

# **Traditional Cultural Practices and Small Arms in the Middle East: Problems and Solutions.**

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A workshop organized by  
the American Friends Service Committee and  
the Regional Human Security Center at the Jordan Institute  
of Diplomacy  
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## **WORKSHOP REPORT** November 2002

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## Abbreviations

Non Governmental Organization.....NGO

Small Arms and Light Weapons.....SALW

## I. Problem Statement

The effective control of the illicit trade in small arms should focus on efforts to shrink the *demand* for weapons, as well as their supply. Over the last four years NGOs involved in curbing weapons demand have participated in lessons-learned seminars in Durban, Nairobi, Toronto, Phnom Penh and most recently Amman. Over 40 such organizations from around the world have met to share experiences, test their assumptions and build stronger connections. These seminars have made it clear that there are practical and effective ways to lessen the demand for small arms in communities affected by gun violence. Often the programs are focused on non-gun related issues such as the perception of insecurity – sometimes codified in social customs -- that is the root cause for weapons demand.

The perceptions of small arms proliferation in the Middle East-North Africa region are quite diverse. At the Amman conference on small arms in 2001 some governments expressed satisfaction with their national controls on the availability of small arms. In contrast, several other representatives, both governmental and NGO, saw clear evidence that small arms were contributing to insecurity and instability in many parts of the region. They identified several factors that contributed to this trend. In particular, they noted that the demand for small arms is driven, in part, by traditional or cultural factors. Weapons possession is perceived to portray a national character or is related to a traditional cultural need such as maintenance of cultural identity and honor. Traditionally, small arms are regarded as symbols of power, confidence and authority and are an integral part of 'manhood'. In Lebanon for example, in the region of Ba'albek and the Mountain, when a baby boy is born, it is still said, "*we have increased by one gun*". In many counties in the Middle East, it is regarded as natural and useful that families possess a weapon. Culturally, firing weapons is even portrayed as an expression of happiness in private or public occasions. In the year 2000, there were 40 such cases reported to have taken place in Jordan.

Tribes living near and crossing national borders to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, West Bank and Israel are known to have traditionally lived with small arms for self-defense purposes. Possession of small arms has also an element of pride in the Bedouin culture. As a result it is believed that a large number of unregistered weapons exist in rural areas. Often the weapons held for traditional purposes help to fuel larger scale violence, such as tribal vendettas, hostage taking, and even outright civil war.

To date, there are no regional efforts to share analysis and lessons learned regarding these common practices and there is no regional structure to assist such work.

## II. Overall Goals

The American Friends Service Committee and the Regional Human Security Center embrace the following framework for regional action on small arms:

- Lessen the demand for small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the countries of the Middle East through effective action by communities, non-governmental organizations and the state, encouraged and supported by the work of civil society organizations.
- Contribute to a greater understanding in the Middle East about what drives people to possess and use small arms and to improve knowledge of practical ways to address small arms proliferation at a community level within the region.
- Share expertise on finding local solutions to this global crisis by utilizing specific lessons learned at three previous international workshops sponsored, in part, by AFSC.
- Enhance the capacity of and further regional cooperation between civil society groups and governmental agencies working on, or interested in small arms demand issues.

## Objectives and Brief Description of the November 3-4<sup>th</sup> 2002, Seminar

A previous seminar, held in Amman in July 2002 focused on bringing together possible partners with interest in curbing the demand for small arms and light weapons in the MENA region. Workshop participants outlined a number of recommendations for possible follow up activities some of which are listed below:

- Identifying national capacities for dealing with the issue and enhance them
- Networking as a practical first step
- Conducting national and regional studies
- Provision of support by international counterparts allowing for sustainability and use of capacity
- Establishment of a regional Middle East North Africa network initiated by the Regional Human Security Center, Jordan in conjunction with the American Friends Service Committee. Its work would include as a primary step to build a cohesive databank of partner information, collection of research, and the development of a shared regional agenda.

The second regional seminar, that took place on 3-4<sup>th</sup> November 2002<sup>1</sup>, initiated the informal network recommended in July. Based on the above recommendations, the organizers set the following objectives for the second regional small arms seminar:

- Drawing together a larger and more widely representative group of NGOs to participate in a regional Middle East network on small arms;
- Sharing information on national and community experiences with traditional practices regarding small arms and conflict resolution;
- Establishing the regional network on small arms on a firmer basis;
- Offering regional and wider international support and encouragement to national and community programs on small arms issues.

All of these objectives were met in significant ways:

- The number of NGOs and agencies involved was greater than at the previous regional seminar: much larger numbers attended from both Yemen and Lebanon, and there was participation for the first time from Palestine and Egypt. In addition the participation from Jordan was at a higher level: two district governors presented case studies and representatives from the police, military and Ministry of Interior participated actively throughout the seminar.
- Each of the national NGOs participating presented information on their experience with traditional weapons possession and tribal structures and noted the impact of these on their wider national society. There was active discussion after each of the reports and an acknowledgment that this was a serious and practical area of concern for each country represented.
- In response to the information presented at both seminars, the participants made a number of suggestions for national steps they could take and also noted the ways that they could approach regional bodies, such as the Arab League, for wider cooperation among regional governments. With this broad program in mind, the participants saw the need for a clearer network organization. They chose a Yemeni NGO leader as Coordinator of the new network and suggested dates in 2003 for further network meetings.
- The presentation by the representative for Small Arms Survey (SAS), an international institute based in Geneva, sparked a lot of discussion. Participants saw clearly the

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<sup>1</sup> Both of the July and November 2002 seminars were jointly coordinated by the Quakers Services/American Friends Service Committee, Regional Office and the Regional Human Security Center at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy, in Amman.

wider context into which their situations fit and were encouraged to note the range of research data available to support their national work. In particular, groups were introduced to the role that active focused research could play in building awareness programs and establishing NGO-government coalitions in their own country situations. Three of the NGOs present were already collecting information for the SAS annual research publication and more of this contact was stimulated by the seminar.

