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**Curtailing the Violence in Israel's Arab Society: Comparison of the Plans Drafted by the Arab Leadership and the Israeli Government**

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**Crime and violence in Arab society in Israel continue to exact a heavy toll: 113 Arab citizens were killed in the past year, and state and local authorities are called to deal with the challenge. On the table there are two plans for curtailing the crime wave: one drawn by the Arab leadership and the other by a team of directors of government ministries. A comparative analysis of these plans reveals that the former emphasizes the state's responsibility for the acute crisis but also highlights socio-economic measures that could help address it. The latter plan focuses on police enforcement, but its implementation has been delayed, ostensibly due to the absence of a state budget. The article presents recommendations for dealing with the challenge in the short and medium terms, centered on police intelligence at the forefront of enforcement, cooperation between the state and Arab society and its leaders, and the establishment of local organs to address the roots of the problem.**

Crime and violence are among the most serious crises that Arab society in Israel has faced in the last two decades. In 2020, 113 Arab citizens, including 17 women, were killed -- an increase of about 90 percent in five years. Arab citizens, one-fifth of Israel's population, account for more than half of all victims of violence. Although mostly law-abiding, Israel's Arab citizens are beset by a high level of crime, six times higher than among Palestinians in the West Bank. Most of the murders were committed with firearms in the context of clashes between criminals and gangs. In 2020, as in the past, police solved only about 20 percent of the homicide cases.

In the last two years, two plans were drawn up to tackle the crisis:

- a. "The Strategic Project for Combating Violence and Crime in Arab Society," formulated by the leadership of the Arab society: the High Follow-Up Committee and the National Committee of the Heads of Arab Localities.
- b. "Recommendations of the Executive Committee for Dealing with Crime and Violence in the Arab Society" – a government plan formulated in consultation and cooperation with representatives from the Arab sector, including heads of local authorities.

Both plans are based on the premise that the police alone will not be able to overcome the challenge. Both offer a multi-system approach that in addition to policing and enforcement also addresses broad social aspects.

### **The Arab Plan**

The leadership of the Arab society does not ignore its responsibility for the crisis, but states that the primary responsibility for the security of the citizens lies with the state. In this spirit, the "Strategic Project to Combat Violence and Crime in Arab Society" was presented in December 2019. It was formulated by Prof. Assad Ghanem of the University of Haifa with the assistance of the Palestinian Authority-affiliated Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), along with Palestinian businessmen. The plan presents, for the first time, a vision for addressing the root cause of "civil terrorism." It is based on the principle of "collective impact" and aims at developing social responsibility and rebuilding civil society through cooperation between the community, local government, and the state. The plan emphasizes education, a discourse of tolerance, and the creation of social deterrence against violence through societal condemnation of criminal organizations and reporting of offenders to the police. The plan also proposes projects for parental involvement in children's education and the mobilization of the Arab media to discredit crime. The plan is structured as a master framework that must be adapted to the characteristics of each locality and calls for funding for its implementation, including from Arab citizens.

The plan does not propose concrete solutions for dealing with criminal organizations, assuming that these come under the responsibility of the national police. However, it recommends that community members participate in addressing the issues of protection money, the black market, and organized crime through grassroots committees, conciliation committees, religious figures, and civil society organizations, along with local authorities.

### **The Government Plan**

The heightened violence and crime in the Arab community and its spread to other sectors of Israeli society have spurred the government to frame it as an issue of national security that extends beyond its immediate consequences for the Arab society. The government's recommendations were formulated in the Prime Minister's Office, in collaboration with representatives of the Arab society and in consultation with representatives of the Committee of Heads of Arab Authorities. In November 2020, the Prime Minister presented the plan to the Knesset.

The plan recognizes the socio-economic gaps between the Arab and Jewish societies and the failure thus far of the state's enforcement organs to deal with the increasing crime in

the Arab sector. It proposes distinguishing between responses to violence, mainly through prevention, and to organized crime, which should focus on four major spheres: 1) heightening police intelligence monitoring, and eliminating criminal organizations 2) preventing the intrusion of criminal organizations into local authorities 3) strengthening economic-social-community infrastructures 4) developing management and monitoring mechanisms for the plan's implementation. The plan includes proposals for curtailing offenses such as the illegal arms trade, the gray market, and protection money. Some of these measures would require legislative amendments to increase penalties, economic enforcement, and strengthened enforcement by technological means, as well as broaden recruitment of Arab police officers and increase the number of police stations.

Similar to the Arab plan, the government's framework points to a direct link between high unemployment among young Arabs and their involvement in crime. Like the Arab plan, it suggests solutions for job promotion, informal education subsidies, and education frameworks for at-risk youth. The government plan also addresses deep societal problems, including housing and socio-economic infrastructure, asserting that they should be dealt with by the relevant government ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice, and especially by the Prime Minister's Office's Authority for the Economic Development of the Arab, Druze, and Circassian Sectors.

