A Statement Against Gun Violence
The Gathering of the Alliance of Baptists in Austin, Texas on April 14, 2012

The Mission Statement of the Alliance of Baptists commits us to “Work for peace.”

From the Campaign to Stop Gun Violence:

• Every day in the United States, approximately 300 people—including 65 children and teens—are injured or killed with guns in murders, assaults, suicides, and accidents;
• Among high-income countries, the United States accounts for 80% of all firearm deaths—including 86% of women killed by firearms, and 87% of all children up to age of 14 killed by firearms;
• Gun violence disproportionately affects minority populations. For example, from 2005–2007, the firearm homicide rate among males ages 10–24 years was highest for African-Americans with 55.5 deaths per 100,000 population. The next highest rate was for Latinos (17.3);
• Gun violence drains our country of $100 billion every year in medical, criminal justice, and security costs;
• An estimated 40% of U.S. gun sales occur without a criminal background check. Requiring background checks on all private sales of firearms can help reduce illegal gun trafficking;
• While the Supreme Court has held that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to keep and bear arms, the Court has also said that “prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill” are both reasonable and constitutional.

From Heeding God’s Call:

• The gun violence that has resulted in more than 40,000 deaths and untold injuries in Mexico is being committed using guns that flow virtually unimpeded by state and federal gun laws from gun shops on the United States side of the border.
• These guns are purchased in bulk in the Southwest by those who profiting by transferring them to Mexican drug gangs. These stand-ins for drug traffickers are called ‘straw buyers’.
• The practice of straw buying is done all across our country, but is especially prevalent and damaging in the Southwest, where many gun retailers are content to irresponsibly or corruptly sell guns in volume to straw purchasers. These are the guns used to threaten, wound, maim and kill across the border.

As people of faith:

1 www.csgv.org
2 www.heedinggodscall.org
• We embrace Dr. Martin Luther King’s hope for peace and safety in our communities;
• We resist apathy to this epidemic of violence, because fear, closed doors, and separation will not end it.
• We unite to bring God’s vision of a peaceable kingdom.

We encourage Alliance of Baptists members and congregations to discern how God may be calling us to reduce gun violence in our own home communities.
• One opportunity for our members and congregations is to join Heeding God’s Call—a faith-based and grassroots movement. Another opportunity is to join in the work of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, a coalition of 48 national organizations working to reduce gun violence. The Coalition to Stop Gun Violence includes religious organizations, child welfare advocates, public health professionals, and social justice organizations.³

We—the Alliance of Baptists—add our organizational voice in support and endorsement of Heeding God’s Call’s efforts on the US/Mexico border to stop straw purchasing from taking place, by using moral, religious and public suasion to pressure gun shops to adopt a Code of Conduct intended to make the leakage of guns from any adopting gun shop far less likely.⁴

In addition, we—the Alliance of Baptists—believe it is a moral imperative to reduce death and injury from gunfire and endorse comprehensive and effective public policy measures such as those recommended by the International Association of Chiefs of Police Association and other experts. Today we endorse these efforts along with other members of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence:

• Keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous criminals and those with serious mental illness by closing gaps in the background check system, including requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales;
• Supporting policies that enhance law enforcement’s ability to combat the flow of illegal guns into our communities and enforce existing gun laws;
• Supporting new technologies to help law enforcement more effectively trace crime guns and supporting development of safety features to childproof guns;
• Encouraging local efforts to prevent and reduce gun violence;
• Urging firearms retailers to implement protocols aimed at preventing “straw purchases” and the sales of firearms to prohibited purchasers;

Fostering research to advance the public’s understanding of gun violence victimization and gun violence prevention.

³ Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America is a coalition member of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence.
⁴ Heeding’s Code of Conduct is identical to the Responsible Firearm Retailer Partnership between Walmart, our nation’s top seller of firearms, and Mayors Against Illegal Guns, a coalition of more than 600 mayors from across the country. The Code is a set of 10 non-burdensome business practices which, if followed, would severely diminish straw buying from gun stores and, consequently, the availability of guns to Mexican drug gangs and their straw buyers at said stores.