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**Transforming Attitudes Towards the Tools of Violence:
The Arms Exchange Programme in Mendoza,
Argentina**

William H. Godnick

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Violence: The Arms Exchange Programme in
Mendoza, Argentina**

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William “Bill” Godnick (USA) is an extramural research student working with Dr Owen Greene. He is developing his PhD thesis on qualitative and quantitative methods for evaluating the effectiveness of civilian disarmament programmes using case studies from Argentina, Brazil and El Salvador. At present Bill is an advisor on small arms control for the United Nations Development Programme’s Emergency Response Division and El Salvador field office and a contributor to the Geneva-based research publication *Small Arms Survey*.

Summary

In late December 2000 the Ministry of Justice and Security of the Argentine province of Mendoza completed the first phase of the programme *Canje de Armas por Mejores Condiciones de Vida*, hereafter referred to as the Arms Exchange Programme, as part of a multi-faceted long-term approach to transform the public security climate. Two hundred eighty five pistols, revolvers and shotguns were voluntarily turned in by citizens for destruction in exchange for vouchers for foodstuffs and tickets to football games with values ranging from US \$50 to \$100. Participants were able to make contact with the programme organisers through a toll-free telephone line. Prior to the firearm turn-in component a public education effort was coordinated in the school system that culminated in a violent toy turn-in and destruction drive that brought in thousands of toy guns and video games for public destruction and incorporation into displays of art.

The overwhelmingly positive response to the first phase of the programme inspired organisers to launch a second phase of weapons collection on 10 April 2001 including sectors of the province outside the Greater Mendoza area. Although the second phase was scheduled to end on 24 April 2001 it had to be extended on two separate occasions in response to enthusiastic requests from several localities that were not originally scheduled to host the Arms Exchange Programme. The second phase, which lasted six weeks, collected a total of 2,281 weapons and 6,547 rounds of ammunition, bringing in a total of 2,566 weapons and 8,262 rounds of ammunition for both phases combined. Arguably, the town of San Rafael, where 809 revolvers, pistols, shotguns and rifles were turned in over the course of four days, in the southern section of Mendoza province, saw more weapons turned in per capita than any other programme in the world to date.

Primary data for this paper was collected by the author and colleague Jacqueline Sullivan from the Monterey Institute of International Studies in December 2000, March 2001 and June 2001.

Introduction: Background on Arms, Security and Violence in Argentina

The Argentine Small Arms Industry

Small Arms Survey (2001, p.16) classifies Argentina as a small producer in its ranking of international manufacturers of small arms and light weapons and the third most important player in the Americas behind the United States and Brazil. The definition of small arms and light weapons used in this paper covers both military-style weapons and commercial firearms (handguns and long guns) (United Nations, 1997). The terms small arms, weapons, firearms and guns will be used interchangeably depending on the specific context.

Argentina has been producing small arms since the 1930s. The arms industry grew exponentially after 1946 when the country began to pursue a policy of industrialisation through import substitution (Der Ghougassian, 2000). More than twenty private sector firms existed, in addition to the multiple production facilities of the state-owned Dirección General de Fabricaciones Militares (DGFM), at the height of the industry's prosperity in the 1980s (Dreyfus, 2000a; Solingen, 1998). Historically, DGFM has produced a variety of military weapons under license for FN Herstal (Belgium) and Beretta (Italy), primarily for the Argentine military. In the late 1990s control of DGFM was transferred from the Ministry of Defence to the Ministry of Finance and several factories were closed while others merged with private sector interests. These changes took place in the context of greater competition from Brazilian manufacturers; fall-out from DGFM's illicit arms sales to Croatia and Ecuador in a scandal that eventually brought the conviction and imprisonment of former Argentine president Carlos Menem; and a larger governmental policy of privatisation of public enterprises under pressure from international financial institutions (Dreyfus, 2000a).

Three important private producers still in existence are Bersa, Rexio and Mahely. All three operate out of Buenos Aires province and produce a range of products for civilian and military markets, both domestic and international. The private sector produced as many as 300,000 units *per annum* in the 1980s, but since 1994 the industry has only reached an average of 24,000 units per year (Small Arms Survey, 2001, p. 28; Dreyfus 2000a). Table 1 shows Argentina's firearms exports and imports since 1994. The country has maintained a positive firearms trade balance for the time period shown.

Table 1: Argentina – Firearms Imports and Exports (quantity)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Exports</i>
1994	43,341	49,792
1995	22,055	39,839
1996	29,529	51,318
1997	40,489	58,066
1998	45,864	44,206
1999	28,137	56,664
2000	33,828	44,070
Total	243,243	343,955

Source: Registro Nacional De Armas de Argentina, June 2001

Table 2 lists approximate dealer and black market prices for selected firearms in Argentina in addition to Brazilian black market prices. Brazil's large and relatively cheap black market trade provides ample incentive to export guns to neighbouring countries such as Argentina.