### **III. Seminar Description**

A two-day workshop took place at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Amman, Jordan. The first day included an opening ceremony, followed by presentations by the hosts, participants from Yemen and Lebanon, a researcher from the Small Arms Survey in Geneva and by the Public Security Directorate of Jordan. After lunch a site visit was arranged to the Jerash Governorate of Jordan where participants were briefed by the Governor of Jerash on how the local community managed to deal with the issue of the misuse of small arms in public occasions such as weddings that led to injuries and death. Participants then discussed with the Governor and the Chief of Jerash Police Department, the method in which this phenomenon was combated, its successes and lessons and how these could be applied in their own societies.

The second day of the workshop continued with discussions with the Deputy Governor of the Ma'an Governorate in southern Jordan. Discussion then focused on how participants could work with traditional practices in their communities in order to assure greater security. After lunch discussions continued to focus on practical interventions and possible next steps in order to activate a regional network on small arms. Discussion was then focused on network objectives, activities, participation and administration, and concluded with the nomination of a network coordinator.

In their presentations the participants described the different ways that tradition and weapons interact in each country and the impacts in each society. Traditional practices and their cultural and historical roots varied somewhat from one country to another in the Middle East North Africa region. Nevertheless, there were common elements evident throughout the region. These similarities permitted the sharing of experiences, lessons and program ideas intended to help countries and participant NGOs to develop more effective, culturally appropriate programs to lessen the demand for small arms and to better control their availability. Participants also identified national and institutional capacities for dealing with the issue and considered methods in which these capacities could be further enhanced.

The continued engagement, participation and the media coverage in the daily newspapers of the follow up workshop kept the momentum and interest on small arms flowing in the region and paved the way for the establishment of a more formal network with the nomination of a network coordinator based in Yemen.

## IV. The Impact of Traditional Cultural Practices on Small Arms Problems; Solutions Proposed in Yemen, Sudan, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine<sup>2</sup>.

### Yemen

It has been widely estimated that there are some 50 million small arms in Yemen, however this figure cannot be verified and further research is needed to verify these figures. However, participants explained that weapons are indeed easily available, possessed in large numbers by civilians, highly visible and include most categories of small arms and light weapons.

Presenters during the workshop brought forward the following themes pertaining to the demand of SALW in Yemen. Some of these themes, which form the core of Yemeni tribalism, are elaborated in an Occasional Paper by Derek B Miller<sup>3</sup>.

- Yemen's tumultuous history is linked closely to its corresponding culture of weapons. Weapons are often linked to notions of liberation, freedom and defending the homeland. Weapons ownership became a tendency and even a characteristic of the Yemeni civilian from the time of the Ottoman invasion and on through the Yemeni revolution, armed struggle against the British and the separatist war of 1994.
- The need to actively defend land requires an instrument that allows territory to be controlled. Because Yemenis value land as a foundation of their collective identity, they have a military need to control it. The capacity to *deter* and also a capacity to *cause harm* in the event that one's land is threatened are important factors for the tribesman, and reasons why he will spend so much on weapons. Concepts about land, therefore, are a demand factor.<sup>2</sup>
- The demand for weapons in Yemen is a consequence of wanting to communicate individual and collective tribal honor. Honor in Yemen is a notion that extends far beyond responsibility for individual action and can be impinged by the moral actions of one's family. This is not a Kantian world of individual moral responsibility, but one where Honor and moral standing in one's community are affected by the actions of one's sons, daughters, wives, brothers and even ancestors.
- Weapons in Yemen are considered tools of expression and are often used to communicate anger, happiness, greeting families, and firing in the air at weddings.
- Weapons in Yemen are considered a source of pride, determining higher social status.
- Weapons are often used as a means of conflict resolution in tribal or inter-clan disagreements or fights<sup>4</sup>. Sometimes the paying of 'blood money' or compensation solves such disagreements. Other times however, unsatisfactory resolution of conflict, or the failure to achieve normality results in revenge attacks<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The country reports in the forthcoming section, are summaries of longer presentations and related discussion during the seminar.

<sup>3</sup> "Stockpiles, Social Controls and Demand: Small Arms in Yemen"

By Derek B. Miller

(Final version to be published as a Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper in English and Arabic in early 2003). Derek Miller participated in the Small Arms demand workshop of July 2002, organized by the AFSC and RHSC, bringing forward then, his interest and knowledge on Yemeni culture as related to SALW.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> It was pointed out that in Egypt too, the traditional and cultural norms are significant factors in the misuse of arms and weapons. In a recent reported case in the Southern rural area of Egypt (Sa'eed), 20 members of the same family were killed in revenge crimes. It is believed that public awareness to change people's attitudes and norms is a long process, whereas amending and drawing out laws to this effect is less time consuming.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Interior, Yemen, official reports indicate that during January – March 2002, 224 homicide cases took place.

