

CASE STUDY

Community Security Forum on Gunshots: Denormalizing Gunshooting as a Tribal Practice in South Mosul

April 2024

The Qayyarah subdistrict in South Mosul, Nineveh Governorate, Iraq, is known for gunshots during events and celebrations - a phenomenon among society that has been inherited from generation to generation. Individuals express their joy and sorrow through violent means – despite being legally prohibited, socially rejected and a risk to children’s safety.

“During wedding celebrations, I am very concerned for my children due to the firing of gunshots into the air. In most cases, I do not allow my family to attend events out of fear for their safety” - **Faisal, Religious Figure in Qayyarah**

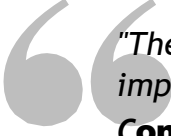
This practice has resulted in numerous injuries, including wounds, deaths, or permanent disabilities for people in South Mosul. Additionally, gunshots cause fear and panic, especially among women and children attending events. It also negatively impacts social relationships due to conflicts arising between survivors and those responsible. Recently, the frequency of ceremonial and celebratory gunshots has increased, with even children engaging in this behavior as a symbol of joy, strength, and pride.

“I almost lost my wife due to a random gunshot, but thankfully the injury was minor” - **Ahmed, Resident of Qayyarah**

Within this context, community leaders and influential individuals in Qayyarah called on Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) to assist in reducing the risks associated with the celebratory gunfire. Given the strong and mutual trust between the community, security forces, and government institutions, NP saw an opportunity to support in proactively putting a stop to the use of celebratory gunshots through nonviolent strategies to interrupt cycles of violence and promote cohesion that contributes to durable peace.

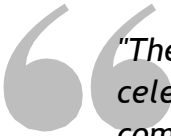
Accordingly, NP organized a Community Security Forum (CSF) in Qayyarah on October 25, 2023, to bring community and duty bearers together to discuss and address the risks observed through heightened and positive dialogue. The forum included community leaders, civil activists, religious figures, community peace teams, media professionals, teachers, police, community police, army, and tribal Hashid. The aim was to collectively discuss and find permanent solutions to prevent the occurrence of violent incidents and

seek nonviolent alternatives, conducive to community cohesion.

 *"The negative phenomenon persisted despite awareness of its risks and negative impacts. It's time to find permanent solutions through everyone's cooperation" --*
Community Police Officer, Qayyarah

During the forum, all participants agreed to collaborate to prevent and stop the cases of gunshots. This collaboration involves protecting community security and activating legal and tribal measures against violators. For instance, community leaders will not use their influence to support a cycle of impunity that would involve them using their connections to release the perpetrator from prison. Equally, wedding invitations would now clearly outline that celebratory gunfire is not allowed during the event. The forum was publicized through social media by local media professionals and community leaders – generating a wide reach among the public which raises awareness about the negative implications of the practice and supports a shift in cultural norms.

The positive results of the CSF became evident shortly after its implementation with a change in community perceptions that encourage nonviolent means to resolve conflicts. The incidents of gunshots significantly diminished. There have been only two instances of gunshots since the forum was conducted, despite numerous events and wedding celebrations in the area. A specific case in point is that there were no gunshots during the community celebration of Iraq's victory in a match of the Asian Cup – a first in Qayyarah's history. This is a strong testament to the impact and success of the CSF and the awareness of the community and its culture in Qayyarah.

 *"The issue of random gunshots used to occupy security forces, especially during celebrations and weddings, causing tensions between security forces and the community. Thanks to NP for the community security forum, as it played a crucial role in stopping this phenomenon" -*
Local Police Officer, Qayyarah

The joint efforts between NP and the community indicate an effective response to local challenges using nonviolent strategies, such as organizing CSFs, which had a significant positive impact on reducing the gunshots during celebrations. This decline underscores the significance of community awareness and collaboration in effecting positive change. In summary, social challenges can be overcome through enhanced engagement between the community, government institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. This entails prioritizing awareness-raising initiatives and nurturing a cultural paradigm shift towards nonviolent conflict resolution, thereby fostering enduring peace.

*** Names were altered to maintain privacy and confidentiality.**