Table 2: Pricing Characteristics of the Argentine Firearms Market

<i>Calibre</i>	<i>Private Dealer</i>	<i>Black Market</i>	<i>Brazilian Black Market</i>
.22	\$200-900	\$70-300	\$30
.38	\$250-900	\$80-300	\$40
9 mm	\$500-1,000	\$150-400	\$90

Source: Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad, Gobierno de Mendoza, November 2000

Role of Arms in Argentine Society

Despite Argentina's violent past characterised by fifty years of military coups that lasted until the beginning of the democratisation process in 1983, only during the last ten years have the country's citizens begun to show concern regarding the proliferation of firearms as it relates to public security and crime (Der Ghougassian, 2000). The focus of security institutions shifted away from traditional a focus on national defence and internal repression to new threats such as arms trafficking, police corruption and international terrorism. The latter threat directly manifested itself in Argentina during the two terrorist bombings against the Israeli embassy (1992) and a national Jewish organisation (1994).

The years of military dictatorship did not bring about civil war as was the case in many Latin American countries. The military always maintained strong restrictions on and control over military weapons that could be used in a national uprising, though these restrictions did not impede guerrilla forces from obtaining them during the period of forced disappearances of real and perceived enemies of the military junta known as the 'Dirty War' (Der Ghoussian, 1998). Before democratisation took root, the military junta used the fight against communism as a pretext for any forceful action taken against the regime's political opponents. Until former US president Ronald Reagan was able to reverse his predecessor's, (Jimmy Carter), limitations on arms sales to Latin America, Argentina and Israel served as the main source for training of indigenous intelligence and combat units in Central America's Cold War conflicts as well as arm sales (Armony, 1997, p. 132). This role put more money in the Argentine military junta's coffers and helped prolong its legitimacy despite internal opposition.

Today Argentina is considered to be one of many links in the international illicit arms trade, especially where its border meets both Brazil and Paraguay. Paraguay is renowned for its illegal arms bazaars and links to Chinese organised crime rings, Brazilian drug trafficking gangs and ethnic Lebanese criminal organisations (Drefyus, 2000b).

On the surface there appears to be a disconnect between the arms industry and the prevalence of their use in acts of violence in present day Argentina. However, the new security threats of police

corruption, drug trafficking and street crime have been exacerbated by a prolonged economic recession resulting in high levels of unemployment. In their study of crime and violence in Latin America, Buvinic, Morrision, et al. (1999, p. 27-28) concluded that in Argentina social violence increased when income disparity grew. Shocking acts of violent crime involving firearms and its reporting in the national press have increased dramatically in Argentina in recent years. According to opinion polls public security is one of the top three unsatisfied needs of the country's citizens (Der Ghougassian, 2000, p. 9).

Firearms Statistics

There are 890 firearms vendors legally registered with the Argentine defence ministry's National Arms Register (RENAR). Of these 310 are found in Buenos Aires province, also home to the nation's capital. Twenty-two are located in the province of Mendoza serving a population of approximately 1.5 million. In Argentina there are 2,224,779 firearms registered with RENAR. The provincial register held by the Ministry of Justice and Security (MJS) in Mendoza has 80,000 registered weapons and officials estimate the number of illegally owned guns in the province to be near 15,000 (Zentil, 2000a). Mendoza accounts for 4 per cent of Argentina's population, but only 1.4 per cent of all registered firearms. RENAR estimates that there are a total of 1 million illegal firearms circulating in Argentina. More than 46,000 were reported stolen nationwide between January 2000 and March 2001 (RENAR, 2001).

75% of all legally registered weapons, at the national level and for Mendoza province, are pistols and revolvers; 60% belonging to private citizens, 25% to public security authorities and the rest categorised as collectibles (Appiolaza, 2000). Only 4% of all licensed firearms users are women (RENAR, 2001). Argentine law permits civilian possession of revolvers up to .32 calibre, pistols up to 6.25 mm and carbines up to .22 calibre. Special permits are required for .38 calibre revolvers and 9 mm pistols.

The Human Costs of Firearm Violence in Mendoza, Argentina

Mendoza, Argentina is not a hotbed of firearm violence in comparison with other South American cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Brazil or Bogotá, Colombia. The use of assault rifles, grenades and other military weapons in crime is not common as is the case in Central America and other parts of South America. However, Argentina in general has experienced an exponential increase in the magnitude of armed violence during the latter half of the 1990s. The context of Mendoza, and Argentina in general for that matter, is not that of post-conflict countries rather more similar to the situation of the industrialised nations focusing on crime prevention and community security enhancement. The typical profile of a victim of gun violence is a young male between the ages of 15 and 30. However, there is no profile for the typical person who is intimidated or threatened by firearms, but not physically harmed. Tracking statistics for firearm related crime between 1998-2000 shows differing trends, on

the one hand demonstrating a decrease in firearm homicides, and on the other, an increase in armed robberies as illustrated below in Table 3.

Table 3: Firearm Related Crime in Mendoza, Argentina (1998-2000)

Year	1998	1999	2000(a)
Homicides	168	115	76
<i>Armed robberies</i>	2,474	3,538	3,458

Source: Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad, Gobierno de Mendoza, November 2000

(a) Figures for 2000 only include January through September.

As is often the case, criminal statistics differ from public health records because of approaches to data collection and they are not directly comparable. According to the Ministry of Health and Social Development, between 1997 and 1998 the total number of victims of gun violence, including suicides, treated in Mendoza's hospitals increased from 145 to 206, though the numbers of deaths decreased (Appiolaza, 2000). Conversely, firearms deaths, where the victim did not make it to the hospital for treatment, rose from 66 to 117 between 1998 and 1999. These figures have increased for both men and women, though female victimisation levels are significantly lower. Tables 4 and 5 detail the circumstances of death, with more specific information collected in 1999. At face value the more detailed 1999 data that also include suicide data would indicate that rifles or shotguns are attributable to more violent deaths than pistols and revolvers though the even greater numbers of deaths where the type of firearm was not identified make it irresponsible to draw such a conclusion. The data also indicates a marked increase in firearm deaths including suicide from one year to the next directly contradicting the information presented by police sources in Table 3 above.

