

The Phenomenon of Proliferation of Weapons

and Their Indiscriminate Use among Civilians in Deir ez-Zor

Magnitude, Effects, and Solutions

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JFL's mission is to collaboratively promote human rights, dialogue, and freedoms in Syria through documentation, advocacy, access efforts, and capacity building for communities and organizations. JFL operates on two strategic tracks, which are reviewed and adjusted every three years. These tracks focus on enhancing justice and defending human rights in Syria, and advocating for the right of Syrians to participate in political and civil life.

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INTRODUCTION

The regions controlled by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria are currently facing security challenges of different degrees. These challenges primarily involve widespread weapon use, particularly during social gatherings, as well as an increase in family and clan conflicts. Additionally, there is a rise in armed gangs conducting armed robberies and ongoing activity from ISIS cells.

This state of security disorder can be viewed as a phenomenon stemming from various factors. These factors include the region's inherent characteristics, its history of conflicts and control, the presence of multiple parties with conflicting interests within and bordering it, the nature of the current authority embodied by the Autonomous Administration and its approach to governance and security, and the tribal nature of the population.

However, the primary determinant influencing the escalation of this issue and the severity of its consequences, which include hundreds of civilian casualties annually, is the proliferation of weapons in the region, particularly in Deir ez-Zor under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Administration. These areas consistently record the highest casualties each year due to security instability and the easy access to weapons. Reports from human rights monitors indicate a continuous rise in the number of victims in Deir ez-Zor over time, highlighting a lack of effective action by the Autonomous Administration to address or mitigate this issue. Little progress has been made despite calls from local leaders in 2021 to enact strict laws restricting the possession of unlicensed weapons among the population, citing it as a threat to social harmony.¹

The monitoring reports from Justice for Life in 2022 indicate an average of about ten civilian victims per month due to indiscriminate weapon use, with a majority being women and children².

¹ Ubadah al-Sheikh, "Security chaos contributes to the proliferation of weapons in Deir ez-Zor," Enab Baladi website, February 14, 2024, available at: <https://rb.gy/1onkys>

² For more on Justice for Life reports, see:

1. Deir ez-Zor in July: Significant increase in victims of indiscriminate use of weapons, available at: <https://rb.gy/vtlxq3>
2. Victims in Deir ez-Zor.. and an attack on schools in its eastern countryside, the report covers the most prominent security events and field developments in the areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration in Deir ez-Zor for August 2022. Available at: <https://rb.gy/yjsws5>
3. Deir ez-Zor: Victims of local conflicts. Protest demonstrations continue: A brief report on the most prominent developments in the section under the control of the Autonomous Administration in Deir ez-Zor Governorate, October 2022. Available at: <https://rb.gy/300hle>

Furthermore, statistics from the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights in 2023 reveal 84 murders attributed to various motives such as theft, with 33 occurring in Deir ez-Zor. Additionally, there were 125 family and tribal disputes, including 87 in Deir ez-Zor, and 165 attacks by ISIS during the same year, with 125 targeting Deir ez-Zor specifically.³

While these figures reflect the magnitude of the security chaos in Deir ez-Zor compared to the rest of the Autonomous Administration, they also highlight the widespread proliferation and uncontrolled use of weapons, surpassing that of other areas in Deir ez-Zor under the control of the Autonomous Administration. The deployment of weapons in Deir ez-Zor can be attributed to two main factors: the accumulation of weapons resulting from the events in Deir ez-Zor since the outbreak of the uprising in 2011, and its geographical location on the Syrian-Iraqi border, which facilitated the flow of weapons in previous periods. Additionally, the narrow river separation between areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration and areas controlled by the Syrian government and Iranian militias facilitates smuggling operations, especially weapons, with the complicity of both parties controlling the riverbanks.⁴

The availability of weapons has led to a relative decrease in their prices, making them affordable for the majority of the region's population, and thus increased demand for them due to the security conditions in Deir ez-Zor, and the decline in the role of the existing authority in maintaining security. Press reports that monitored the prices of light and medium weapons in Deir ez-Zor indicate that the price of a Kalashnikov rifle ranges between 200-1500 dollars, while a machine gun (PKC), classified as an average weapon, its price ranges between 1500-3000 dollars, and the average cost of the bullet store may reach 210,000 Syrian pounds⁵.

