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Medvedev Upholds Strict Gun Laws

By Nikolaus von Twickel

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Kate Suba, Jaden Albrecht and Simran Chand mourning the school shooting victims in Connecticut on Sunday. **Mary Altaffer**

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev spoke out against relaxing gun laws in the wake of a U.S. school shooting that claimed 26 lives Friday.

"A horrifying tragedy. Incredible grief," Medvedev said Saturday in a comment on his Facebook page. "I completely agree with those who oppose the free circulation of guns. That's my position as a matter of principle."

Medvedev made the comment following responses to an earlier post in which he offered condolences to U.S. President Barack Obama over the Connecticut elementary school attack, the second-deadliest school shooting in U.S. history.

In Russia, about 4 million people — 3.5 percent of the population — legally own firearms, the use of which is limited to hunting and self-defense on private property.

Russia's relatively strict firearm regulations have recently been challenged by advocates of a U.S.-style liberalization.

The Right to Arms movement, supported by Federation Council Deputy speaker Alexander Torshin, published a report in July calling for public ownership of handguns to be legalized.

The group said Saturday that school shootings made a case for arming teachers.

"With the ongoing threat of terrorism, Russia needs a policy of forceful deterrence and to encourage guns even for teaching staff," it said on its website.

But such arguments are not popular with the governing United Russia party, which Medvedev heads.

Irina Yarovaya, a senior party figure who chairs the State Duma's Security Committee, said Saturday that after the Connecticut shooting, Russia's gun advocates should "stop making suggestions that are a real threat to society."

On Nov. 7, six people were killed and another was wounded when an employee opened fire at the Moscow offices of the Rigla pharmaceutical company.

The alleged gunman, 36-year-old company lawyer Dmitry Vinogradov, has been charged with murder and faces up to life imprisonment.

Opinion polls suggest that most Russians oppose public ownership of firearms. A survey by the independent Levada Center last year found that only 13 percent of respondents favored legalization.

Critics have argued that broadening the legal availability of handguns risked abuse due to widespread corruption in the country.

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