Table 4: Firearm Deaths in Mendoza, Argentina (1998)

<i>Type of Weapon</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pistol or revolver	12	2	14
Rifle or shotgun	6	1	7
Unidentified	39	6	45
Total	57	9	66

Source: Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Salud, Gobierno de Mendoza, November 2000.

Table 5: Firearm Deaths in Mendoza, Argentina (1999)

<i>Weapon/Situation</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Suicide w/pistol or revolver</i>	5	1	6
<i>Suicide w/rifle or shotgun</i>	17	3	20
<i>Suicide w/unidentified weapon</i>	25	1	26
<i>Homicide w/pistol or revolver</i>	1	0	1
<i>Homicide w/rifle or shotgun</i>	6	1	7
<i>Homicide w/unidentified weapon</i>	50	7	57
<i>Total</i>	104	13	117

Source: Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Salud, Gobierno de Mendoza, November 2000.

Even in the rich, industrialised countries such data held by different government agencies with different mandates and agendas can be confusing and demonstrate conflicting trends. In Mendoza, in general, it appears that the feeling of insecurity is on the rise, while confidence and trust of local authorities is improving slightly. Recently, 46% of Mendoza's population gave a positive evaluation when surveyed on the local government's performance in public security (Zentil, 2000b). This does show that the majority still disapprove of their work, but is likely better than the attitudes toward the now defunct police forces of prior decades that were inspired by a national security doctrine that focused on the repression of subversive political activities rather than crime prevention, in order to justify the continued military control of the government.

Beginning in 1998, the provincial government of Mendoza and the distinct political parties with representation in the provincial parliament initiated the reform of the police, including the creation of a multidisciplinary public security training academy and university institute that also introduced many of the more modern and socially-oriented law enforcement techniques such as community-oriented policing (Appiolaza, 2000). Two hundred corrupt police officers were removed from the force at the beginning of this process. Now, in order to reach important positions in the police ranks an officer has to attend university and complete five courses in law. Decentralisation also took place within this framework. Each of the province's four zones have their own autonomous police force where there once was one. Additionally there is a traffic police and investigations police, six police institutions in total operating in the province.

As in almost all cases of security sector reform, the degree of institutional sincerity to carry forward these changes in orientation and practice is debatable and we will not discuss that aspect here. The judiciary has also undergone similar processes, though Mendoza continues to lag behind the other regions of Argentina in relation to the crimes committed and sentences carried out, as demonstrated in Table 6.

Table 6: National Comparison of Crimes and Sentences (1999)

<i>Place</i>	<i>Crimes</i>	<i>Sentences</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Province of Santa Fe</i>	73,968	1,684	2.28%
<i>City of Buenos Aires</i>	191,755	2,513	1.31%
<i>Province of Cordoba</i>	104,362	1,207	1.16%
<i>Province of Buenos Aires</i>	293,802	3,408	1.16%
<i>Province of Mendoza</i>	89,930	694	0.77%

Source: Ministerio de Justicia de Argentina, November 2000.

The situation in Mendoza thus far described demonstrates that firearms are present in this society and do have measurable negative effects according to public security and public health statistics. While policing techniques may be improving, it is evident that the judiciary must become more efficient in prosecuting all crimes including those relating to firearms and violence. All of the discussion so far has very much focused on statistical evidence provided by the national and provincial governments. We must take this information for what it is worth, a reference point with which to begin to analyse the problem. While no one is so naïve as to believe that government figures completely reflect reality, the mere categorisation and stratification of data collected by government agencies tells us quite a bit.

If we were only able to look at the situation in Mendoza through the lens of the information provided above, it would be difficult to gauge the severity or nature of the problem. In relation to the nation's capital, crime appears to be less significant, with 6 out of each 100 Mendozans surveyed claiming to have been victims of crime, in comparison to 15 in 100 for Buenos Aires. For that reason it would now be appropriate to look at the human side of firearm violence in Mendoza through several anecdotal examples provided below.

The following select cases that took place in different districts and municipalities within the province of Mendoza during 2000 will help illustrate the nature of the problem:

- On 19 March Mr. Francisco Gabriel Agostino was shot and killed in his own house apparently by his son in either a domestic argument or accident.
- On 3 April Ms Scarlett Muñoz was shot and injured while pushing her hot dog vending cart down the street. She was caught in the crossfire from two rival youth gangs.
- On 12 September a toddler, Diego Matías López, lost his eye when he pulled the trigger of a gun he found on the bed in a relative's house where he was visiting.
- On 13 September twelve-year old Marisol Rosales was shot and killed when a stray bullet penetrated her head while sitting in her house.
- On 19 September fifteen-year old Cintia Rodríguez was shot in the leg while visiting her neighbour when yet another stray bullet from a gang fight came through the window.