The proliferation of weapons among civilians in Deir ez-Zor peaked during the clashes between tribal gunmen and the SDF in August 2023. Subsequently, the SDF initiated a security campaign, resulting in the confiscation of significant quantities of weapons and ammunition. This led to a temporary decrease in the public carrying and using weapons indiscriminately during social events. However, the problem resurfaced shortly after the campaign concluded, posing an

³ "Autonomous Administration" areas during 2023: About 740 people died in acts of violence... 209 crimes and tribal fighting... and 165 operations by ISIS cells, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, January 3, 2024, available at: <https://rb.gy/awp6k6>

⁴ Reham Mansour, Deir ez-Zor countryside: Weapons for those who want. For all budgets, Al-Modon, March 6, 2020, available at: <https://bitly.ws/3gfDv>

⁵ Ibid.

ongoing threat to the security and safety of the population without any sustainable or effective solutions in place⁶. In February 2024, five tribal conflicts were recorded in Deir ez-Zor.⁷

This paper aims to assess the extent of weapon distribution among civilians in Deir ez-Zor areas governed by the Autonomous Administration, along with identifying key sources and analyzing their unregulated usage and impacts on societal peace and development. It will investigate the cultural and security motivations driving civilians to obtain weapons, while also examining past experiences of weapons collection efforts by previous governing bodies in the region. The goal is to offer practical recommendations, informed by inputs from local and civil communities, for addressing the issue of weapon proliferation in a manner that aligns with the region's cultural and security context.

⁶: Idem

⁷ "Autonomous Administration" areas in February: About 55 people were killed in acts of violence... and the security chaos continues through 11 tribal fights and murders... and large-scale security campaigns against the major escalation of the ISIS cells, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, March 5, 2024, available at: <https://bitly.ws/3gkvD>

SIGNIFICANCE

After the clashes in Deir ez-Zor between tribal fighters and the SDF, the Autonomous Administration organized a conference titled "Enhancing Security and Stability", during which 42 reform pledges were issued for Deir ez-Zor. Prior to the conference, various civil society organizations had submitted proposals for dialogue, reflecting the region's reform priorities and the demands of its citizens. These initiatives emphasized the importance of civil society's role as a mediator between tribes and the Syrian Democratic Forces, ensuring the quality of dialogue outcomes and the avoidance of quotas.

Based on the above, the practical significance of this paper stems from the fact that it is part of a broader intervention project led by Justice for Life that aims to consolidate the contribution of civil society in the implementation of the reform pledges issued by the Autonomous Administration. This is done by prioritizing reform in line with the needs of the region and the demands of the people and providing technical recommendations through dialogues for the Autonomous Administration. It is related to reforming the security sector and strengthening the role of its interior committees in controlling the spread and indiscriminate use of weapons, taking into account the security situation and the social structure of the region.

In addition, this type of intervention based on the foundations of dialogue between the local community and the Autonomous Administration mediated by civil society, leads to the establishment of peaceful ways to express demands and reduces the chances of resorting to violence due to the lack of channels of communication and response. Therefore, the Autonomous Administration's serious handling of the outcomes of this dialogue may contribute to reducing tension among the people and prevent several groups and segments from resorting to extremism or forming armed groups to defend their interests instead of turning to dialogue and laws.

OBJECTIVES

Given the threat posed by the phenomenon of the proliferation of weapons among civilians and their indiscriminate use to the safety and security of the people in Der ez-Zor, and the service and security reality of the region, this paper, as one of the contributions of the security reform, aims to achieve the following:

1. Shedding light on the phenomenon of the proliferation and indiscriminate use of weapons in Deir ez-Zor, and analysing its causes, in a way that can contribute to the development of effective strategies to combat it.
2. Identifying the negative effects of the phenomenon, the extent of its reflection on the social and economic reality of the region, and its role as an obstacle to development in it. This is with the aim of forming a scientific ground that helps in developing awareness programs to reduce these negative effects.
3. Exploring the motivations behind civilian decisions regarding the acquisition of weapons, especially the cultural motivation that is related to tribal structure, security related to the conditions of the region, and the efficiency of the existing authority in maintaining security. This makes the design of plans and programs to confront this phenomenon more acceptable and compatible with the requirements of the local community.
4. Evaluating the efforts of local authorities and comparing them with the experiences and policies of previous authorities in the region in confronting the proliferation and indiscriminate use of weapons, and exploring the community's reaction to these policies and the extent of its response to them.
5. Providing practical recommendations that can be considered technical implementation mechanisms, in line with the recommendations issued by the Stabilization Conference within the framework of security reform on the one hand, and the requirements and culture of the local community on the other. It contributes to the development of sustainable and effective policies to combat the proliferation of weapons and achieve stability and societal peace in the region.
6. Assessing the relevance of the results to the demands and needs of the community by presenting them to its representatives and verifying that they respond to those demands.