- The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Yemen varies from one area to the other. While the 1994 war has narrowed the gaps of such proliferation between the different areas, the northern region remains the most armed. This region has a very low literacy rate, agricultural productivity, and trade. According to the Yemeni Advisory Council report in 2001, the number of people killed reached 1,979 in 4 Northern governorates, Tamar, AlBaida, Sana'a and Umran. These people were victims of tribal wars and revenge crimes. The report also mentioned a number of 574 cases of kidnappings and road thefts, the latter amounting to 400 of the incidents.
- The carrying of personal firearms is regulated by Article 1 item 5 of Yemeni Law. Furthermore, the purchase of weapons themselves is not prohibited but regarded a legal right of the citizen in Yemen, Article 9. Thus it is fair to say that Yemeni law does not provide any disincentive against weapons purchase<sup>6</sup>.
- Yemen's geographic structure and lack of security facilities prevents easy access by security personnel to places of conflict.

## Providing Solutions

Presenters suggested a number of ways to lessen the dependence on weapons in Yemen:

*Awareness Raising and Education:* Encourage safer habits regarding weapons handling by disseminating information related to injuries and deaths related to weapons mismanagement. Raise awareness concerning the dangers of weapons circulation. Conduct community outreach programs that teach tribes and their elders that weapons do not symbolize manhood, pride and honor.

*Role of civil society:* to disseminate information, translate experiences, gather information on 'painful' incidences, teach lessons to society. Election and Landmine awareness programs have had positive impacts in Yemen. Could the same processes be translated to a SALW awareness program? It is difficult for the government alone to fulfill all tasks needed to control arms. Therefore, it is imperative that the various sectors of civil society participate in these tasks. Also, international efforts are needed to provide developmental opportunities for people, as an alternative to the use of weapons.

*Role of Islamic Law:* and religious leaders could help in contributing to awareness.

*Linkage of human and economic development to small arms reduction strategies:*  
Exchanging farm equipment for weapons

*Review of current legislation:* Applying law to Yemeni cities and holding all Yemenis equally accountable. Preventing corruption and limiting the licensing of weapons. Enacting law concerned with public display and use of weapons in social occasions.

*Establishment of strengthened security systems:* To better enable security personnel to reach scenes of conflict and manage the conflict. Establishment of coast guards.

*Provide training to civil society NGOs with conflict management and resolution training.*

*Pressuring the Yemeni government to review its SALW situation within the context of a changing world.* The government could better control the purchase and storage of weapons and should form a committee to work on the control of honor crimes.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1992, a law was issued against the public carrying of weapons, however it was not enacted and failed to list the cities in which carrying weapons was prohibited. The law therefore remains unregulated.

## Sudan

There are 65 tribes in W. Sudan with distinct social structures and of varying hierarchy. Over the past decade there has been noted a sharp rise in the proliferation of SALW. The Sudanese presentation outlined a number of factors that give weight to understanding the Sudanese experience, summarized below:

- Instability in neighboring countries allowed for cross border connections in the arms trade to flourish replenishing the supply of weapons in Sudan.
- Easy availability combined with cheap prices for arms and ammunition.
- Tribal conflict and disagreement over social but also access to natural resources issues.
- Use of SALW in the protection of livestock and land.
- Inter tribal looting leading to the need for SALW to protect communities.

### Providing Solutions

*Training on non-violent conflict resolution:* Training could be conducted by civil society NGOs who could reach communities, and in their language create an understanding of managing conflict in non-violent ways.

*Awareness raising and education:* In schools and villages against participation in tribal conflict with the use of weapons. Spreading of awareness on dangers of carrying weapons and injuries and deaths that follow.

*Enacting government commitment and legislation:* Through helping to provide better security systems, campaigning and pressuring for action to be taken.

*Development related intervention strategies:* To lure weapons replacement by village or community development, provision of services or restructuring.

## Lebanon

Lebanese society possesses great cultural diversity as a result of its division into eighteen or more religious “confessions,” but it still demonstrates some common trends. One of these is the general use and possession of SALW. In the absence of official statistics, experts have estimated that approximately a half million SALW are possessed by ordinary Lebanese citizens. It is interesting to note in this context that Lebanon’s population is estimated to be no more than three million. The presenters explained that it is rarely the case that a household does not possess at least one firearm, whatever the religion, denomination or social status of the individual.

A number of factors pertaining to this extensive possession of arms were highlighted.

- Possession of arms is considered a source of pride and often equated to the idea of resistance and struggle. Lebanon’s history has helped to achieve this perception among its inhabitants dating back to the establishment of the Lebanese entity in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, later becoming the Lebanese Republic in the mid 20th century.
- Lebanon shares with its neighbors the view that possession of arms represents manhood. In the region of Ba’albek and Mount Lebanon, Lebanese people still exclaim, “We have increased by one gun” when a baby boy is born. Sometimes a rifle is given to a baby boy as a gift at birth. Also, a gun is often shot in the air several times to indicate happiness during a social occasion.
- Lebanese law legitimizes the carrying and trading of arms, under the legislative decree No. 137 issued in 1959. Furthermore, Lebanese authorities issue licenses very easily.