Poaching and illegal hunting have also been uncovered as a source of the misuse and negative effects of firearms on the environment. These incidents are more often associated with higher-powered weaponry than those related to traditional domestic or street crime. In the first month of 2001 the regional delegation of the forest service responsible for the region of Mendoza recovered sixteen firearms including eight .22 calibre carbines, one Mauser carbine 7.62 mm, two shotguns of 12 and 16 gauge and three revolvers, calibres .22, .32 and .38 (Castón, 2001).

In short, there is concrete evidence that Mendoza is negatively affected by the presence and misuse of firearms in several contexts in terms of crime and public health as well as the environment. With

this much established it is now appropriate to discuss the particulars of the Ministry of Justice and Security's Arms Exchange Programme.

The Arms Exchange Programme for Better Living Conditions

Origins, Political Support and Planning

The idea of exchanging weapons for some in-kind benefit was not original to Mendoza. In fact these types of programmes have been implemented in the United States for several decades now and in the contexts of crime prevention and post-conflict peace building, for much of the 1990s. The Arms Exchange programme in Mendoza was inspired by a study of prior programmes in El Salvador, Panama, Rio de Janeiro, Albania and Cambodia among others. In fact the programme organisers chose a strikingly similar name to that carried out by the municipal government of San Miguelito, Panama in 1998.

Many in the United Kingdom will remember the gun buy-back scheme implemented by the Home Office in collaboration with law enforcement in response to the 1996 school shooting in Dunblane, Scotland, where sixteen children and a teacher were killed and twelve others were wounded. The 1997 Firearms Act prohibited civilian possession of all handguns. Between July 1997 and February 1998, 162,000 handguns and 700 metric tonnes of ammunitions were handed in throughout Great Britain in exchange for amnesty and cash incentives. Despite several shortcomings, including the failure to participate on the part of 25,000 gun owners, the programme was considered a marked success collecting 87% of all legally registered handguns (Bonn International Center for Conversion, 2001)

A weapons exchange or amnesty programme was formally presented to the provincial legislature in Mendoza, Argentina in February 2000. The first reactions were of hysterical laughter that then turned into a heated debate on whether or not such a scheme would disarm criminals. Supporters from all three major parties, *Alianza*, *Justicialista* and *Demócrata*, were more realistic and proposed that such an effort would focus more on changing the culture and local attitudes in relation to the tools of violence. As usual, the debate included the point of view that voluntary weapons collection would leave the honest citizens defenceless against well-armed criminals. However, unlike many other societies, the debate on the role of guns in society did not go strictly down party lines; the ruling *Alianza* and *Justicialista* parties were unanimously for collecting weapons voluntarily, while the *Demócratas* were divided even among siblings serving in the same legislature under the same party flag.

Even with broad political support in the province and the moral support of Argentine president Fernando De La Rúa and the provincial leaders of Santa Fe and Cordoba, who were looking to see if this programme was suitable for their regions, it took until 9 August 2000 to draft and approve the Provincial Law on Disarmament #6809 (Appiolaza, 2000). This law did the following:

- Made it possible to turn in legal and illegal weapons, explosives and ammunition in exchange for an in-kind benefit for the purpose of destruction for a period of 180 days with the possibility of continuing on with the process for an additional 180 days.
- Created two toll-free telephone lines, one run by the MJS's sub-secretariat for community relations to provide information regarding the weapons turn-in programme and the other under the control of the investigations police to denounce the presence and location of illegal weaponry.
- Established the framework to develop mechanisms that prevent the illegal entry of firearms, explosives and ammunition into the provincial territory.
- Promoted the development of a strategy to better implement and control the regional register of firearms and the commercial firearm trade.

Once this legal framework was established, the task of planning and implementing the weapons collection scheme was placed in the hands of the MJS - specifically the sub-secretariat for community relations under the authority of Mr. Gabriel Conte. Mr. Conte then in turn hired Martin Appiolaza, a former journalist with Mendoza's widest circulating newspaper, *Diario Los Andes*, to coordinate the programme and educate the public about it. As a former journalist, one advantage Mr. Appiolaza had was a distinct perspective from that held by police and politicians regarding public security and the role of firearms in society. Not only did this help him conceptualise the challenge of motivating citizens to hand in their guns from a more sociological perspective, but his contacts with the media ensured that the programme would be covered by the newspapers during all of its stages. Correia (2000) notes that the triangulation of support from local government, citizens and the media is critical for the success of programmes designed to enhance community security. At this point the MJS and Appiolaza's main challenge was to convince the citizenry to embrace the programme and participate.

Before proceeding further, the programme organisers contacted dozens of NGO participants in the emerging International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), including the high profile Brazilian

disarmament movement known as Viva Rio.¹ In addition to encouragement and moral support, IANSA and Viva Rio put the MJS of Mendoza in contact with the Help Desk for Practical Disarmament at the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)² from whom they received expert advice and dialogued on different ideas and approaches. BICC had already developed a guide to best practice in weapons collection and destruction with versions in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Russian that was used as a key reference point for developing the overall programme framework (Laurance, Godnick, et al., 2000). During the planning stages the Mendoza programme did not only benefit from other experiences in the United States and Latin America, but also from the ‘Weapons for Development’ approach pioneered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Albania. While there may be competing opinions as to the effectiveness and efficiency of the UNDP’s pilot weapons collection effort in Gramsh, Albania, the concept did bring out the idea of promoting community participation in disarmament with the promise of the development of community public goods and infrastructure. As we will see later the MJS in Mendoza decided to develop a hybrid programme combining the individual material benefits of the ‘Goods for Guns’ approach with collective community incentives.

Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the Arms Exchange Programme must be seen in the context of the multi-party political agreement that made its implementation possible. Under this agreement a new public security policy was adopted including significant reforms of the police sector, increased investigation and prosecution of organised crime networks and improved patrolling procedures in Greater Mendoza. Additional focal points included expanded neighbourhood conflict resolution and mediation programmes, community watch systems and forums to ensure direct citizen participation in security sector policy.

The Arms Exchange Programme set out to communicate the message of disarmament to all levels of society, provide advice and reinforce the many dangers that go along with firearm possession and ownership.

¹ For more information on the International Action Network on Small Arms visit <<http://www.iansa.org>> and for Viva Rio visit <<http://www.vivario.org.br>>.

² A wide range of resources and country/case profiles can be found on the BICC Help Desk website at <<http://www.disarmament.de>>.

The specific objectives of the programme were:

- Raise the price of firearms on the black market.
- Reduce the number of weapons available to criminals.
- Prevent further proliferation of firearms.
- Reduce the number of deaths, accidents and injuries.
- Reinforce the relationship between guns and violence.
- Increase community solidarity.
- Develop complementary programmes to benefit public security.

Public Education Campaign

Early on, programme organisers admitted that a voluntary weapons collection effort would not be likely to bring in the guns in the hands of criminals and that the real goal was to influence a change in culture and attitudes towards the role of guns in society. In that context the public education campaign became equally as important as the proposed weapons turn-in programme. In order to get the word out to the public and motivate them to participate in the Arms Exchange programme a multi-media strategy was implemented by the MJS under the guidance of Martin Appiolaza, because of his experience in the communications business. This public education campaign included:

- Establishment of a 1-800 toll-free number where people could get information on the Arms Exchange programme;
- Constant coverage by the local newspapers;
- Television advertising that showed two identical guns side by side in front of a small child asking him to distinguish the real from the toy;
- Creation of a website with all of the details of the programme³;
- Incorporation of non-governmental organisations, specifically neighbourhood groups and the Football-Soccer League of Greater Mendoza, as extensionists at the community level; and
- Implementation of a violent toy turn-in campaign in the local elementary schools

³ The Arms Exchange Programme website can be found at <http://www.seguridad.mendoza.gov.ar/canje/canarm.htm>.

The most powerful component of the MJS public education campaign was the violent toy exchange campaign carried out in the local elementary schools. Violent toy turn-in drives are nothing new and have been tried all over the world, especially in the United States. However, what made this experience unique was how this experience connected directly to the upcoming weapons exchange programme and the children were not only to be educated on the dangers of weapons, but were also used as vehicles to influence their parents who might actually have firearms in the home.

Overall 6,000 school children turned in more than 6,000 violent toys and games in exchange for books, potted plants and tree shrubs. Schools from nine *departamentos* (political divisions similar to counties) in Mendoza province participated. Psychologists recommended against destroying the toys turned in because that could be seen as a 'violent act', instead, the plastics were melted down and incorporated into *mosaicos* or works of art to be displayed at school. In many schools, dramas were acted out, choruses sung and balloons were launched into the sky with anti-violence messages. At one point, in one particular school, all of the excitement riled up a group of school boys almost to the point of a shoving match because each little boy claimed to support one football team against another, *Boca Juniors* versus *River Plate*. When the school director noticed this he made both groups stand face-to-face, shake hands and then hug. This might sound trivial, even ridiculous, but those who know the seriousness with which Argentine fans support their football teams would see some significance in this act, however short-lived its impact may be.

In short the violent toy turn-in campaign reached a sizeable public that included 6,000 children, their teachers, parents and families. It may all sound like a trivial, feel good exercise, but several participants in the actual weapons turn-in programme that began a month later mentioned the influence of their children on their decision to turn in a gun.

Programme Implementation

Phase 1 – December 2000

Even before the programme began on 23 December 2000 several dozen people had called the toll-free hotline to inquire about the weapons they wanted to hand in and the incentives available for doing so. In essence, the MJS had made arrangements to receive 35 firearms via 'home pick-up'. The rest of the 285 firearms were turned in to pre-determined collection sites established throughout the Greater Mendoza area in community halls, MJS branch offices and at the football-soccer league headquarters. The weapons collected included revolvers up to .32 calibre, pistols up to .25 calibre, rifles and shotguns up to .38 calibre with barrels no more than 60 cm in length. One thousand seven hundred and fifteen

bullets were collected with the firearms, but were only taken as donations. This first stage of the programme only included weapons permitted for civilian use. The MJS and both chambers of the legislature committed themselves to work toward a temporary law in the near future that will permit the turn-in of all types of illegal weapons in future rounds of collection.