### **Differences between the Two Plans**

The Arab plan places the main responsibility on the state for dealing with the wave of crime and violence, presented as the result of racist and marginalizing state policies. It also cites internal social factors that weaken the authority of adults, including the disintegration of the tribal structure. Other obstacles are the cultural-political identity crisis, the patriarchal nature of society, the decline of moral values, and the conduct of Arab politicians who talk big about the need to fight crime while engaging with criminal gangs.

The issue of building more police stations in Arab localities seems to be a matter of controversy among Arab local leaders. Some fear they will be used against the local residents or for gathering intelligence about political activities. This reservation is not shared by all the heads of the municipalities or the members of the Joint List, some of whom call for more enforcement activities and even for activating the Israeli Security Agency in the war on crime. There is, however, widespread opposition to the inclusion of young Muslims in the police force due to the possible inherent tension among such recruits between conducting Israel's national police activities and their likely pro-Palestinian national sentiment.

The government's plan suggests that in order to counter threats of extortion, municipal mayors might have the option of issuing public tenders through regional cluster mechanisms. Yet the plan disapproves of reconciliation committees that are traditionally used in the Arab society to resolve local conflicts. The plan does not favor voluntary arms collection campaigns due to their perceived ineffectiveness. Instead, it calls for tougher penalties and the use of other tools in the criminal code against the suspected possession illegal weapons. It also proposes concrete steps to prevent the transfer of weapons from the West Bank by closing gaps along the security fence and strengthening supervision at the crossings.

### **Feasibility of the Government Plan**

The government plan, designed to serve as a basis for a multi-year plan, has been agreed upon by government ministries and is likely also accepted by many representatives of the Arab public. The estimated cost of implementing the plan is about NIS 2.5 billion over five years.

On February 3, 2021, the Prime Minister announced that he intends to promote organizational measures for the plan's implementation, including: establishment of a ministerial committee that he will head; appointment of a project manager to deal with violence in Arab society; establishment of a team headed by the National Security Council "to prevent the proliferation of weapons"; establishment of a new police unit to eliminate Arab crime, including the creation of 30 new job openings at a cost of NIS 50 million; and an investment of NIS 100 million for the construction of new police stations, fire stations, and multi-purpose welfare installations. So far, no government decision has been made on these proposals.

The government has not yet adopted this blueprint, which has thus not been translated into a detailed and budgeted plan; its implementation would require a multi-year budget. Furthermore, some of the plan's proposals for increasing enforcement may require Knesset legislation. In the immediate term, therefore, the government's plan cannot achieve a significant reduction in crime within the Arab society.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The government plan includes the state's recognition of the importance of dealing with crime and violence in the Arab society and its responsibility in this effort. The Arab document as well signals a transformation: while blaming government policies, it does not relieve the Arab sector of partial responsibility, does not settle for verbal rhetoric, and seeks to assume an active part in curtailing crime. The dialogue between the representatives of Arab society and the government is an important step forward in

formulating an understanding on what is required as a basis for cooperation in reducing crime.

There are, however, significant obstacles to the implementation of the government plan, especially due to the absence of a state budget, the unstable political-governmental reality, and the distrust among significant segments of the Arab public of the intentions of the political echelon, particularly during recurring Knesset elections.

Given the growing severity of crime and violence in the Arab sector, it is necessary to accelerate steps to increase enforcement against crime in the immediate term:

1. In the field of illegal weapons:
  - a. Completing and implementing the police planning process for the prevention of theft of weapons from IDF bases
  - b. Increasing the police's initiative of seizing illegal arms in the Arab society
  - c. Reducing the transfer of weapons from the West Bank.
2. Public support of the police, along with strengthening the operational intelligence capacities of the police force as a crucial factor in reducing violent crime.
3. New police stations in the Arab localities and expansion of existing stations, while easing public opposition by improving the performance of existing stations.
4. Notwithstanding opposition to this idea, increased efforts to recruit young Arab men and women to the ranks of the police.

All of these measures will not address the problem without attention to deep societal issues. To this end, in-depth programs, most of which exist in government ministries and local authorities, must be promoted, along with the development of local mechanisms to mobilize the community itself to curtail violence, in cooperation with local authorities and civil society actors. In addition, it is necessary to expand the integration of young Arabs in employment and increase close support of at-risk youth, as well as strengthen local authorities and their enforcement mechanisms. A condition for all these is the allocation of the budgets required for the implementation of government plans, and the maximum integration of Arab society representatives in the planning and the implementation processes.