- With a deteriorating economic situation, although crime levels are not high, Lebanese people tend to carry arms for self-protection or personal defense in the face of a lack of effective security systems and trust in government capacities.
- Regional politics have a big influence on the demand for SALW in Lebanon. The Israel-Palestine conflict is reflected in the internal politics of Lebanon. Liberating the south of the country from Israel through armed resistance bears with it the pride of arms possession. The existence of armed Palestinian resistance groups also plays a role in this issue.

## Providing Solutions

*Development and implementation of new and improved national laws on weapons possession and use.*

*Exchange of information and processes of combating the problem within the region through the implementation of a MENA region network:* Information, country perspectives, and practical lessons could be made available to local communities. The more information shared, the more changes noted regionally/globally could enhance personal development inside communities.

*Activation and further development of international law; forming a regional or international network to exchange information and expertise; and developing advocacy campaigns through regional organizations and the UN.*

*Development of national coalition and action groups to pressure the national government and carry out appropriate actions.*

*Reinterpreting Cultural Practices:* Culture need not be amended or changed, rather effort should be made to differentiate between tradition and simply bad habits. Such a program might include:

- Monitoring the effect and damage caused by SALW.
- Identifying damages and dangers
- Showing that heritage includes tolerance, forgiveness -- these elements are not contradictory to societal traditions. Encourage the adoption of positive customs, not by changing community heritage, but rather to retain traditional practices within a framework of a changing world, changing security needs, progress and development. An emphasis on enhancing culture rather than lessening its influence.

*Development of a well-functioning public security system that includes civil society cooperation:* This would greatly help to lessen weapons demand, but even such changes might be held hostage to regional influences. This wider challenge comes from several directions: the instability of many states in the region due to internal, regional or international factors; the prolongation of the Arab-Israeli conflict; and the emergence of the “the war on terrorism” and its link to the theory of the clash of civilizations.

## Jordan Public Security Directorate

There is a lack of precise statistics for unlicensed weapons in Jordan. However, the Department for Public Security presenter explained that there have been statistical studies conducted showing in the year 2000 a total number of 125,312 pieces was registered. However, it is estimated that 80% of weapons remain unlicensed. Weapons are often used by the public in a variety of ways owing to the factors indicated below:

- Firearms acquisition and their use during ceremonies increased in the absence of a strong state during the Ottoman reign. Thus, with the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the

- end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, power came into the hands of the individual or the tribe, and firearms reflected such power.
- Socially in Jordan, like many other Arab countries, weapons are used as a portrayal of happiness. Large portions of Jordanian society express their feelings in public or private occasions by shooting in the air, often in crowded places.
  - Often weapons are used in cases where the notion of honor is threatened. A conflict usually takes often designated as revenge for the honor crime, resulting in death and the clearing of shame and dishonor<sup>7</sup>.
  - More often than not, regional insecurity and political conflict encourages the purchase of SALW by individuals, who view their purchase as a sign of 'freedom' and resistance.
  - More and more, increased opportunities for participating in organized crime encourage gang members to purchase illegally available weapons.
  - The illicit trade in weapons across or within state boundaries allows for cheaper prices thereby easier availability.

#### Measures taken by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

- In 1952, legislation was enacted in the Jordanian weapons and ammunition law no. 34 regulating the possession and carrying of weapons by introducing licensing procedures and minimum age requirements. Sentences for the misuse of weapons were also introduced through Law no 34 in 1953. The most recent amendment of the law on firearms is the sentencing of anyone who fires bullets during ceremonies to three months of prison or to pay a fine of 1000 Jordanian Dinars or imposing both sentences (Article 11/D of the law on firearms and ammunition).
- Cooperation between the customs departments and border guards with patrol squads was enhanced by training and provision of equipment useful in monitoring weapons smuggling activities.
- The Public Security Directorate carried out programs broadcasted through television showing the dangers of misusing firearms during weddings and other occasions. Lectures were given at schools and universities.

#### Providing Solutions

*Improving the capacity of criminal investigation laboratories and providing police force with updated technical devises to better detect and test validity of firearms before licensing.*

*Intensifying border and highway controls*

*Increasing awareness among communities and tribal societies on the dangers of irresponsible weapons use.*

*Encouraging the public to abide by weapons laws and issuing criminal sentences for use of weapons during public or private occasions.*

#### Ma'an Governorate

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<sup>7</sup> It is indicated that in the year 2000, 10 cases of honor crimes took place with the use of firearms and 5 cases in the same year were related to revenge. Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Arab Region, National and Regional Measures, Published by the Regional Human Security Center, Amman 2002.

The area of the Governorate of Ma'an in southern Jordan is around 33,000 Km<sup>2</sup> and its population is 110,000. The desert accounts for 90% of the total area of Ma'an, whereas the mountains account for the remaining 10%. The city of Ma'an is mainly urban with rural populations inhabiting the districts of Shobak and Petra. Bedouin villages and towns are found in the rest of the governorate, as well as some of the districts of Shobak and Petra. One of the most significant features of the traditional norms in Ma'an is the acquisition of weapons. This is mainly due to the nature of the Bedouin lifestyle involving the continuous search for water and food and the protection of these resources from others. Defending one's land and property also accounts for SALW demand. Weapon acquisition also became linked to chivalry. Weapons are used publicly during celebrations and revenge acts. Weapons are also often used to send messages across the desert.