Table 7: Weapons accepted under the Arms Exchange Programme

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rifles, up to .22 calibre• Shotguns, single barrel up to 60 cm• Pistols, up to .25 calibre• Revolvers, up to .32 calibre• Any models manufactured prior to 1970 |
|---|

The actual collection effort lasted four days, 23-27 December 2000, and 285 firearms were surrendered for destruction in exchange for tickets to sporting events or *Vale Más* vouchers for values between \$50 and \$100. *Vale Más* are government subsidies similar to food stamps. They are redeemable in ‘mom and pop’ small businesses, but not in the large chain supermarkets. This way the provincial government helps promote the small businesses that are a dying breed with the global expansion of large international hypermarket chains. In future rounds of collection the MJS is studying installing community alarms in neighbourhoods that collectively turn in significant quantities of weapons. The community alarms are electrical systems that connect houses in a given neighbourhood and allow citizens to respond collectively to problems of crime and violence. Other incentives under consideration for future efforts include educational scholarships; public transportation passes and travel vouchers. Nineteen thousand, nine hundred dollars were spent in incentives to recover the 285 weapons turned in, resulting in an incentive cost of US\$ 70 per weapon in the first phase of the programme.

In addition to the MJS and police, other governmental and non-governmental agencies collaborated with time and resources to make the Arms Exchange Programme possible, including the Ministry of Health and Social Development and the Provincial School Board. At each site, including the mobile collection sites, a team received the weapons and assisted the individuals participating on how to choose the most appropriate form of compensation. A representative of the MJS sub-secretariat for community relations and social workers from the same ministry greeted the programme participants. A representative of the regional arms register RENAR assisted with all of the technical considerations, out of uniform, so as not to cause distrust among people suspicious of police or military official participation. The police only became directly involved in transporting weapons in plastic and metal bins collected via house to house visits and guarding the weapons collected at the pre-

established collection sites. Overall, the first round of the Arms Exchange Programme was deemed a success, not only in terms of public awareness raising, but it also exceeded expectation for weapons collected. Programme organisers were not expecting to receive more than 30 weapons total and in fact collected 285, with much more interest in participation being expressed by groups and individuals outside of the greater metropolitan area.

Because the nature of exchange was anonymous, and on a no questions asked basis, it was impossible to collect data on the individuals who surrendered weapons. However, as has been the case in other programmes 'each weapon is a conversation' and, in fact, many people choose to share their reasons for turning in a weapon. Provided below are several anecdotal examples from Phase 1:

- In one community a woman in her forties turned in a revolver and refused any compensation. A week earlier she had tried to kill her children and commit suicide.
- An old man called the toll-free number from a pay phone and the mobile collection unit went out to meet him in the shack he lived in on the outskirts of town. He was unemployed and said the food voucher he received for his gun would feed him and his wife for several months. Two more men came out of their houses to turn in guns wrapped in newspaper when they saw their neighbour turn his in.
- Another woman turned in a gun that was hidden in her house by her son who had been running around with a local gang.
- Antonio R. had threatened his wife, Susana D, both university professors, with a revolver on several occasions during domestic arguments. Susana insisted he turn in his gun as part of the programme if he wanted them to stay together. He did!
- The owner of a small store in the conflictive Godoy Cruz neighbourhood turned in his revolver and shotgun because he did not want to worry about someone being injured with his guns. He hoped his example would motivate other people nearby to do the same.
- A middle-age couple turned in several guns for tickets to see their favourite football team play; they had stored them away for many years without any intention of using them.

All of the guns turned in were crushed in a press publicly and stored in plastic tanks in the provincial police storehouse. A local company donated time and the equipment to destroy the weaponry. The

destroyed arms will be incorporated into one or more works of art, as they will be turned over to the local university art department. Local artist and head of the university art department Eliana Molinelli stated that “it is possible to create learning and beauty out of the material that was originally designed only to kill and injure (Revista Nueva, 2001).”

Phase 2 – April 2001

After weeks of media attention the second phase of the Arms Exchange Programme began on 10 April 2001. In addition to establishing a collection centre at the MJS’ Office of Community Relations in Mendoza Table 8 lists the collection centres established throughout the province.

Table 8: Dates and Locations of Phase 2 Collection Centres

April 10-11 at the Junín Cultural Centre
April 12-13/May 9-10 at Palmira
April 16-17 at the Tunyán bus terminal
April 18/May 7-8,10 at the Luján de Cuyo Municipal Building
April 16-20/May 2-4, 7-11,14-15 at the MJS Office of Community Relations, Mendoza
April 19-20 at the Villa Nueva Community Centre
April 23-25/May 2-4 at the San Rafael Railroad Museum
April 24 at the Maipú Shopping Centre
April 25-26 at the Union of Foodservice Workers, San Martín
April 27 at La Consulta in San Carlos
May 14 –16 in General Alvear
May 16-17 in La Paz
May 18 at Eugenia Bustos in San Carlos

The centres were strategically chosen to be locales already familiar to most of the community and completely disassociated with the police. The second phase brought in 2,281 firearms. The MJS spent US\$112,850 in incentives to collect 2,281 firearms resulting in an incentive cost per weapon of \$49 for the second phase and \$52 per weapon overall for the first two phases of the programme.

While weapons manufactured all over the world were turned in the overwhelming majority of weapons were produced in Argentine factories. As was mentioned earlier the town of San Rafael, a provincial municipality with a population of approximately 80,000, turned in 809 guns in four days. When programme organisers ran out of incentives after the two days originally scheduled they had to re-programme another visit to San Rafael. Other areas where public demand required return visits included the Greater Mendoza Metropolitan Area and Luján.

