

Is it feasible to limit civic and constitutional rights through poor references to public order and safety?

ONLY A FUNCTIONAL FIREARMS LAW CAN IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY

Finland as a nation has a long history of hunting and shooting sports and hobbies. Some of Finland's greatest achievements in international sporting events have been in different shooting disciplines, e.g. Olympic Gold in Trap in 2008 and several medals in both European and World Championships in 2009. Recreational shooting in different forms is practiced by over 670 000 Finns, if air guns are included over 1 million Finns, a nation of just 5 million.

The sport- and hunting organisations as well as the organisations for arms dealers and gunsmiths etc are actively working to maintain and improve the level of safety in shooting sports. This work is done through education in safe handling and marksmanship, but also through actively promoting safe attitudes and manners among recreational and competing shooters. The civic organisations want to preserve this safe and responsible hobby as a part of the living national culture, now and in the future. This is also the aim of the active and constructive cooperation with the national authorities that the organisations try to maintain. However, to maintain a possibility for both the younger and more mature to practice recreational or competitive shooting in the future, a well functioning and well-defined firearms law is absolutely necessary.

The Finnish government has issued a proposal for a new weapons law (109/2009, no English translation available). This proposal does not support aforementioned goals. The bill has some significant problem areas. It has been prepared at a very hastily pace and without any expert input at all. According to the organisations signed below, the bill also violates the pillars of Finnish democracy; the Finnish Constitution and the common concept of justice.

Both local and international experience and studies show that restrictive legislation that targets only law-abiding license holders and practitioners do not have any positive effect on public safety or criminal activity. It is also worth noting, that many of the proposed restrictions in the new bill are already in use in most police districts, through mandatory instructions from the Ministry of the Interior. These restrictions have not had any demonstrated effect on public safety, and making them law will not change this.

The proposed new firearms law has many ambiguous definitions and statements. Among others, the definition of what is to be considered a firearm is so vague, that all air powered rifles and pistols would be considered a firearm, as would most paint-ball and airsoft weapons (both of which are commonly considered toys). Another remarkable issue with the bill is the proposed right for Police to make so called check-visits in the homes of registered gun owners. This in effect is a warrant to search the premises of licensed owners, without any suspicion of guilt of any crime. The organisations below feel that this is a violation of the civic rights to personal integrity, the sanctity of the home and personal honour of the legal license holders. It places them as well as their families in an unjust and unequal position before the law.

All of the aforementioned problems could have been avoided, had the offices that prepared the bill taken advantage of the expertise that exists in the different hunting, shooting and professional associations and federations. Instead the work has been done solely by public servants at the department of lottery and weapons administration, without enough technical knowledge or knowledge of different hunting and sporting disciplines, and completely ignoring the specialists and their statements. Furthermore the preparatory work has not considered any alternative solutions, nor have the effects of the proposed bill been

investigated. Remarkably, even the public authorities have stated that restrictive or punitive weapons laws are ineffective in preventing gun related tragedies.

Finland has one of the most tightly controlled systems when it comes to owning and procuring weapons in the European Union today. The EU directive on acquisition and possession of weapons (2008/51/EG), and the technical definitions required by it, is to be adopted by the member states and their national legislation during 2010. The Finnish legislation already conforms to the directive in an exemplary way.

We also regrettably have to note that the Finnish Ministry of the Interior apparently does not know the contents of the proposed bill. Representatives of the ministry have stated to the media that the intention is not to make air powered weapons licensed firearms. The organisations below also presume that this is not the intention, but it does not change how the proposed bill is written, regardless of what officers of the different departments state to the media. It is another example of the effects of an ill prepared law that was done too quickly without the necessary competence. It is also worth noting, that it is not the Ministry of the Interior who interprets the law, and therefore it is likely that the courts will be burdened with cases related to the bill in the years to come.

The Finnish governments proposition for a revised firearms law has been hastily prepared, without the required knowledge and expertise, and includes many legislative and judicially problematic points. We, the undersigned, therefore demand that the Finnish government withdraws their proposition from the Parliament so that the effects of the proposition on public order and safety can be properly investigated, and so that alternative solutions can be suitably considered, and that a new proposition for firearms law may be given based on the findings of these actions.

SIGNEES

Finnish Arms Trade Association – www.aselaki.info/AAE/
Finnish Weapons History Federation – www.asehistorianliitto.fi
Finnish Arms Dealers Federation – www.asekauppiat.fi
Finnish Gunsmiths Organisation – www.seula.net/asesepat
Classic Old Western Society – www.cows.fi
National Defence Training Association – www.mpsy.fi
Finnish National Hunting Federation – www.riista.fi
Finnish National Rifle Association NRA – www.nra.fi
Reservist Sports Federation – www.resul.fi
Finnish Biathlon Federation – www.biathlon.fi
Finnish Shooting Sport Federation – www.ampumaurheilu.fi
Finnish Weapons History Society – www.suomenasehistoriallinenseura.fi
Finnish Air Gun Shooters – www.sihry.fi
Finnish Bow Hunters Society – www.jousimetsastys.fi
Finnish Hunters Society – smy.sporttisaitti.fi
Finnish Hunters Federation – www.metsastajaliitto.fi
Finnish Reserve Officers Federation – www.rul.fi
Helsinki Swedish Reserve Officers – www.hsrk.fi
Vantaa Reserve Association – www.vantaanreservilaiset.fi

Further information available from:

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