

## **In Harm's Way: Girls in Settings of Endemic Armed Violence**

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### **UN Presentation on gun violence, women and girls**

**Samantha, Niles and Phoebe: Little Red Schoolhouse & Elisabeth Irwin High School, USA**

#### **Niles:**

Hello my name is Niles and I am 14 years old. Over the course of my life I have heard about and seen a lot of gun violence. I remember watching the 11 o'clock news at night and seeing story after story about people being shot in their community, by family members, by strangers and sometimes by turning the gun on themselves. I started wondering why everyday someone had to lose a loved one to gun violence. I also started to question why the news reporters would show this violence like it was normal and unavoidable. Don't they understand that an epidemic is happening all around us?

This has made me to want to do something about gun violence and assist communities in helping themselves solve gun violence issues. At school, part of my class was to choose a civil and human rights issue to work on. I decided to focus on gun violence as my topic. I think that freedom from guns and gun violence is a fundamental civil right and a human right. I am very glad to be here today.

#### **Samantha:**

My name is Samantha and I am 13 years of age. I am of Guyanese descent and I live in the Bushwick area of Brooklyn, New York. I was born and raised in East Flatbush. In that neighborhood growing up, activity related to gun violence was rare but it did happen. I remember times when you could hear gunshots outside at nighttime. Even though it wasn't happening to me, I remember wondering, who was getting shot? How did their family feel?

So I decided to further my knowledge about gun violence and, as an individual, think about how we can change this. As a member of the black community, I wanted to understand why so many young black people, and people of other ethnic groups for that matter, would kill each other. Through our project I have started to learn much more about what people are doing to prevent more gun violence throughout New York City. It has been very enlightening.

#### **Phoebe:**

Hi, my name is Phoebe and I am fourteen years old. My mom has been an advocate against gun violence for most of my life. For the last 10 years, since I was four, I have been taken to events to raise awareness about guns and gun violence in New York City and beyond. In a way, I have grown up in the world of gun violence prevention.

But, as I have gotten older, I have started to really understand how important this work is to people in communities where there is a lot of gun violence. Seeing mothers, grandmothers, distant relatives, and friends speak out about loved ones they have lost is very meaningful. Not only seeing their pain and suffering has been important to me, but knowing how many of these people are trying to deal with the issue of gun violence in different communities has inspired me. Meeting families and individuals that have been affected by guns has really made me understand what a huge problem gun violence is in our country and caused me to want to help raise awareness about this important issue in any way I can.

Now my group and I will present some statistics that describe gun violence in the United States. Then we will show a video of women who work to stop gun violence in their neighborhoods.

#### **Niles:**

One of the ways that women have been affected by gun violence in New York is through domestic violence. We found that according to Womensphere – Global Women's News, Views and Issues, up to 50% of female murder victims in New York State are killed by intimate partners. Many of those killings are perpetrated with guns.

#### **Samantha:**

We also found that in the United States, children are victims of gun violence in disproportionate numbers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 3,184 children and teens died from gunfire in the United States in 2006. This means one young life was lost every two hours and 45 minutes, almost nine every day, 61 every week. Some of these deaths are accidents and some are a suicide, but the majority are homicides.

#### **Niles:**

Despite the present situation of gun violence that is affecting women and children in NYC and the United States, we spoke to a few women who are working on combating gun violence in their areas. We wanted to highlight Devina Perez of the Put Down the Guns organization in the Bronx, Yvette Forehand of the Rory A Forehand Foundation, and Gloria Cruz of the Million Mom March Bronx Chapter. All of these women were personally affected by gun violence.

**Phoebe:**

The Put Down the Guns organization was founded by Devina Perez, a survivor of gun violence. She was shot at point blank range in a New York City train station, targeted as part of a gang initiation. The shooter went on to kill a man later that evening. That was the moment that changed her life. She now works to bring young people from New York's five boroughs together in peace through community-wide activities involving music and sports.

**Samantha:**

Rory A. Forehand was a victim of gun violence on February 24, 2007. Yvette Forehand, his mother and many other family members then started the Rory A. Forehand Foundation in his memory, to provide educational and recreational activities in a safe environment. They also place a stern emphasis on education and non-violence, encouraging both youth and adults to become productive individuals in their society.

**Phoebe:**

The Million Mom March was originally a huge rally in Washington, D.C. held on Mother's Day in 2000. It raised awareness about gun restrictions and encouraged more legislation to keep guns out of the hands of kids and criminals. Now, Million Mom March chapters are represented across the USA and use local support for common sense gun laws. Gloria Cruz established the Bronx Chapter of the Million Mom March after her niece was shot and killed at a Labor Day picnic.

**Niles:**

The United States is supposedly a country at peace, yet everyday people kill each other with guns. We will continue to work helping communities and organizations in New York and beyond, helping kids and adults live in non-violent ways. We hope we have inspired you today.