Provided below are several anecdotal examples from Phase 2:

- A woman with two teenage sons turned in a shotgun that she inherited from her father. “My boys are always asking for grandpa’s shotgun, wanting to see it, touch it, play with it – it is not a toy and I am scared that something will happen. We are not the kind of family that hunts, or...I don’t want my boys to think that guns are useful for anything but hurt.
- A woman turned in a revolver that her husband originally bought for personal protection. Three months earlier she came dangerously close to pulling the trigger during a domestic argument. “I realized how dangerous it was to have a gun in my home. I hid it in the house and told my husband it was stolen from my car. This was before I heard about the Arms Exchange Programme – I heard about the weapons exchange and decided to get rid of it once and for all. Now I am not so scared”.
- One man stated, “ I decided to turn my gun in because I have children. I used to hunt, but I don’t anymore. Really, the main reason is that I am afraid my kids will come into contact with a bullet.”
- “ I heard about the weapons collection on television, and brought these guns that belong to my grandfather to turn in. I think it is a good way to raise awareness for everyone about the danger of guns.” Twenty year-old Patricia de López from Mendoza City.
- A paralysed woman who was confined to a wheelchair arrived at the office of the Ministry of Justice and Security of Mendoza with a fully loaded pistol. She handed over the pistol after confiding that she had recently bought the gun with the intention of committing suicide.

The arms collected in the programme’s second phase were destroyed on 9 July 2001 in Mendoza in solidarity and unison with Small Arms Destruction Day that took in New York, and other locales simultaneously around the globe, at the beginning of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms in All Its Aspects⁴, with the sponsorship of the governments of Brazil, Mali, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The weapons were crushed with a press donated by the private sector as they were in Phase 1.

Evaluating the Arms Exchange Programme

⁴ For more information on the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms in All Its Aspects visit < <http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/CAB/smallarms/> >.

The Arms Exchange Programme has recovered more than 2,000 guns in exchange for foodstuffs, soccer tickets and other items. It has reduced the possibility of accidents and misuse in the homes of those who participated. Combined with the educational campaign in the schools it has also highlighted the relationship of guns and violence in the minds of thousands of youth and their families. In fact the Arms Exchange Programme in Mendoza influenced the Government of Argentina's position before the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms in All Its Aspects making it more progressive and providing a concrete example from the non-post-conflict developing world. Additionally, it should be noted that six other Argentine provinces: San Juan, Neuquén, Córdoba, Chubut, the capital and the province of Buenos Aires have all now adopted Mendoza's progressive new security model which contemplates the implementation of an incentivised gun amnesty programme.

Mendoza and its provincial neighbour San Juan have established a bi-provincial security commission that includes combating arms proliferation and misuse (*Diario Los Andes*, 2001). As it relates to firearms the commission has committed itself to:

- Develop provincial border controls to prevent arms and drug trafficking.
- Establish permanent, flexible information exchange mechanisms among police and provincial government institutions.
- Promote harmonisation in police and judicial reform.

The idea is to eventually expand the commission to include other provinces in western Argentina. Counterparts in the Ministry of Justice and Security of the Government of San Juan stated that they would not have been as keen to form the bi-provincial commission had they not witnessed the success of the Arms Exchange Programme.

Perhaps the only weakness the author of this report has found in the programme's development and implementation is the exclusion of people holding high-powered military weapons and explosives from participating. Of course, Mendoza is unlikely to have large quantities of AK-47 rifles and hand grenades, but other weapons excluded from the programme included 9 mm automatic pistols and .38 calibre revolvers, basically any weapons prohibited from civilian possession. It is understood that this is probably a consequence of the political and legislative agreements that made the Arms Exchange Programme possible. The main point here is that it is counterproductive to turn away people willing to turn in specific types of illegal weapons when removing them from circulation is one of the programme's primary goals. Programme organisers have committed themselves to rectifying this programme if they obtain further funding and approval to implement a third phase of the effort.

Evaluating the Arms Exchange Programme's results will be a challenge. According to Rosenfeld (1996) there are three types of programme goals to be evaluated in relation to gun buy-back programmes: immediate goals related to service delivery, intermediate goals such as public awareness and the ultimate programme goals which are re-stated below:

- Raise the price of firearms on the black market.
- Reduce the number of weapons available to criminals.
- Prevent further proliferation of firearms.
- Reduce the number of deaths, accidents and injuries.
- Reinforce the relationship between guns and violence.
- Increase community solidarity.
- Develop complementary programmes to benefit public security.

Public awareness will have to be measured through a variety of opinion polls and focus group meetings. A multi-disciplinary group including community organisations, police and public health officials must study the other more complex long-term goals. After the hundreds of programmes implemented in the United States there is no conclusive evidence as to whether or not these programmes reduce firearms proliferation and misuse, but this may underestimate other policy objectives (Laurance, 1996). Rosenfeld (1996) goes on to say that the popular appeal and social significance of gun buy-back programmes is mostly normative and ideological, part of a system of soft controls. Success is measured via strengthening community bonds, mobilising support for community leadership and calling attention to other forms of social control capable of reducing gun violence against traditional crime control methods. Romero, Wintemute, et al. (1998) in their study of a 1993 programme in Sacramento, California concluded that the potential benefits of a gun buy-back programme are more easily measured at the household rather than at the community level.

Quantifying Tangible Results

Table 9: Weapons Surrendered to the Arms Exchange Programme

<i>Type</i>	<i>Phase I</i>	<i>Phase II</i>	<i>Total</i>
Carbines	26	165	191
Shotguns	35	373	408
Pistols	40	307	347
Revolvers	184	1,436	1,620

Total	285	2,281	2,566
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Source: Ministerio de Justicia y Seguridad, Gobierno de Mendoza, Argentina, July 2001.

