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Put an end to violence

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Despite the many illegal weapons among the Arab population, the police seem helpless and the Arabs of Israel are being abandoned

It was recently reported that a special force of about 70 Border Patrol policemen entered Taibeh to put an end to the violence that has exacted a heavy toll of deaths, injuries and property damage. This came in response to angry demonstrations organized by residents of the city, who demanded that police immediately intervene to restore order and security for the residents. The Border Patrol's intervention will be judged according to its results: Is it intended to create a false impression and deception, or are the police finally taking responsibility, addressing their failures and putting an end to violence and the use of firearms.

The case of Taibeh is only an example, but it illustrates the severity of the situation and the prevalence of one of the problems plaguing the Arab population – the rise in violence and the use of weapons. This phenomenon threatens the population's social stability, emotional well-being and security. The reasons and roots of this phenomenon should be studied and an organized work plan should be developed to effectively address it.

Arab society suffers from low socio-economic status, institutional repression, rising unemployment and poverty, a dearth of employment opportunities, a low standard of education, a collapse of local government and a lack of local leadership. But the central and critical factor is the spread of "legal" and "illegal" weapons. The weapons are usually in the hands of two population groups: criminals, who are involved in drug deals and other crime, and people connected with the establishment. The government and police are not doing enough to collect the weapons, which constitute an immediate threat to the lives of the residents. Research conducted by the Center for the Study of Crime, Law and Society at the University of Haifa and published last month indicates that 75% of the Arab citizenry believe that an effective measure for reducing violent crime would be to institute stricter conditions for granting gun licenses.

The police are not demonstrating a desire to eradicate violent incidents. Due to the helplessness of the police, many people in the Arab population believe that the police condone and even encourage this phenomenon in order to reinforce the negative image of Arab society as being violent. The initiative for community policing, which began a number of years ago, has not helped. On the contrary, since this initiative began, the violence and use of arms has increased.

To make things worse, the police officers themselves are quick to pull the trigger – when it comes to Arab citizens. In addition to the 13 civilians killed in the October 13th events, the police have killed nearly 20 Arab citizens since then. In most of these cases, no indictments were made. This reality harms the public's trust in the police.

There are things that can be done to reduce the violence and the use of weapons, and the police should place this issue at the top of their list of priorities. The police should focus their efforts on eradicating crime and collecting weapons instead of displaying hostility toward the Arab public and its leaders. Finally, the government should include the leaders of the Arab public and the Arab mayors in planning and implementing this action, and in developing an educational program and an information campaign to encourage anyone who has a weapon to hand it over to the police.

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