Weapon acquisition and use continued after the end of the Ottoman era. However, since the early establishment of the Jordanian state, a number of regulations were set to control the acquisition of weapons. In time, and with the establishment of relevant legislations, security systems, political stability and the implementation of development-related housing projects for Bedouins, the illegal acquisition and misuse of weapons largely decreased. However, weapons acquisition, trade and use is still very significant in the Ma'an Governorate. The Deputy Governor pointed out the following factors related to the demand for SALW.

- Firing at weddings and ceremonies.
- Illicit trade in arms and ammunition<sup>8</sup>.
- Revenge crimes.
- Use of arms for drug trades.
- Acts of terrorism that could also be funded from outside<sup>9</sup>.

### Providing Solutions

- Enhancing the role of mosques and Imams in raising awareness.
- Enforcing the laws and regulations that prohibit the acquisition and misuse of weapons.
- Enhancing the "declarations of honor" that are drawn up by leaders at the local community level to stop the misuse of weapons.
- Enhancing the role of the media in raising awareness.
- Integration of awareness programs weapons in the education system focused on stopping the illegal acquisition and misuse of weapons.
- Decentralization of management and development planning will have a significant role in combating the phenomenon. Social studies note that poverty and unemployment are the main reasons for weapon acquisition and misuse.

### Site Visit: A Jordanian Initiative in Jerash

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<sup>9</sup> Arms related violence has erupted after the November seminar in Ma'an. The Jordanian government has explained the situation to be related to "a criminal gang of outlaws and bandits who have terrorized local individuals and institutions and fomented anti-government sentiments since January of this year, with instigation by non-Jordanian elements (mostly other Arabs)." Delicate yet crucial issues have been raised concerning the rule of law in the governorate and the issue of tribal loyalties.

At a site visit conducted at the Governorate offices, workshop participants discussed the frequency of the use of SALW at weddings and other occasions in the Jerash Governorate in Jordan. The Governor described a number of situations where the use of SALW led to tragic consequences.

One of the most prominent examples pointed out by the Governor was the recent case of Burma village. The tragedy started when a group of children from two different tribes were playing, and then started to fight. Later, an adult tribal member, who had rented a gun to fire during his brother's wedding, used the weapon to quell the children's fighting. A bullet hit and killed an innocent young man from the other tribe. Consequently, an inter-tribal conflict arose. Twenty-one houses were burnt in revenge attacks and a large number of residents were forced to evacuate the village.

In line with the directives of the Ministry of Interior to abolish the phenomenon of firing bullets during the various ceremonies<sup>10</sup>, the Jerash Governorate carried out a number of meetings during the past few years with the aim of putting an end to such practices. Meetings were carried out with representatives from the public and private sectors such as clubs, community leaders, public and political figures and Mosque Imams, in order to work together to raise awareness of the dangers and adverse impacts of the phenomenon. Consequently, a "*declaration of honor*" was drawn up and signed by community leaders and *Mukhtars*. It stated the following:

- Should the firing of bullets occur during a ceremony, all guests should leave the event.
- The organizer of the ceremony will shoulder the full responsibility of bullet firing.
- Strict actions will be taken against those disobeying the law.
- No public interference is to take place from social and political figures upon sentencing a person for firing bullets.

The Governor remarked that, as a result of the awareness raising actions and the signing of the declaration of honor by prominent society figures, there had been remarkable control of firing bullets during ceremonies. It was noted that Jerash is also a good example of a society in transition. For example, after the signing and public announcement of the declaration of honor, if a one guest carried his weapon at a wedding, other guests would leave.

The Governorate of Jerash raised the following opportunities for further work in this area:

- To continue raising awareness.
- To find alternatives to the celebratory use of firearms, such as fire works, in close cooperation with the security system.
- To enforce the law according to articles (11/C) of the weapon and ammunition law no. (34) of the year 1952; and article (156) of the sentences law no. (16) of the year 1960 which states that anyone found carrying a weapon outside his house is to be imprisoned for a duration of six months and to pay a fine of ten Jordanian Dinars.
- To refuse requests by people who are well connected to drop charges against those firing bullets.
- To draw out regulations for all printing shops to insert on the wedding invitation cards the phrase "*please, do not fire bullets*".
- To refuse any invitation to events where firing bullets take place.
- To draw out regulations for all ceremony ballrooms to set conditions that discourage the firing of bullets during ceremonies, and to inform the security centers in case such actions take place.

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<sup>10</sup> As mentioned previously, the use of weapons is common in Jordan as a way to express sentiments of happiness or sadness during weddings, funerals and other occasions, public or private. During a site visit to the Jerash Governorate, the Governor also attributed public use of weapons to the belief that bullet firing often portrayed a strong character.

- To enforce article no. (30) under item (D) of the public health law no. (21) of the year 1971, which considers any object, process, smell, sound, smoke, or bi-products that may cause health damages to be a health hazard.

