

A POLICY STATEMENT *of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America*

FIREARMS CONTROL

Adopted by the General Board

September 15, 1967

Every year an appalling number of citizens of the United States are victims of gun murders, suicides and accidents. In comparison with other Western nations, it appears that too many of these casualties reflect overly permissive firearms policies. The nation has seen an alarming tendency for extremists of all kinds to depend upon the ownership and use of firearms to determine the success of their respective causes.

The National Council of Churches reaffirms its belief in the God-given "right to life" as fundamental and sacred. In an increasingly complex and urbanized society, it is not possible to protect life and maintain public order when individuals have unregulated access to firearms.

Therefore, the General Board of the National Council of Churches records its support for strong and adequate legislation regulating the sale, transportation, ownership and use of firearms. Such legislation at the federal level should restrict the shipment and sale of firearms so as to eliminate mail-order sales to individual purchasers. It should also prohibit individual importation of all firearms with the exception of antique collectors' items. In addition, federal statutes should limit purchases of pistols to those persons over 21 years of age and of rifles to those over 18. Firearms manufacturers and dealers should be required to pay adequate federal license fees and be of reputable character and without criminal record.

Both federal and state governments should enact measures or broader existing legislation which outlaw private

possession and transportation of destructive devices such as bombs, fire bombs, bazookas, mortars, and antitank guns.

States should require a permit for the purchase, ownership, possession and use of firearms in order to complement federal action. Permit requirements ought to incorporate proper identification of applicant (by the fingerprint method if possible), and a waiting period prior to issuance so that an adequate check can be made of the prospective purchaser to verify such matters as age, absence of mental illness, and lack of a felony record.

The states should institute appropriate procedures for the registration of all firearms and their owners. Failing action on these matters by the states, the federal government should take suitable action.

Federal, state and local legislation should incorporate firearms policies which protect and sustain the public interest rather than the special interest of any private group or sector of society.

We are fully aware that firearms control legislation does not take the place of constructive measures to eliminate the causes of crime and social dis-organization. It does, however, represent a long overdue measure which might have prevented much tragic loss of life.

119 FOR; 4 AGAINST; 0 ABSTENTION.