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Civil Society

TLIGHT

Ramallah

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Palestinian Security Sector Governance: The View of Civil Society in Nablus

Nablus, a city of some 130.000 inhabitants, has historically been the commercial hub of the northern West Bank. Since 2000, however, the city has experienced unseen economic decline and instability, due primarily to Israeli closure policies. Beginning in late 2007, the caretaker government in the West Bank undertook steps to re-establish law and order in the city. Between October 2008 and April 2009, DCAF and SHAMS Center for Human Rights and Democratic Participation held a number of working group sessions with Palestinian civil society organisations in the city. These sessions took place in the framework of the DCAF-SHAMS Forum 'Delivering Security to the Palestinian People', which aims at supporting a sustainable and inclusive Palestinian dialogue on security. The Forum brings together representatives of all stakeholder groups in Palestinian security sector reform (SSR). This issue of the DCAF Spotlight summarises the findings of the working group sessions and shows how civil society in Nablus views security sector governance in their city.

What do Palestinians in Nablus expect in terms of security?

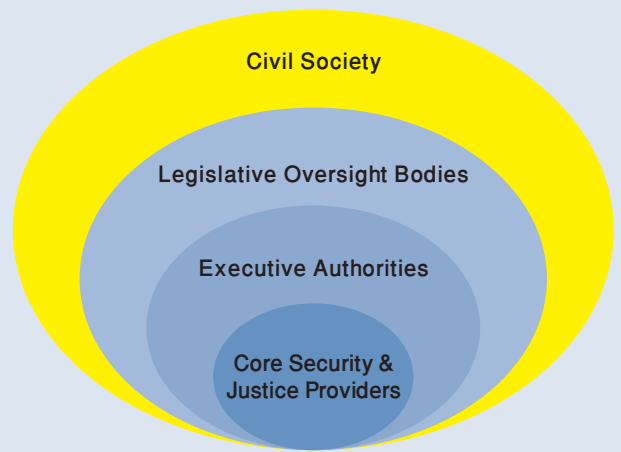
Palestinians in Nablus expect the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to deliver security to all citizens in an effective and equitable fashion. Participants in the working group sessions expressed the following expectations towards the Palestinian authorities:

Respect of citizens' rights:

- ◆ 'The behavior of the security officers needs to be improved. We don't want to be asked for our driving license with a gun in our face.'
- ◆ 'I expect the security forces to protect our freedoms and rights. Where is my freedom? To whom can I speak now, and to whom not?'
- ◆ 'I want the security forces to treat us with respect. I don't want to be presumed guilty all the time by them. I want protection from them.'

What is the Security Sector?

Legal & Policy Framework



The security sector consists of the core security and justice providers and their management and oversight institutions. The legal and policy framework regulates their tasks, authorities and structures.

Core security and justice providers:

- ◆ Security forces (armed forces, police, intelligence and security services, but also liberation armies and insurgency groups)
- ◆ Justice and law enforcement institutions (courts, prosecution services, prisons, traditional justice systems)

Management and oversight institutions:

- ◆ Executive management and oversight bodies (Presidency, Council of Ministers, ministries of defence, interior, justice and finance)
- ◆ Legislative management and oversight bodies (Parliament and its committees, ombudspersons)
- ◆ Informal oversight institutions (civil society organisations, media, research and advocacy organisations)

Safety at homes and on the streets:

- ◆ 'I want to be safe in my home and I want to be safe on the street.'
- ◆ 'We know that the security forces can only operate during the day. But I still want them to protect my children on their way to school.'

Professionalism and neutrality:

- ◆ 'The security forces need to get rid of the wasta (nepotism) culture.'
- ◆ 'What the PNA can do for me? They should apply the law to everybody equally. Here the people who draft the law are the same who do not respect it.'
- ◆ 'Security forces should be neutral like everywhere else in the world.'

Economic security:

- ◆ 'We want economic development and the end of unemployment. We want prosperity.'

Ownership:

- ◆ 'I want to feel that this country belongs to us. I want to feel that reforms belong to me. Not to others.'
- ◆ 'Money is wasted on building security capacities that nobody needs. The security forces receive loads of money from actors that have nothing to do with the interest of our people.'