Participants noted that it is evident that the local communities can play a role in controlling the phenomenon of small arms, as noted in the Jerash initiative, where the declaration of honor is analogous to legislation. It was noted that in some governorates in Yemen, there are similar declarations however they are not enforced.

It was suggested that one of the tasks of civil society through the regional small arms network, would be to address Arab Ministers of Interior, so that the issue would be further discussed in the Interior Ministers' annual meeting.

## Egypt

In Egypt, the reasons for weapon acquisition are similar to those in the rest of the Arab countries, such as firing at weddings, revenge for honor crimes and personal protection. In some instances in Egypt some families continue in their acts of revenge for about seventy years and pass it from one generation to the next. These may result in families having to evacuate from their village. Sometimes forty to fifty houses are evacuated in such situations.

Furthermore, in Egypt a number of reported cases showed that the practice of firing at weddings was used in order to commit crimes of revenge.

## Palestine

The phenomenon of public weapons possession and use in Palestine differs from presentations given by participants from other countries due to the Israeli social, economic and political occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Although official figures do not exist and will be difficult to obtain in the near future due to a highly secretive trade, it is widely acknowledged the much of the Palestinian population possess arms or is able to make explosive devices<sup>11</sup> for use or show of resistance against the occupation. Weapons possession is highly related to resistance and defense and therefore is legitimized socially.

However, as with other Arab societies, the 'historical culture' of weapons also provides incentive for purchase and use.

- Weapons are often used to defend one's community from another especially during conflict related to use of land and honor and following revenge actions.
- Weapons portray family status and are considered a source of pride sometimes used only for a sense of 'decoration' in the home.
- Weapons are sometimes stored in defense against individual attacks coming from nearby Israeli settlements, acting outside the main conflict.
- Weapons are used to protect a sense of honor particularly of a wife or female children.
- Weapons are sometimes used as the deciding force in conflicts taking place with concern to general disagreements occurring in business, on the street etc.
- A lack of any legislation in this regard and the lack of public security and rule of law allows for the Palestinian's need to take 'matters into his own hands'.

## Providing Solutions

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<sup>11</sup> According to a participant in the seminar, explosive devices are easily made at home and children often know their composition too, sometimes used as a 'joke' between friends.

*There is little expectation that in the near future much effort can be carried out in curbing the misuse of SALW as long as the Palestine-Israel conflict continues to exist therefore legitimizing in the Palestinian society the necessity for holding weapons useful for defense and resistance.*

*Research is also difficult to carry out at this point given the sensitivity of the subject.*

*Collection of material produced in newspapers and other media related to use of weapons outside the political context might be possible for use in future programs to deal with SALW control.*

*Research could be collected concerning the experiences of other Arab nations or conflict ridden societies that would help to pave the way towards establishing in the future national activities.*

## **V. Similarities and Differences in Traditional Practices**

Below, we draw together our observations on how Arab traditions differ from one place to another and on how they are similar. This is not just an academic interest however, as it is part of the conceptual basis for developing practical answers to gun violence and to look for ways that NGOs and governments can assist each other.

### **Similarities**

1. These practices are gender and age specific: males hold and use the weapons, women's involvement as users or as victims is severely limited. It is important to note that in the case of honor crimes and fatal accidents caused by the misuse of weapons during public occasions, women are more often the victims. Boys' passage to manhood is linked specifically to weapons possession and use.
2. There are strict customary limits as to where and when weapons can be used and against whom they can be aimed.
3. The wider conflict management system into which the guns fit is presided over by elder males in the family, clan or tribe. Individual men may use their guns on their own, but any injuries or deaths that result will be considered an offence against the victim's group and will require conflict negotiations at the appropriate level among the elders of the offending and victimized groups. Wars of revenge may result, if other recourse cannot be found, but such wars escalate easily and usually are kept within strict bounds.
4. The importance of the weapons lies not in the violence and injury they can inflict, but rather in the seriousness of their purpose. They are tools to enforce order in a system based on maintenance of standing and honor. They are meant to induce respect and to symbolize and protect the male's role and the rightness of male and female actions. They are also a deterrent against others trying to lessen one's dignity, honor, possessions and rights. Conceivably, tools other than weapons might meet some or all of these purposes.
5. Infractions against one's honor can be made right by responses other than physical injury or killing, for example by payments of money, or other valuables.

**There are differences in the current status of traditions across the region.**

1. In Jordan, the traditional conflict system is heavily affected by the power of a strong central government and its judicial and policing system. In areas of overlapping jurisdiction, the state has sought to collaborate with the traditional system to assure more effective provision of security and order. The problem lies in weapon and acquisition rather than weapon carrying.
2. In Lebanon, the conflict among traditional “confessional” and political groups escalated to a full civil war. The traditional system is particularly associated with the Christian and Druse factions on Mount Lebanon. Other armed parties to the civil war – for example Palestinian refugees, Hizbollah and Amal Shiite militias – share some aspects of traditional arms practices but cannot be seen accurately as fully traditional societies. Any arms control in Lebanon will have to take this problematic asymmetry into account.
3. In Yemen a large proportion of the population still lives traditional rural lives. Weapons possession is written into the country’s constitution and is an integral part of rural security and identity. How can such an integrated system be changed without threatening wider insecurity?<sup>12</sup>

## **VI. Relationship between Small Arms and Development: Examining the various strategies, which have been developed and implemented<sup>13</sup>.**

Poverty and underdevelopment are increasingly associated with violent conflict. Conversely, it is becoming clear that violent conflict deepens underdevelopment, as it destroys development assets, along with physical, human and social capital. There is also growing awareness that small arms and light weapons are a key element of this negative equation—generating widespread insecurity and eroding human development.

