



A Systemic Plan is Needed to Eradicate Crime in Arab Society

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Serious violence in Arab society is acquiring the dimensions of a social disaster whose serious ramifications have long ceased to be confined solely to the Arab population.

A study by the Knesset Research and Information Center into the level of serious violence in Arab society in the period 2014-2017 confirms the gravity of the situation: 64% of murder victims in Israel are Arabs; and Arabs account for 57% of murder suspects and 53% of the victims of attempted murder; half of suspects of grievous bodily harm; one-third of victims of assaults on public servants; and 82% of suspects of carrying or holding illegal weapons. All this despite the fact that Arabs constitute just 20% of the total population of the State of Israel.

The grim reality reflected in these figures is primarily the result of the following factors:

1. **Chronic under-policing:** Decades of under-policing reflect the lack of attention by the Israel Police to the problem of crime within Arab society. This phenomenon includes weak enforcement, a slow response to calls for help, a low rate of solving crimes, and the limited allocation of police staff positions and resources to combating crime and violence within Arab society. There is also a simultaneous phenomenon of over-policing, reflected in the disproportionate use of violence against Arab citizens and the use of quasi-military practices against this population, both in the context of criminal incidents and in responding to protests and disturbances. The tension between under-policing and over-policing essentially reflects the manner in which the Israel Police regards Arab citizens of Israel in both contexts: in the civilian context, in which the police is supposed to provide efficient policing services, and in the security context, in which it sees these citizens (or some of them) as a potential threat to the regime and to public order. This contradiction between the two functions of the police toward Arabs creates an extremely profound sense of mistrust between the two sides, seriously impeding the police's ability to serve Arab citizens and to combat crime in their communities.

2. **Poverty and unemployment** – the connection between economic deprivation and difficulty and crime is recognized around the world, including Israel. Half of all Arab families in Israel are defined as poor, and almost two-thirds of Arab children live below the poverty line in Arab communities whose residents are situated at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Many of these communities face acute under-development, widespread unemployment, weak education and welfare systems, and dilapidated physical infrastructures.
3. Conflicts over **resources: land and jobs** – the unique status of land in Arab society and the emotional affinities it involves, alongside the acute lack of land and its increasing unavailability, all exacerbate the conflicts between and among Arab families. At the same time, the extremely low number of jobs and positions available in the Arab communities increases and intensifies competition for the smallest position, leading to conflicts that engulf entire families. This is also the main reason for the serious clashes that accompany municipal elections, which in most cases have nothing to do with ideological differences between competitors, but rather focus on the perceived control of a pool of jobs that are regarded as loot to be distributed among the victorious faction.
4. **Resistance to modernization and secularization** – the transition from a traditional – religious, rural, and collectivist – culture to a modern, urban, individualistic and secular one is reflected in a profound debate that includes threat and violence against individuals who challenge the traditional patriarchal system and the gender gaps it includes. Threatening ideological discourse is amplified by the social media and is also evident in the context of other political and ideological differences.
5. **Erosion of family authority** – conflicts that in the past were managed or even resolved between the heads of families and dignitaries now create fertile ground for extensive clashes between residents pressurized to take part with a stroke of the keyboard. Individuals seek to realize themselves, in part by distinguishing themselves from the social group that is losing its levers for imposing deterrence.
6. **Idleness among young people** – almost 40% of young Arab men and women aged 18-22 are not in studies or employment. While their Jewish peers progress along a clear development track, including post-high-school frameworks followed by military service, Arab high-school graduates face an unclear future with limited job opportunities, a low level of preparedness for academic studies, and inadequate training frameworks. This situation is compounded by the shortage of community

centers, sports facilities, and entertainment options. This reality of boredom and purposelessness creates fertile ground for the emergence of antisocial behavior, vandalism, and violence.