Addressing women's security needs:

- ◆ 'I want women's security problems to be addressed. I want the police to adopt concrete measures to protect women and stop considering domestic violence as a private issue.'

How do Palestinians in Nablus evaluate the performance of the PNA security forces?

Civil society in Nablus appears to have a mixed view of the performance of the PNA and its security forces in delivering security to the citizens. While many Palestinians welcome the authorities's efforts to establish law and order in the city, they are critical of what they see as the PNA's attempt to increase repression and curtail freedoms. Overall, civil society does not trust the PNA's ability to deliver good security services to

the people. Civil society in Nablus is highly critical of the role of donors in Palestinian security sector governance and believes that the main obstacle to good governance is the Israeli occupation. Many civil society representatives in Nablus are not optimistic about the prospects for sustainable security sector reform efforts in their city.

Effect of Occupation

For Palestinians in Nablus, Israeli occupation policies remain a key factor of insecurity.

Damaging Israeli occupation policies:

- ◆ 'In Nablus, the occupation is a major factor of instability, both inside and outside the city. We should not ask a security officer to do what he is not able to do. The security forces cannot work at night. It is known to everybody that we have the occupation at night and the Palestinian forces during the day.'
- ◆ 'Currently, the security forces are used for solving social problems. But can they protect us from the occupation? No. The security officers are threatened by the occupation exactly like the citizens. So there is no need for security forces.'

Role of Donor Policies

Participants believe that current donor support to SSR does not meet their security needs.

No ownership in security sector reform:

- ◆ 'We have security forces serving the United States Security Coordinator and Israel. Where is our executive authority? Who decided to bring in the United States Security Coordinator? Who wanted that?'
- ◆ 'We see the international plans applied on the ground without knowing what is the exact broader perspective of these plans. We do not know the aims of these plans. There is a direct interference from internationals in our society.'

Damaging effect of donor policies:

- ◆ 'As of now, 37% of our budget goes to the security forces. Since 1994, the security forces have used more than 15 billion US dollar. And for what? We still have no security.'
- ◆ 'Donor support should be spent for the well-being of the citizens and not for the Authority.'

Performance of Security Forces

While welcoming the improvement of law and order, civil society criticises the forces' lack of professionalism.

Improvement of Law and Order:

- ◆ 'Here in Nablus, we can say that 30% of our usual problems have disappeared. Some phenomena of the past do not exist anymore.'
- ◆ 'The security operations during the last months have reduced the level of chaos in the city.'

Increased repression by Security Forces since the Gaza War:

- ◆ 'Things have deteriorated over the last months. The war on Gaza reflected dangerously in Nablus and its vicinity. Security forces kill people during investigation and beat people up who demonstrate in support of Gaza.'

Lack of professionalism in the security forces:

- ◆ 'The PNA established the security forces as security forces for Fatah only. Security has come to be identified with political parties.'
- ◆ 'The PNA needs to change the idea that security is only for representatives of Fatah, and that Fatah is the PA. And we want to define clearly the role of the different security forces.'
- ◆ 'We can see the following problems here in Nablus: High numbers of security forces, no clear differentiation of their role, and corruption in the forces. If I make a mistake, I still don't know which force will arrest me and what measures they are going to take against me.'

No coordination between the various security forces:

- ◆ 'Each security organisation continues to be a small kingdom, and the officer in charge sees himself as the king.'
- ◆ 'People are being arrested on the orders of local officers, but it needs a central political decision before anybody is freed. And family visits are only allowed if people have good personal relations with the officers in charge of the detention facilities.'
- ◆ 'It starts with details like the uniforms of the security forces. How come they are not dressed in a uniformed way? This officer has trousers of that colour, his jacket is different, while his comrade is again dressed in another way.'

Performance of Executive Authorities

Civil society is losing trust in Palestinian authorities and fears increasing repression.