The term “human development” is defined in terms of the quality of people’s lives. This means advancing human capabilities (i.e., improved health and knowledge), and ensuring that people can make use of their enhanced capabilities. The concept of human development seeks to move beyond traditional indices of economic development—such as *per capita* income—and emphasizes that there is no automatic link between growth of national income and improvement in people’s lives.

It seems clear, in 2002, that the security and development agendas are converging, with a wide range of actors from both sectors now working, often in partnership, to improve human security and human development. Small arms are increasingly understood to constitute a central challenge to the achievement of these goals. This agenda is also increasingly focused on demand issues, with greater attention paid to the reasons that lead individuals and communities to hold and use guns.

The uncontrolled proliferation, availability and misuse of small arms are associated with declines in virtually every indicator of human development.

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<sup>12</sup> One participant during the seminar claimed that in fact, it would be difficult to bring the SALW proliferation onto Yemeni agenda. The presentation of the idea itself can be abnormal given the security situation in the Middle East, regional war looming ahead. *“To present the idea itself can be dangerous. In Yemen this recommendation [weapons collection] would not be adhered to unless the weapons are being sent to Palestine!”*

<sup>13</sup> From the Presentation of Mr. G. McDonald, Small Arms Survey, Geneva, Small Arms and Development Presentation for the Workshop, *“Traditional Cultural Practices and Small Arms: Problems and Solutions”*, Amman, Jordan, 3–4 November 2002

Where guns dominate, development suffers. Schools shut down, shops close, commerce stops, and the local economy grinds to a halt. Buildings are destroyed, bridges are blown up, and whatever development was underway is lost. Private investment dries up and development organizations cannot operate. Where small arms prevent development, a key challenge is to provide programs that reduce the demand for guns and offer other avenues toward security, sustainable livelihoods and development opportunities.

The effects of small arms and light weapons on human development are both direct and indirect.

## Impact

Direct effects in relation to the use of small arms and light weapons include fatal and non-fatal injuries. Indirect impacts on human development often go unnoticed or are not quantified. Below is a summary of some of the indirect impacts presented.

- Collapse of basic services
- Violence-induced displacement (both internal and trans border), and may inhibit or delay later return or resettlement.
- Collapse of both formal and informal economic activity
- Negative effect on government revenue (through lower tax collection), government expenditure patterns and rates of domestic savings
- Insecurity for relief and development agencies, often causing these organizations to withdraw from regions that are badly affected.

## Responses

A fair number of development-oriented international financial institutions—such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—have adopted multi-dimensional approaches to small arms control, involving awareness-raising programs, improved controls over arms flows, security sector reform and DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration). Operational arms of the UN conducting similar initiatives include UNDP, UNICEF, the Department for Peace-Keeping Operations, and the World Health Organization.

There are many reasons why people hold on to their guns in the aftermath of conflict. These include: poverty, inequality, unemployment, insecurity, opportunism, fear and a lack of faith in the relevant peace process. A recent strategy that has emerged to tackle these demand factors in weapons collection programs is UNDP's "weapons for development" approach. Awareness-raising efforts are aimed at sensitizing communities to the dangers associated with small arms in order to reduce demand and generate support for needed legislation, and for weapons collection and destruction programs.

Incentives to reduce the demand for small arms have included local development schemes such as:

- Community participation (to set targets for collection, the prioritization of development needs and appropriate messages for a public awareness campaign); public awareness-raising at the national and local levels;
- Capacity-building programs for purposes of restoring public confidence in government security forces (providing the police with vehicles, radios and training); and
- Weapons collection (with development exchanged for the collection of weapons e.g. supermarket vouchers for guns in El Salvador, and micro-enterprise seed money in Congo-Brazzaville and Nicaragua).

