



GUN CRIME



Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South) (Lab): What action he is taking in response to the latest incidents of gun crime in Nottingham.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): This is the first opportunity that I and the House have had to send our condolences and our heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends of Danielle Beccan. All gun crime is a tragedy, but the death of a child is a bigger tragedy than any other.

We do not collect statistics on drive-by shootings, but the statistics we collect demonstrate a fall in the number of deaths from gun crime over the last three years, while there was a rapidly rising curve until 2001 in relation to the use of guns. That has been stabilised but it is still not acceptable. Although 77 per cent. of all gun crime ends up with no one being hurt and only 18 per cent. have some minor hurt, it is a tragedy for individuals, families and communities that even a small number of

people are killed by guns. It is, therefore, beholden on all of us to ensure that we join together to find the solutions.

Mr. Prentice: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply; we all think of the victims of those senseless, drive-by shootings. Did he see the piece in *The Observer* yesterday, quoting the Manchester police, who say that the average life expectancy of those involved in gun crime in Manchester is 24? Who are the people supplying those guns? Surely, we need to come down like a ton of bricks on those who supply illegal firearms. A sentence of five years is far too lenient.

Mr. Blunkett: We can certainly debate whether five years as a minimum is unsatisfactory, but when the House debated the matter we were dealing with a situation in which the average sentence for carrying a gun was 18 months and I think we all agreed that was outrageous and that something should be done about it. I have to point out that, for the first time ever, we have raised the minimum sentence for death from use of a gun to a minimum starting point of 30 years. Every time we bring forward proposals to the House on minimum sentences, there is conflict within, as well as between, parties about whether it is right for us to do so. The measures that we took last year, including those that we added to the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, are a starting point not an end point for getting a grip on gun crime. Gun crime deaths amount to 8 per cent. of the total murders in this country, and with the use of other weapons, including knives, we face another major challenge in protecting our communities.

Alan Simpson: I thank the Home Secretary for his kind words about Danielle Beccan, and I pay tribute to the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell), in whose constituency the family live. Will the Home Secretary, however, accept that the best way in which we can overcome the problem of guns on our streets is to stop the guns getting there in the first place and to look carefully at how those guns get through the current system? Will he also support the initiatives that are being taken by the local authority and local communities in Nottingham? One of our most urgent challenges is to give those in the communities the confidence to come forward with evidence about the holding of

guns, without putting their own lives at risk. In that context, will he send support to the local communities and local authority in Nottingham for their initiative next Friday, when, with Danielle Beccan's family, people will stand together in Nottingham in an act of solidarity and defiance against the gun crime that we face?

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