



2013 January 28
Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and
Children's Safety

Honorable Committee Members:

A few years ago several New Haven community groups were planning an event to celebrate the United Nations-designated International Day of Peace, September 21. We met in an elementary school in New Haven's West River neighborhood. A young man and his youth-group advisor came to ask for help in developing a similar celebration across town in Newhallville. During the discussion the young man told us that he and friends had discussed the handgun violence in their neighborhood. One of the youth voiced the question on many minds: **"If our President and our government use guns and the violence of war to settle disputes, why shouldn't we do the same?"**

Yes, we should restrict the easy availability of guns and update gun ownership policies in the United States. But we must go further. For we live in an economy of violence that goes far beyond handguns and semi-automatic rifles. Our nation spends over a trillion dollars a year on building vast killing machines and actively using them, more than all other countries combined. Our nation far too readily initiates war. Our nation threatens to use its arsenal of nuclear weapons that can instantaneously end the lives of all children and all civilization. Our nation recruits our youth, whom we parents have taught to cherish life, and teaches them to kill others. **Our nation buys billions of dollars of weaponry and sells billions more abroad, sales that fill the coffers of the manufacturers of killing machines, sales that bind us to the unnecessary and premature deaths of our global brothers and sisters.**

In our own country, we witness violence against women, against immigrants and against minorities. And children.

We exist in a culture of violence. In April 1967, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., stated, **"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."** King looked at Vietnam and our cities. We look at Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen and still our cities.

Yes, we must address the fact that getting a gun is easier than getting a driver's license. But we must urgently address the "shocking and bloody" tragedies in the many Newtowns and New Havens of our land that result from "spiritual death." We must lean our minds and shoulders into reaching spiritual uplift. For only if we accept the responsibility to look beyond the heart of a grieving nation and seek out a fundamental flaw, only as we are willing to seek a higher truth and **root out the culture of violence and an economy that feeds on it** will we have reason to expect to see all our children and our global family live long and happy lives.

Peace ^ Justice

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