



## WASHINGTON OFFICE ON LATIN AMERICA

*Celebrating 30 years of promoting democracy, human rights and social justice in Latin America.*

April 16, 2013

Senator Dianne Feinstein  
331 Hart Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein,

The Washington Office on Latin America is a DC-based human rights organization that focuses on the relationship between public policies and human rights. In particular, we advocate for U.S. government policies that will have a positive effect on human rights in Latin America.

Since 2006, drug-related violence in Mexico has risen dramatically. Estimates vary widely, but as many as 60,000 people have been killed. Thousands have been disappeared; reports of torture and arbitrary detention have become increasingly common. Recognizing that safety and freedom from violence are human rights, WOLA has advocated for comprehensive solutions to violence in Mexico, including judicial reform, police reform, and increased funding for civil society.

The causes of violence in Mexico are complex, but the availability of inexpensive and deadly firearms along the U.S. border plays an important role. 70 percent of firearms recovered in Mexico and submitted for tracing come from the United States; the same military-style assault weapons that have been used in massacres here in the United States are being bought in this country and illegally trafficked across the border into the hands of criminal organizations. Gun violence is a shared problem, and it demands shared solutions.

We believe that a strengthened and renewed Assault Weapons Ban is part of the solution to both violence in Mexico and Violence in the United States. Several studies have credit the Assault Weapons Ban with helping to reduce violence in the United States between 1994 and 2004, and two recent academic papers have linked the expiration of the original Assault Weapons Ban in 2004 to a subsequent rise in violence in Mexico. There is no “magic bullet” to the problem of violence, whether in Mexico or the United States, but this legislation is a step in the right direction.

For these reasons, the Washington Office on Latin America wholeheartedly endorses the 2013 Assault Weapons Ban.

Sincerely,

Joy Olson  
Executive Director