7. Directing the findings of detailed technical dialogues directly to the Autonomous Administration to achieve the best implementation of technical recommendations.
8. Supporting and advocating for detailed recommendations to international actors, including U.S. agencies operating in Syria, to promote reform implementation and stabilization.

DATA SOURCES

To achieve the objectives of the paper, two types of data will be relied upon:

- I. Primary data was gathered from three focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted between January 28 and February 25, 2024. These sessions took place in various locations: the **Kasra** area in the western region of Deir ez-Zor, the **Hajin** area in the eastern countryside, and the Al-Busaira area in the northern part of Deir ez-Zor. This distribution ensured representation from across the governorate's countryside under the control of the Autonomous Administration. Each session included eight community representatives, such as notable figures and tribal elders, as well as representatives from local civil society organizations and internal committees of the Autonomous Administration. Gender representation was taken into consideration in each session.
- II. Secondary sources include human rights reports from organizations such as "Justice for Life" that monitor victims of indiscriminate weapon use and security chaos in the Deir ez-Zor region, along with reports from other human rights organizations and observatories. Additionally, press materials and reports discussing the proliferation of weapons among civilians in Deir ez-Zor were examined. These reports and press materials formed the basis for the discussion topics during the FGDs.

FINDINGS

Through the in-depth discussions that took place in the three FGDs, the following conclusions were reached:

The First Theme: Monitoring The Phenomenon Of The Proliferation Of Weapons And Their Indiscriminate Use Among Civilians In Deir Ez-Zor

This theme aims to reach an approximate estimate of the size of the proliferation of weapons, the age groups that carry these weapons, the most important sources of obtaining them, and the negative effects of this phenomenon on the social and economic levels in the region.

- 1) In Deir ez-Zor areas under the Autonomous Administration, weapons are extensively prevalent, as indicated by representatives from civil society and local communities participating in the sessions. According to their accounts, nearly every household in the area possesses one or more weapons. In terms of variety, the majority of weapons in civilian possession are combat-oriented, ranging from Kalashnikov rifles to medium-grade weaponry.

There are no official statistics available regarding the exact number of weapons present in Deir ez-Zor. Representatives from the Interior Committees participating in the sessions deemed such a census nearly impossible due to the widespread distribution of weapons among civilians, the presence of armed gangs and ISIS cells, and the ongoing influx of weapons from areas controlled by the Syrian government. However, on average, they estimated that 50-75 per cent of the population in Deir Ezzor possesses one or more weapons.

- 2) Participants from the local community representatives in the three sessions concurred that the phenomenon of widespread weapon distribution in the region is unprecedented in terms of the quantity, variety, and public visibility of weapons. They attributed this development to the region's experiences since 2011 and the prevailing security chaos. Previously, the acquisition of weapons was primarily for self-defence purposes and was discreet, limited to individual firearms such as pistols and hunting rifles, with Kalashnikov rifles being extremely rare.

