

## **This is an Emergency.**

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The son of the Chief Justice of Sindh High Court was kidnapped at 2:30 PM on June 20, 2016. The sad and unfortunate incident took place in broad daylight at an upscale and busy shopping area of Clifton. It was witnessed by dozens of shoppers, and bystanders. No one came forward to help or report the matter on any emergency number or to any law enforcement agency. The Sindh police got to know of this incident at 9:10 PM. Six hours and forty minutes are long enough to relocate a person 300-400 Km away from the scene of the accident.

On August 13, 2018, Amal Umer, a 10 year old school girl lost her precious life when hit by a stray bullet from a police AK-47. Reluctant and inadequate hospital services, absence of even a rudimentary state-operated ambulance system and a plethora of unreliable emergency phone numbers did the rest. The absence of emergency services, untrained policemen and their disproportionate weaponry came under legitimate questioning. What was however conveniently underplayed was the presence of hundreds of armed bandits, who freely operate on every intersection, nook and corner of our streets.

An effective integrated emergency response system and elimination of all guns (except those that lie in the domain of the state), could have a sea change impact on saving lives and preventing crime and violence. The crux of these tragedies is the prevalence of some 20 million legal and illegal weapons in the hands of civilians in our country. It is a well-documented fact that gun violence is directly proportional to the prevalence of guns in that country, the worst example being the USA. Countries such as Australia, Japan and UK, through deweaponisation schemes, have almost completely eliminated gun violence in their countries.

It is unfortunate that in Pakistan, weapons and violence are a hobby and indulgence of its richest elite. Only between 2008 and 2013, the Federal Government had issued 69473 licenses for prohibited bore weapons on the recommendation of the parliamentarians. This was confirmed by a written statement presented by the Interior Minister in the National Assembly on 28 February 2013. Likewise on 29 December 2014, the Provincial Home Minister informed the Punjab Assembly that 50 per cent of 1.8 million arms licences issued in the province were fake and there was no record of 900,000 arms licenses issued in Punjab. The Sindh Home Minister is on public record for having issued 300,000 prohibited bore gun licenses to his friends and party supporters.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan in its Suo Motu case 16 of 2011 had stated that, *“Karachi is full of arms and ammunition of prohibited and non-prohibited bores including licensed and illicit, therefore, Karachi has to be cleansed from all kinds of weapons by adhering to the laws available on the subject, and if need be, by promulgating new legislation.”*

Providing security to all citizens is the first responsibility of the state. When the state shirks from this responsibility, it is taken over by self-appointed gangs, mafias, individuals and criminals. Pakistan today has hundreds of rural and urban private militias and armies – in gross violation of Article 256 of the Constitution.

There ought to be a citizens’ movement to push the reluctant Federal and Provincial governments to fulfil their constitutional duty to protect the lives of all citizens. This can only be done by declaring that no citizen regardless of his/her status is allowed to possess, carry or display any weapon, licensed or otherwise. Issuance of all gun licenses ought to be stopped immediately and the existing licenses (largely issued on the basis of favour, status or bribe), be declared null and void. Simultaneously the state must execute nation-wide schemes for surrender of unlicensed weapons and buy-back of licensed weapons, as successfully demonstrated by Australia and UK.

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Unlike the rest of the world, Karachi has numerous emergency phone numbers. 15 for Police, 1101 for Rangers, 1102 for CPLC, 1915 for Rahnuma, 16 for fire, 115 for Edhi, 1020 for Chippa ambulance and 1021 for Aman Foundation. A classic case of designing confusion and failure in a system.

Most countries of the world have a single phone number for all types of emergencies. The US and Canada use the same number 911 for crime, fire and ambulance services. Almost all countries of Europe use 112 for all emergency situations. Is it too much for the citizens of Pakistan to demand a single emergency phone number all across Pakistan that caters to all types of emergencies - medical, criminal or fire.