7. **Limited presence of government authorities** – Arab communities suffer from a clear shortage of basic services, such as hospitals, central bus stations and rail stations, fire-fighting stations, and Magen David Adom bases. There are almost no compounds of government offices in Arab communities. This situation reinforces a sense of lawlessness, disorder, and a lack of enforcement by the state toward Arab citizens.
8. **Poor access to capital and credit** – the positive phenomenon of the development of entrepreneurship, commerce, and economic development in the Arab communities has attracted a new type of crime. These activities require capital and credit, which are in short supply in Arab society. This encourages the emergence of high-interest loans, debt collection through violence and “protection”.
9. **Protest and alienation** – the over-representation of Arab citizens in crime and the phenomenon of disregard for the law may also be interpreted as a form of protest against the state, its authorities, and social order, and – above all – the inferior status of the Arab minority. It can also be a sign of despair. In addition, this phenomenon may reflect a desire for control and sovereignty within the Arab communities, applying rules set by elements within Arab society rather than by the state authorities.
10. **Uprooting crime in Jewish communities** – effective action by the enforcement authorities against crime does not eliminate it, but rather channels it to the Arab communities. Just as weather systems gravitate from an area of high pressure to one of low pressure, so crime moves from cities where it is under pressure to areas where enforcement is weak and ineffective (for example – from the Netanya-Hadera area and Gush Dan, which are under such pressure, to the “Triangle” and Wadi Ara areas). This transforms Arab communities and the Arab neighborhoods in the mixed cities into “priority zones” for criminal activities.

A precondition for efficiently tackling the diverse causes of violence, given the variance between them, their seriousness, and their connections to numerous other fields, is to recognize that the police cannot address the issue by itself. There is a need for an interministerial government project led by the Ministry of Public Security and the Israel Police, the Finance Ministry, and the Ministries of Justice, Education, the Interior, Transport, and Housing.

A holistic effort of this type must be formulated with the agreement of Arab elected public representatives in the Knesset and local government, and must not be exploited as yet another opportunity to bypass them and to erode their legitimacy. These representatives are well aware of the grave threat the plague of violent represents for Arab society, and today they are demanding efficient and fair policing services. Their public and proactive support for the program is essential.

Without replacing the planning process, it is already clear that numerous steps must be taken. For example:

The police, which despite its direct responsibility cannot cope with the problem by itself, must undergo change on the level of a reform in structure and in awareness. It must adopt a “civilian” mindset and stop thinking and acting as a security body when it comes to Arab citizens. Without belittling the security challenges that result from the conflict, the police must be released from attending to these aspects. Until this happens, it will be very difficult for the police to perform its classic function in combating crime. Establishing police stations, recruiting police personnel and volunteers, reporting, filing complaints, and cooperating with investigations – all these aspects will no longer be controversial once the police is freed of its split personality and it becomes clear to the public (and to police officers) that it is a service organization – for Arab citizens as for others.

The evidence suggests that the police and the Ministry of Public Security already understand the seriousness of the problem of violence. Government Decision 1402 regarding the enhancement of policing for Arab society, and the subsequent formation of the Policing Authority (headed by Major General Jamal Hakrush), together with the opening of two new police stations (Jisr a-Zarqa and Kafr Kana), reflect an effort to ensure quality policing in Arab communities. However, the pace of progress is slow and cannot match the deteriorating reality on the ground. Accordingly, even if the police is not formally released of its security function in the near future, it must act as follows:

- Adopt a “**Pro-Community policing**” approach based on fairness, respect, and human contact with citizens, together with solution-oriented policing that avoids problems rather than confronting them after they have been created.
- The definition of “high violence cities” as top priorities for a holistic response.
- Ensuring a **significant and continuous presence** in Arab communities, including the **establishment of stations** to be designed and operated as accessible and welcoming

service centers, and not as fortified compounds reminiscent of the period of military rule.