- 3) According to observations made by participants in the sessions and representatives of the Interior Committees, the phenomenon of weapon proliferation in Deir ez-Zor is notably more pronounced and severe compared to other areas under the control of the Autonomous Administration, even those sharing similar social/tribal structures. While Interior Committee representatives attributed this difference to the presence of various external parties seeking to instigate chaos in the region, some community representatives believed that the widespread distribution of weapons was a result of deliberate security negligence by the authorities. They suggested that this laxity was aimed at consolidating authority under the guise of security chaos. The proliferation of weapons varies in terms of quantity and type across different areas within Deir ez-Zor. Representatives from local and civil communities noted that the eastern countryside experiences a higher density and variety of weapons compared to other regions.
- 4) The acquisition of weapons in Deir ez-Zor is not limited to a particular age group; however, the visible carrying and uncontrolled use of weapons tend to be more prevalent among individuals aged between 20 and 30 years. Civil society representatives highlighted during the sessions the notable presence of weapons among minors as well. Furthermore, they expressed concerns about the dangers associated with young people of this age group having access to weapons, which extends beyond civilians to include military personnel affiliated with the SDF. These individuals have been observed misusing weapons during public events and escalating personal disputes with civilians, potentially leading to armed confrontations. Several incidents were cited during the sessions as examples of such occurrences.
- 5) In Deir ez-Zor, acquiring weapons is not considered a challenge, as noted by a representative from the local community who emphasized that the issue lies not in the availability of sources but in the "financial liquidity" of individuals. This sentiment was echoed by other participants. Arms dealers are well-known within each area and conduct their operations almost openly, a fact acknowledged by representatives of the Interior Committees. The sources of weapons held by dealers are diverse and abundant. They include the significant quantities of weapons amassed during the region's prolonged state of militarization over the past decade. Additionally, there is an active smuggling network across the river from areas controlled by the Syrian government, which contributes to the influx of weapons. Representatives from the Interior Committees indicated that the

Syrian government is also involved in pumping weapons into the region, to undermine its security and stability.

- 6) Participants in the sessions highlighted several negative effects stemming from the proliferation of weapons, which pose threats to civil and societal peace while hindering development in certain areas. The key negative effects, as classified by the participants, include:

Psychological Effects

Caused by manifestations of the proliferation of weapons in public places, and the firing of indiscriminate bullets on occasions. These effects are particularly noticeable in children through panic and bedwetting at the sound of gunfire, a very common condition according to the participants in the sessions. One of the teachers participating in the focus sessions added an important observation regarding the psychological vulnerability of children to armed manifestations, which is that he noticed that some children in his school draw weapons in the drawing class, which is a result of the war, as he considers that this was not usual before it.

The psychological effects also include adults, with participants reporting several miscarriages of women due to indiscriminate and heavy gunfire, emphasizing the general fear that families experience when they hear gunfire.

Loss of Lives and Threat to Civil Peace

The phenomenon of weapon proliferation and their indiscriminate use across different regions of Deir ez-Zor results in civilian casualties. This occurs through incidents such as indiscriminate shooting at weddings and events or during armed conflicts within families and tribes. Participants in the three FGDs recounted numerous incidents of casualties witnessed in their respective areas as a result of these occurrences.

Participants further noted that the proliferation and easy availability of weapons has resulted in a significant rise in cases of forced firearm theft in the region, often perpetrated by organized gangs. Moreover, there has been an escalation in clan and family conflicts, with participants expressing concern that any minor dispute between individuals could potentially escalate into a violent confrontation involving weapons, leading to casualties. This observation is corroborated by the aforementioned reports.

Economic Impacts and Development Delays

The proliferation of weapons and their indiscriminate use leads to economic consequences that can be categorized into two levels, as noted by participants in the FGDs. At the **individual level**, this includes losses incurred by individuals and families, such as damage to private property and the loss of livestock due to stray projectiles during events or conflicts. Moreover, the prevalence of weapons and security instability compels many individuals to prioritize acquiring weapons, diverting resources away from other essential family needs.

At the **regional level**, pertaining to development, civil society representatives in the three FGDs highlighted that the proliferation of weapons within a region impacts its standing with donors, consequently impeding access to development projects funded by local and international civil society organizations. They provided examples of organizations relocating to safer areas due to threats faced by their staff, and instances where certain regions lost vital projects, such as a blood bank, due to the prevalence of weapons.

Local community representatives highlighted that the proliferation of weapons and ensuing security chaos serve as a pretext for the Autonomous Administration to withhold development and improvement of services in Deir ez-Zor compared to other areas under its control, using the security situation as justification.