Sinking trust in the Palestinian National Authority:

- ◆ 'There is success at the operational level, true, but there is failure at the strategic level. There is a huge gap between reality and what the people expect. There is a huge gap between all the talk about developing the security forces and their actual performance on the streets.'
- ◆ 'Everything linked to security here in Nablus evokes mistrust. When I see where we stand and what the PNA and our political parties, be it Fatah or Hamas, have achieved, I expect nothing in terms of security anymore.'
- ◆ 'The PNA is experiencing a big loss of credibility right now. It is losing ground and support by the people because of its misbehaviour.'

Political arrest practices of the caretaker government:

- ◆ 'Political detention must stop immediately. The security forces deny political detention. But it happens. This is all governmental policy. It must stop.'
- ◆ 'Now we start to live under the same conditions as our brothers in other Arab countries: oppression, unlimited power, fear.'

Performance of Oversight Mechanisms

For civil society, civil-democratic oversight mechanisms fail to provide adequate checks and balances.

Weak civil-democratic oversight:

- ◆ 'The role of civil society is crucial in raising awareness among the people and exercising oversight.'
- ◆ 'We must strengthen the relations between the security forces and the citizens. Relations have to be based on mutual respect'
- ◆ 'The judicial system suffers a big problem. Security depends on the judiciary. How can security forces work successfully if there is no strong and independent judiciary?'

Targeting civil society organisations:

- ◆ 'The civil society needs a minimum of immunity in this prevailing security chaos. We need to be able to raise our concerns without fear.'
- ◆ 'We need a body to protect us from the security forces. And we need better channels of communication with the security forces.'

Assessment of Policy Process

Civil society sees the policy-making process as lacking inclusiveness and failing to reflect local needs.

No shared security policy:

- ◆ 'There is no consensus here in Palestine about the vision of security. There is still a lack of understanding about what security the forces can actually deliver to the people.'
- ◆ 'It is only external actors that exert security over us. The kind of security we expect is different from the one Israel wants to impose on us. Now what Israel wants the PNA wants. I am very pessimistic about what is going on.'

Recommendations

Many Palestinians in Nablus believe that it needs serious steps for the authorities to improve the delivery of security in the city. They also feel that without responding to the needs of the people, public trust in the Palestinian National Authority and its security forces is likely to decrease further. Participants in the working group sessions made a number of recommendations on how Palestinian security sector governance could be improved:

On the strategic level:

- ◆ To devise a national security policy that is shared by all and that will guide the Palestinian security sector reform process; such national security policy should be formulated in a politically and socially inclusive fashion and be centred on the security needs of the citizens.
- ◆ To undertake sustainable efforts to depoliticise the Palestinian security forces and to remove the provision of security from political interests.

- ◆ To clearly define the roles, responsibilities, jurisdictions and task of all security forces, including on the conceptual, legal and practical levels.
- ◆ To review the existing legal framework for the Palestinian security forces and amend it in line with a civil-democratic principles of security sector governance.
- ◆ To disband non-statutory security actors engaging in illegal activities.

On the institutional level:

- ◆ To strengthen oversight institutions such as the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and the judiciary in order to hold the Executive Authority and its security forces accountable in an effective manner.
- ◆ To strengthen public oversight mechanisms, such as the media and civil society organisations, to help increase the public accountability of security forces.
- ◆ To foster a culture of institutional loyalty in the security forces, rather than loyalty to individual commanders.

On the operational level:

- ◆ To put an immediate end to all forms of political arrest.
- ◆ To launch a sustained rehabilitation process for Palestinian security personnel to improve their professional skills and their behavior vis-à-vis the citizens and to ensure that the 'right person occupies the right position'.
- ◆ To promote a culture of openness and transparency on the part of the security forces in order to reduce nepotism and corruption, and to establish better channels of communication between the security forces and the citizens.
- ◆ To provide security forces with the necessary capacities to fulfill their responsibilities, in particular in terms of infrastructure, equipment and vehicles necessary for combating crime.

DCAF Spotlight is a new publication issued by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Ramallah Office. DCAF Spotlight publishes concise reports on salient topics of Palestinian security sector governance for local and international SSR practitioners.

DCAF Ramallah • Al-Maaref St. 34 • Ramallah • West Bank/Palestine
Tel: +972 (0) 2 295 6297 • Fax: +972 (0) 2 295 6295 • www.dcaf.ch