- To invest a supreme effort in ***solving crime*** in general, and murders in particular, despite the partial cooperation on the part of the public, since the police bears the burden of proof. Successes in this area are a condition for gaining the confidence of the public.
- To avoid quasi-military operations in Arab communities.
- To avoid contact and confrontation with the population relating to issues that are not directly related to keeping the law (such as displaying flags that are not prohibited, which currently meets with an aggressive response from police officers).
- Prioritizing attention to the issue of ***illegal weapons*** in Arab communities. The police must implement “weapons amnesties” allowing citizens to return weapons without facing criminalization, while at the same time enhancing enforcement operations and the seizure of weapons.
- Nurturing a culture of ***accountability*** toward the public, and the perception of the public as a “client” entitled to present the problems it faces and its priorities and to receive responses from the police.
- To provide systemic training for commanders and police officers on the subject of “policing in a divided society” and the challenges this entails.

The **Ministry of Public Security** should provide an ***umbrella framework*** for implementing all the aspects of change in the police, and particularly for securing the ***allocation of resources*** required to implement these aspects. The Minister of Public Security, despite being an elected political figure, should lead the change in attitude toward Arab citizens. At present, the minister’s actions and statements make a dramatic and negative contribution to the relations between the Arab public and the police.

A further function of the Ministry of Public Security is to promote the concept of establishing ***emergency service compounds*** in Arab communities. These compounds will include a police station, fire and rescue station, emergency/trauma rooms, and a municipal “situation room.” There are solid reasons for favoring the compound model: improving coordination between these services and their response; enhancing the legitimacy of the police as a service that saves lives; and coping efficiently with the serious lack of land in the Arab communities.

The **Ministry of Justice** should focus its efforts on three objectives: ***tightening penalization*** for weapons offenses; establishing community ***mediation centers*** in Arab communities; and

transforming the Police Investigation Department into an trusted body that is attentive and relevant to the Arab public. At present, the Arab public regards the PID as part of the system, and in no sense recognizes it as a gatekeeper body that can offer assistance against arbitrary and violent behavior by the police.

The **Ministry of Finance**, and **particularly its Planning Authority**, together with the **Ministry of Housing**, should address a solution to the problem of the availability of land and the approval and acceleration of building plans, with the goal of alleviating the tensions in the fields of building and housing.

The **Ministries of Finance and Economics**, together with the Banking Supervision Department and the Antitrust Authority, should all work together to open bank branches (of different banks) and to develop financial tools and services, loans and mortgages adapted to the needs of Arab society. At the same time, they should be to address seriously the shadow Economy in the Arab communities.

The **Ministry of Education** should develop and implement **curricula** on the subject of violence, conflict resolution, safe behavior in social networks, road safety, and so forth. In the Informal Education sphere, it should promote the full and optimal operation of **community centers** in Arab communities, in order to increase the availability of activities for children and young people and reduce the level of boredom and idleness among youths on the streets. At present, many of the community centers in the Arab communities are failing to realize their inherent potential. On this subject, the Ministry of the Interior has an important role to play in working with local authorities to establish playgrounds, parks, and leisure facilities. Mifal Hapayis should become involved in the effort to help establish community centers and sports facilities, including in Arab communities that are unable to meet the burden of matching funding.

In conclusion, although changes taking place within Arab society in Israel are partly responsible for the difficult situation in the Arab communities, the main reasons are deep and structural and derive from the status of Arab society in Israel and the longstanding policies toward Arab citizens.

Therefore, attributing violence and crime to Arab “nature” or “mentality” is simplistic, ineffective, and in itself serves as an obstacle to solving a complex but solvable problem. Law and order, security, and safety are fundamental human and civil rights and Israel’s Arab citizens deserve them fully. Their absence creates an enormous obstacle to social and

economic development in the Arab communities, to an extent that jeopardizes the potential to optimize the implementation of various government programs to advance Arab society. Accordingly, there is an immediate need for a comprehensive government plan to eradicate violence and promote personal security in the Arab communities.

The time has come for Arab citizens to know that the state believes that their lives are as valuable as those of its Jewish citizens.