The Second Theme: Motives for Possessing Weapons and Not Giving Them up

The theme aimed to understand the cultural and security factors behind the desire of civilians in Deir ez-Zor to possess weapons and not give them up:

Tribal and Cultural Heritage

- A. The tribal and social structure and cultural heritage significantly influence the inclination of people in Deir ez-Zor to procure weapons. Representatives from the local community,

including notable figures and tribal leaders, emphasized that traditional folklore reflects a reverence for weapons within society, with ownership being a source of pride in tribal culture. However, the current widespread availability of weapons, their visibility in public spaces, and their indiscriminate use are not solely attributed to culture but are also linked to the prevailing security situation. Representatives from civil society expressed the view that this heritage originated during a period before the establishment of a centralized state when clans and tribes engaged in warfare without regulatory authority. During this time, the security of the clan and its members relied on possessing weapons. As circumstances evolved and the state's laws began to regulate the acquisition and use of weapons, their significance became more symbolic, and their usage became limited and controlled. However, with the region's prolonged security challenges and the absence of a capable governing authority, tribal solidarity and individual protection have resurfaced, leading to a resurgence in the importance of weapons.

- B. The tribal heritage can be considered a factor that may contribute to the resistance to the delivery of weapons in the region, as it is considered deficient in the right of the individual, according to the representatives of the local community, especially in light of the security conditions in the region. According to elders, residents may prefer to hide or even bury weapons rather than hand them over because they do not trust the authorities' ability to protect them.
- C. The tribal heritage could potentially contribute to reluctance in surrendering weapons in the region, as it is perceived to inadequately safeguard individual rights, according to representatives from the local community, particularly given the prevailing security conditions. Elders indicated that residents might opt to conceal or even bury weapons rather than relinquish them due to distrust in the authorities' capability to ensure their protection.
- D. Although tribal culture influences the acquisition of weapons in the region, it also serves as a factor in controlling their use. Elders and representatives from civil society discussed in the FGDs the constructive role played by notable figures and tribal leaders in resolving conflicts peacefully, thus averting the need for weapon usage. Additionally, civil committees established by these figures, alongside religious leaders and members of civil society, contribute to influencing and mitigating instances of indiscriminate shooting during events.
- E. The tribal culture and the significance of weapons within it can pose challenges for the "interior committees," as noted by representatives of these committees. They stated that they are sometimes compelled to turn a blind eye to instances of weapon carrying and usage on

certain occasions. Representatives provided examples, such as overlooking the unauthorized carrying of weapons by individuals seeking revenge and the failure to hold accountable those who engage in shooting at weddings, often due to the mediation of tribal sheikhs.

Security Conditions of the Region

The years of conflict in Deir ez-Zor have resulted in significant security implications, particularly concerning the proliferation of weapons among civilians. Throughout the three FGDs, participants discussed the most significant effects stemming from these implications, aiming to gauge their correlation with gun ownership and the potential reluctance to relinquish weapons due to the persistent presence of these security factors. Participants were also requested to prioritize these effects based on their significance as motivations for acquiring weapons. The responses were as follows:

- **The perception of instability within the status quo (Autonomous Administration)** and the potential threat of attacks from other factions such as the Syrian regime and Iranian militias are regarded by participants in the three FGDs as the primary motivation for acquiring and retaining weapons. This stems from the region's stance against the Syrian government since the onset of the uprising, along with the presence of numerous individuals wanted by Syrian security services and defectors within the region. Additionally, there is apprehension regarding the potential recurrence of repressive measures and violence seen in areas previously controlled by the Syrian government and Iranian militias, should control revert to the Syrian government in the region.
- **The presence of gangs that practice looting**, which increases the need for individuals to defend themselves and their property.
- The attendees at the FGDs highlighted **the activity of ISIS cells in the region**, particularly their involvement in assassinations. Several examples were cited of individuals who survived assassination attempts because they were armed. What stood out in their assessment of this factor was that ISIS in the region has now become a broad umbrella under which various parties commit crimes. This includes cells associated with the Syrian government and gangs that terrorize civilians under the guise of affiliation with ISIS.
- **Individuals feel a sense of security inadequacy from the relevant authorities in dealing with ISIS cells and gangs**. This prompts them to take security measures into their own hands by carrying weapons to defend themselves and their families.

During the discussion on this point, many representatives of civil society and local society focused on the existence of a link between some gangs, arms and drug smugglers, and members of the military and security services, especially the former military council, which increases the people's distrust of the security services, in addition to their negligence, which some participants considered intended to maintain security.

Cultural Factors

When comparing cultural factors to security considerations as motivations for participants in the FGDs, security factors were unanimously prioritized. Some representatives of civil society noted that despite their tribal background, they had not previously acquired weapons. However, they acknowledged acquiring weapons during the recent period due to the prevailing security chaos.

