion and language. Civilian access to firearms also jeopardizes the rights to adequate housing, health, and education, and the right to equality and non-discrimination. Increased civilian access to firearms also has specific impacts on the human rights of women, children and adolescents, and ethnic minorities, as highlighted in the report.
- Given the potential harm and devastating impact of the misuse of firearms on the enjoyment of human rights, legislation and public policies concerning civilian access to firearms should be formulated and reviewed with a human rights lens.