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Churches agency helps track weapons in Caribbean

Michael Swan Catholic News Service | Mar. 4, 2011

TORONTO -- Gun violence in Jamaica kills more people than some formally declared wars, said the director of an ecumenical program tapped by the Canadian government to help the Caribbean basin nations track the flow of weapons and ammunition.

Sixty of every 100,000 Jamaicans are murdered, with most of the deaths caused by someone with a gun, said John Siebert, executive director of Project Ploughshares, an agency of the Canadian Council of Churches that has monitored the arms trade, defense policy and wars around the world since 1976.

A three-year, $2.4 million project under Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade will allow Project Ploughshares to help CARICOM, the Caribbean regional grouping of nations, tackle the problem of gun violence.

The murder rate in the small island nation is almost nine times that of Canada's, reported *The Catholic Register*.

Siebert's organization will assist CARICOM's coordinating body for police forces to develop a computerized database to track guns and ammunition.

Ploughshares also will work with University of the West Indies professors studying the private security industry that protects almost every business in the region.

"In a lot of the larger states, you have more private security guards and officers than you have police," Siebert said.

"Demographics are part of this. It's almost a universal observation that the primary perpetrators and victims of gun violence are young men, 15-30," he explained. "But there is also something happening with the flow of guns and the Caribbean as a transit point for drugs and as a reception point for guns."

The organization played a key role in developing the Nairobi Protocol, a 2004 agreement among 12 East African nations to control the flow of small arms. That experience was a consideration in the agency winning the contract for the work in the Caribbean, it said.

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