Third Theme: The Region's Experiences with Weapons Collection or Forced Disarmament

This theme aimed to explore the strategies employed by successive authorities in the region (the Syrian government, ISIS, and the Autonomous Administration) to address the proliferation of weapons among civilians. It also sought to assess the effectiveness of these strategies and evaluate their acceptance among the population.

The Syrian Government

According to the majority of participants in the FGDs, what set apart the Syrian government's tenure in managing weapons was:

- **Strict Laws and Penalties:** Despite widespread corruption in the security services, the Syrian government imposed strict laws prohibiting the carrying of weapons without a license and providing harsh penalties for violators, including imprisonment and fines.
- **Restriction of Licenses:** This makes it difficult to obtain a license to carry weapons, and the presence of weapons that cannot be licensed, such as (Kalashnikovs).
- **Enhanced Security Measures:** control of arms trade and combating smuggling, and capacity to intervene. In the case of clan fights in which weapons are used and security is imposed. Participants also pointed out that these security measures, although generally repressive, were able to create a state of safety with which citizens do not need to acquire or use weapons. The majority of the attendees agreed that these measures and laws,

although they were aimed at protecting the security of the ruling regime from their point of view, were effective in limiting the proliferation and use of weapons. Participants held differing views regarding the applicability of these regulations and laws in the areas under the Autonomous Administration. Some believed that such laws associated with dictatorial authority were outdated and no longer acceptable, suggesting that existing laws were adequate but not rigorously enforced. Others believed that such mechanisms were necessary and could be reinstated in the region.

"The Islamic State" (ISIS)

Participants in the FGDs noted that during the "Islamic State" control period, significant operations were conducted to confiscate weapons, and severe punishments were imposed on individuals found carrying weapons or associated with former armed factions. These actions were carried out through violent and intimidating means. Residents were compelled to adhere to these policies, as they faced immediate punishment if found in possession of weapons.

Most participants believed that while the measures implemented during the "Islamic State" control period were reluctantly accepted by the people and temporarily addressed the region's security and stability issues stemming from weapon chaos, they were deemed cruel and arbitrary. However, they also considered it impossible to reintroduce these methods.

Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria:

Responses regarding how the Autonomous Administration would address the proliferation of weapons among civilians varied among participants. Some community representatives noted the absence of laws specifically prohibiting the carrying of weapons, while others acknowledged the existence of such laws but highlighted their selective enforcement, particularly during security campaigns. Additionally, some attendees believed that tribes address the issue of weapon proliferation and usage through their notables.

Civil society representatives predominantly emphasize the presence of laws aimed at curbing weapon proliferation in the region. However, they highlight the challenge lies in implementing these laws, particularly in the Deir ez-Zor region, and the effectiveness of those responsible for enforcement. Most attendees expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate implementation of these laws, attributing it to the lack of proper execution, which perpetuates the stagnant security situation in the region without significant improvement.

Participants from the Interior Committees in the sessions acknowledged the shortcomings of current laws and their enforcement concerning the proliferation of weapons among civilians. They indicated plans for the forthcoming issuance of new legislation aimed at regulating weapon possession and prescribing penalties for offenders. This initiative is expected to bolster the effectiveness of laws and combat the proliferation of weapons more effectively. Additionally, they highlighted efforts by the Autonomous Administration to confiscate weapons and conduct security patrols, particularly in the eastern countryside of Deir ez-Zor. This aligns with observations made by civil society representatives regarding the enforcement of laws on weapon possession primarily during security campaigns.

They also mentioned that their security personnel are relatively inexperienced and lack sufficient qualifications to effectively manage a complex issue like the proliferation of weapons. However, they emphasized their commitment to addressing this challenge by providing training and enhancing the qualifications of their personnel through relevant academies.

Roles of the Local Community (Clans/Tribes) and Civil Society

During the FGDs, participants were polled regarding the involvement of tribes and civil society in addressing the issue of indiscriminate weapon proliferation, as well as their evaluation of the effectiveness of these roles.

