Life and Liberty

David Wheeler, Sandy Hook Promise

Thank you Mr Chair

On the morning of December 14, 2012 at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, not far from here, we lost our six year old son, Benjamin.

Ben and 19 other young children, 6 and 7 years old, were murdered by an unstable, suicidal individual who had access to a weapon that has no place in a home. Six of their teachers were also killed.

Ben was an irrepressible little boy who dreamed of being an architect, a paleontologist and a lighthouse keeper – all at once.

People always knew when Ben was around. The joy he showed in his headlong rush through life was contagious. Quick to smile, quick to laugh, eyes sparkling always with his love of everything (and a good deal of mischief).

He was an energetic spirit who filled our lives with a delightful noise. Perhaps you have a little boy or girl at home like that.

You, the diplomats assembled here, represent the governments of your countries. It is the job of your governments to implement policies to keep your citizens safe.

In my country we are unable to connect the necessary dots to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

Of course we need better mental health care, and far better mechanisms for identifying and monitoring individuals in mental distress. But mental disturbance is not specific to my country. What is particular to my country is the guns – and the ammunition.
The disturbed young man who killed my son and his classmates and teachers was carrying six 30-round high-capacity magazines, and he emptied most of them that morning. He fired 154 rounds in 11 minutes.

For the victims, it doesn’t make any difference to whom these weapons were registered. It doesn’t make any difference if they were purchased legally. What matters is that it was far too easy for another mentally unbalanced, suicidal person who had violent obsessions to have easy access to unreasonably powerful weapons.

If you are familiar with my country’s Declaration of Independence, you will know that it refers to certain inalienable rights of Americans, including the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The order of those words in that foundational phrase was not an accident.

The liberty of a person to own an assault weapon and a high-capacity magazine – and to keep them in their home – is second to the right of my son to his life.

His life.

To the right to live of all of those children and those teachers.

To the right of the lives of your children, of you, and of all of us.

We must prevent this from happening again, and the work you do this week can help.

Thank you