Even though programme organisers avoided making lofty claims and predictions about what the Arms Exchange Programme would do in terms of impact beyond cultural change and public awareness raising, sceptics in government and civil society will ask if the effort produced any tangible benefits. Hughes-Wilson and Wilkinson (2001) have put out a practical set of guidelines and simple formulas for evaluating programme impact in terms of recovery statistics, crime statistics, economic statistics, financial cost and risk rating. With the data currently available it is possible to evaluate the recovery statistics and the financial cost of the programme. Crime statistics and the effect on the black market for firearms will have to be measured over time in order to detect any impact, while the risk rating of specific weapons requires analysing the use of specific models of weapons and their frequency of use in firearms fatalities and injuries in order to calculate the number of potential lives saved.

a. Recovery Statistics

The 2,281 weapons recovered represent approximately 2.5% of all illegal and legally registered weapons circulating in Mendoza, estimated to be 95,000 (80,000 legally registered and 15,000 illegal weapons). However, the 2,281 weapons recovered represent 15% of the illegal weapons the MJS estimates to be circulating in the province a much more significant recovery percentage

b. Financial Cost

Above the average cost of incentives per weapon recovered was estimated at US\$ 52. Nevertheless, there were other costs involved including personnel salaries, security, telephone operators, publicity, supplies and logistics. The Arms Exchange Programme expended US\$ 299,107 in programme incentives and operating costs resulting in a cost of US\$ 116 per weapon recovered

Evaluation Pitfalls

There are two direct challenges for anyone attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of a given weapons collection programme. First, because they are generally anonymous in nature there is no stopping someone from outside the designated geographic area from turning in a weapon. Second, the actual number of illegal weapons is largely unknown, despite educated estimates. Additionally, there are a wide variety of other policies, aside from voluntary weapons collection programmes that also have an impact on the proliferation and misuse of firearms. Di Chiaro III (1998) and Greene (2001) believe there are a multitude of other measures required to curb the spread and abuse of firearms including:

- Strengthening enforcement of existing laws;

- Harmonising approaches with neighbouring cities, provinces and countries;
- Uniquely marking small arms and light weapons;
- Pursuing greater transparency in weapons production and trade;
- Restricting ammunition supplies;
- Building capacity in affected regions;
- Improving data collection and information sharing;
- Improving security and storage capacity among governmental entities including record-keeping and loss reporting;
- Ensuring high standards and practice among private security companies and other non-governmental bodies authorised to maintain and use weaponry;
- Adopting a clear and unambiguous legal basis for possession and use; and
- Suppressing and removing the tools of violence through raids and other operations.

Attempting to isolate the impact of a weapons collection programme, or any other of the above-mentioned policies, on the circulation and use of firearms during a given period of time is a very difficult task. Beyond these difficulties there are an even greater mix of social, political and economic variables more directly related to the root causes of arms proliferation and misuse that need to be taken into consideration as part of any programme evaluation.

Conclusion

Of course the critics were right. Few, if any, criminals turned their guns in. However, from the start the MJS stated that the goals of the Arms Exchange Programme were more cultural than anything. Although on one occasion a man came into the community centre where the weapons were being collected, placed two revolvers on the table and said “ I do not want to commit another robbery and I am turning in my guns.” Authorities later found out that the admitted criminal took the \$100 in food vouchers he received for the revolvers and donated them to a home for the handicapped that same afternoon.

The Arms Exchange Programme has far surpassed the expectation of even its most idealistic supporters, both in hard numbers and inspiring stories. When Mr. Conte and Mr. Appiolaza first began to promote the idea from within the MJS’ Office for Community Relations they became a subject of political cartoons that poked fun at what they considered to be a naïve and simplistic idea. The newspapers have since changed their editorial line, celebrating their community’s innovation and ability to set a new standard for public security in Argentina.

The Arms Exchange Programme has once again demonstrated that by focusing on the tangible tools of violence one can obtain the attention of large segments of the population, especially concerned mothers and other women. Hopefully, as a government entity, the MJS will seize the opportunity to strengthen links with community groups, non-governmental organisations and the local police and develop a broader programme of action that not only seeks reduction in firearm mortality and injury, but also looks to have an impact on Mendozans' perceptions of insecurity in their daily lives.

The Future of the Arms Exchange Programme

By mid-2001 the severe financial and economic situation in Argentina once again reached crisis levels. Government expenditures, including funding provided by the central government to provincial governments for projects such as the Arms Exchange Programme, were cut back on a grand scale. A third phase of the programme planned for August 2001 was cancelled. Enthusiasm to implement similar programmes on the part of other Argentine provinces slowed without the possibility of national funding for their efforts.

The organisers of the Arms Exchange Programme in Mendoza, however, have not given up hope nor halted their efforts. In cooperation with members of local civil society representatives from the MJS have created the non-profit, non-governmental organisation Fundación Espacios para el Progreso Social (Social Progress Foundation). Among their aims is the continuation of the Arms Exchange Programme at the micro level, organising weapons collection and destruction in individual neighbourhoods, substituting the economic support from the government with that of the private sector and churches. This time around the politicians, press and society at large are less sceptical about the programme's potential to produce positive results.

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