## Needs

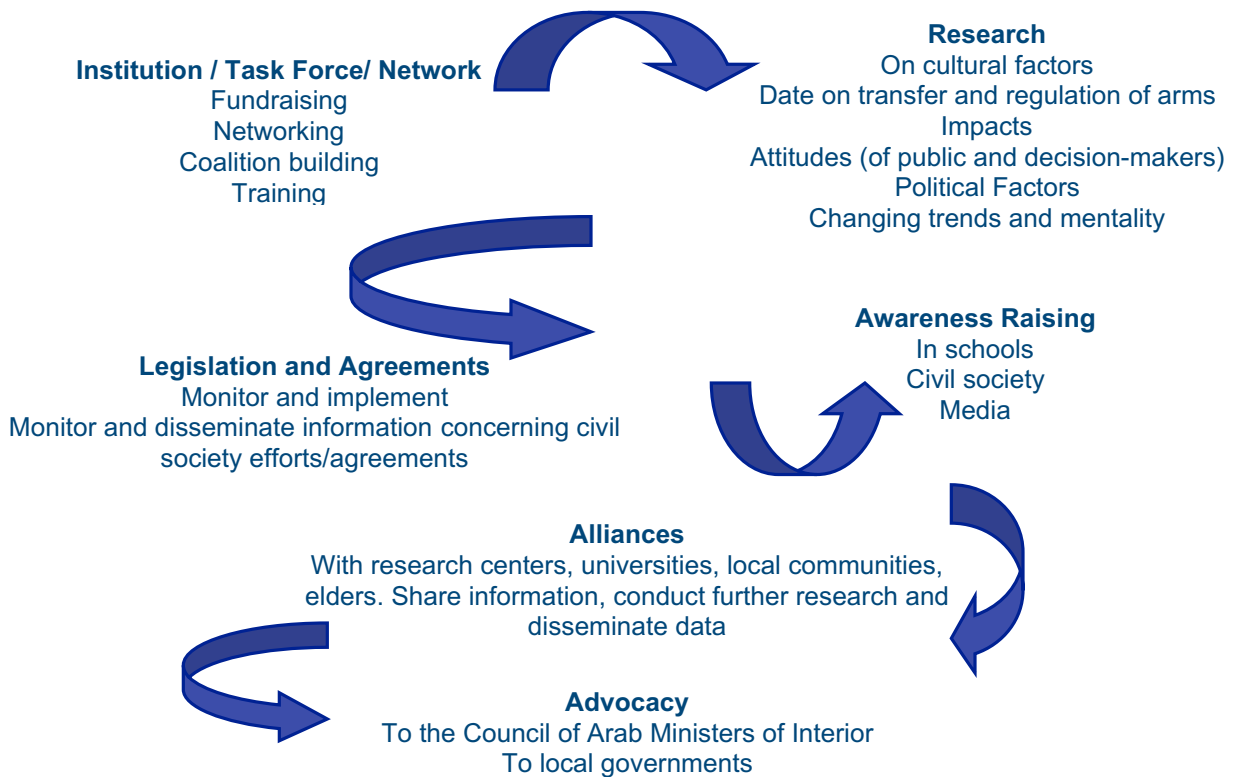
- Gather much more data and conduct extensive field research before we can begin to measure—with reasonable precision—the impacts of small arms on human development.
- Strengthened monitoring and evaluation of the various programs are now underway in order to see just how effective these are in promoting human development. This will require work at the local level and the continued, close partnership of governments, international organizations and civil society.

## **VII. Next Steps**

It is not the aim of the workshop to suggest the removal of traditional and cultural practices that often underlie and assure the stability and cultural security of a community or tribe, but rather to perceive tradition as a dynamic not stagnant force. It is the aim of the workshop to study particular similarities and differences within communities in the Middle East thereby suggesting how the dynamic of tradition could be assisted in order to further provide security.

| <b>Questions Needing Answers</b>   |
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| In the Middle East, is weapons possession less a problem than their use?   |
| Would customs changed or removed cause further clashes within communities?   |
| Would collecting weapons create new habits or new practices?   |
| Is there a clash with religious customs when dealing with traditional practices and small arms?  |
| Why are weapons abused in some countries, but not in others? How might this knowledge affect SALW control programs in the Middle East? |

## Phased program on a Regional Level; the establishment of a network on Small Arms and Light Weapons



# National Activity Planning

## Yemen

- Conduct a field study to discern societal attitudes and extent of the use and misuse of SALW.
- Conduct awareness raising programs using influential persons and elders to carry messages to communities
- Publish information through radio and other media channels
- Communicate directly with organizations and individuals who would participate within a national coalition
- Focus on advocacy to amend present laws

## Lebanon

- Communicate workshop deliberations and recommendations to society and communities by conducting national workshop
- Research/monitor local conflicts or incidences of individual or gang weapons possession and misuse
- Disseminate information concerned with dangers of misuse
- Conduct comparisons with states or communities that have successfully overcome aspects of the problem
- Incorporated within the existing work of civil society NGOs, plan for intervention e.g. Alternative conflict resolution skills and methods.
- Formulate programs / training sessions through workshop including first civil NGOs and communities. Include advisors from security services.
- Establish a national committee through a conference including human rights, children, women's' and developmental organizations with a stake in the issue. Include parliamentary representation.
- Establish perhaps within the committee a local pressure network that could begin to carry out activates planned for by the national committee.

## VIII. Practical Steps and Recommendations towards the Implementation of a MENA Region Network on Small Arms and Light Weapons

A Regional Alliance will meet again in a follow up seminar to exchange information on what has been achieved on a national level, including addition of further interested partners in the MENA region to form a more formal network. The functions, management vision, mandate, coordination, bylaws or constitution, alliance and activity will then further be discussed. However, participants highlighted certain visions concerning the network.

- Linkage of government institutions and NGOS and communities to cooperate to satisfy mutual needs.
- Translation of small arms studies and experiences in each MENA country participating in the network.
- Conduction of studies, dissemination of information.
- Involvement of global movements, invitation to such movements to take further interest in regional activities.
- A simple coordination routine preferred. Yearly rotation of coordinator, to be discussed in further workshop.
- Nominated Coordinator (*Dr. Eizeldeen Al Asbahy, General Director of the Human Rights, Information and Training Center, based in Taiz, Yemen*) to establish network email list as a primary step with the help AFSC/RHSC and create opportunity and organization of follow up meeting to meet ends of formal network establishment.