Opinions regarding the role of tribes were diverse. While some participants believed that tribal elders, due to their possession of significant weapon stockpiles, could not effectively control weapon proliferation, others emphasized that the responsibility for enforcing laws rested with security services rather than clans. Additionally, some participants highlighted the influential role of notables within society, suggesting that their ability to influence could be more impactful in curbing weapon proliferation than that of security forces. However, they emphasized the need for supportive authority to assist notables in their efforts.

During the FGDs, variations in opinions were observed, attributed to regional disparities in the scale of weapon proliferation phenomenon and the corresponding status and roles of tribal elders.

As for the role of civil society organizations, the majority of participants pointed out that this role is still timid and limited in the framework of raising awareness of the dangers of the proliferation and indiscriminate use of weapons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following in-depth discussions across the three FGDs regarding the proliferation and uncontrolled use of weapons in Deir ez-Zor, the ensuing recommendations reflect the suggestions put forth by civil and local society representatives concerning the necessary measures to address the phenomenon and attain security and stability in the region.

Security Level

- A. In light of the volatile security environment in Deir ez-Zor under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Administration, as outlined in the findings, it is imperative for the administration to escalate its endeavors aimed at tackling the urgent security challenges in the region. This measure is crucial for establishing societal security and fostering lasting peace by addressing the underlying causes of the issue.
- B. Based on the recommendations provided by local community and civil society representatives, the majority of residents associate weapon possession with tribal customs and the necessity of ensuring personal and familial security amidst the prevailing security instability, wherein security services have struggled to effectively address these challenges in the region. Consequently, any initiative by the administration to counter the proliferation of weapons should adopt a gradual approach, aligning with efforts to address the region's security issues. It should prioritize meeting the demands of the population by combating the public display of weapons and their indiscriminate use during events, without resorting to large-scale collection or disarmament campaigns, but rather through comprehensive security measures and targeted house raids.
- C. To curb the influx of weapons into the region, efforts should focus on tightening border control with areas governed by the Syrian government and other regions, as well as enhancing measures to combat arms smuggling. This includes intensifying security operations to apprehend arms dealers and imposing stricter legal penalties associated with arms trafficking, with the aim of eradicating this phenomenon.
- E. Regulating the behavior of military personnel from the SDF regarding the use of weapons, whether on or off duty, particularly in public settings among civilians or during events, is essential. This can be achieved by imposing stricter penalties for the indiscriminate use of weapons and ensuring effective accountability for offenders.

- G. Enhancing the training and qualifications of internal security personnel is essential to effectively address the issue of weapon proliferation and its indiscriminate use by civilians.

Legal and Legislative Level

- A. It is crucial to finalize the legal framework governing the possession and usage of weapons, which includes imposing penalties and deterrent fines for violators. This entails establishing regulations regarding the age groups authorized to carry arms and enforcing stricter criteria for licensing weapons, ensuring they are only accessible to select civilians under specific circumstances.
- B. Increasing the severity of legal implications and fines associated with unauthorized weapon possession and the indiscriminate discharge of firearms in public spaces and gatherings.

Level of Enforcement of the Law

Civil society and local representatives emphasized in the FGDs that a key issue lies in the lack of rigorous and effective enforcement of laws, even if they are stringent. Therefore, any strategy aimed at addressing the proliferation of weapons must prioritize ensuring the strict implementation of laws and regulations by military checkpoints and interior committees, without making exceptions based on social structure.

Strengthening Partnership and Spreading Awareness

- A. Shifting the focus onto the proliferation and indiscriminate use of weapons as a matter of public concern to bolster collective consciousness and spur societal endeavors in tackling this issue. This involves fostering collaboration with the local community, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, and educational institutions to disseminate laws and raise awareness about the significance of regulating weapon use and the hazards posed by their proliferation.
- B. Enhancing the endeavors of civil society entities in increasing awareness regarding the perils associated with weapon proliferation, and broadening their role as intermediaries between the Autonomous Administration and the local community to facilitate dialogue channels concerning the community's issues and demands. This aims to ensure the peaceful expression of these demands and prevent resorting to violence due to communication and response channels being obstructed within the administration.

- C. Disseminating knowledge about regulations pertaining to weapon possession and usage control via traditional media outlets and various social media platforms.
- D. Backing community peace initiatives carried out by civil society organizations and dignitaries, while broadening the scope of reconciliation committees to mitigate the likelihood of family and tribal disputes escalating into violent conflicts involving weapons within the region.