

Dewaposition in Pakistan is in direct conflict with power, influence and the financial interests of the gun lobby. Those in possession of weapons and those whose profits depend upon manufacturing, import, smuggling, licensing, sale and give up weapons, either voluntarily or happily.

In May 2015, the Sindh Government announced its decision to cancel 595,146 out of the total 1,057,456 gun licenses that it had generously issued. The announcement was as bogus as the thousands of fake weapons licenses that are also easily available. No steps were taken to execute this decision. In August 2016, the new Sindh

While many of the militants who threaten the security forces on the mountains of Waziristan have been effectively neutralised, their counterparts, criminals, militants and banned outfits continue to pose a potent threat. Armed to the teeth with weapons ranging from 9 mm pistols to machine guns, automatic rifles, hand

grenades, rocket launchers and anti-aircraft guns, they continue to strike with impunity at their chosen targets in the rural and urban areas of Pakistan. Despite scores of committees, meetings, resolutions and promises, the state has miserably failed to take even a single meaningful step to proceed against this menace.

The much needed dewaposition in Pakistan is strongly resisted by its own powerful and devious brand of the USA's National Rifle Association (NRA). The NRA, in our case, is represented by legislators who hold over 69,000 prohibited-bore weapon licenses. It is represented by manufacturers, transporters, stockists and sellers of weapons. It is represented by those engaged in smuggling, import and distribution of weapons. It is represented by those who have issued millions of gun licenses without any mandatory checks. It is represented by the cartel of government officials and dealers who exchange both real and fake gun licenses for an under-the-table price. It is represented by the bureaucrats who have perfected the techniques of data disappearance by declaring any record other case in point.

Chief Minister, once again issued a press statement vowing to cancel arms licenses. This too was not backed up by any formal notification of cancellation, nor have any weapons been surrendered. Furthermore, there are fake licenses in all provinces. Punjab, for example, has formally admitted to having no record for 900,000 out of the 1,800,000 gun licenses issued. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa meanwhile, actively encourages gun culture by facilitating teachers, government servants and doctors to obtain gun licenses.

Fighting a war for survival, while simultaneously promoting weapons and tolerating militant groups, is beyond the realm of logic. It only lends credence to the widespread belief that dewaposition is a state-sponsored activity. It is patronised by the powerful ruling elite of Pakistan. A law-maker who has 200 plus prohibited bore gun licenses cannot be expected to vote in favour of dewaposition! The fact that the infamous National Action Plan (NAP) conveniently, and completely, missed out the 'dewaposition' clause in its 20-point agenda, is yet another case in point.

As "not available," lost or burnt. And finally, a large chunk of this disaster capital goes to the powerful private security agencies whose business flourishes with every bullet that diminishes yet another life.

Dewaposition in Pakistan is thus in direct conflict with power, influence and the financial interests of the gun lobby. Those in possession of weapons and those whose profits depend upon manufacturing, import, smuggling, licensing, sale and weapon-related services cannot be expected to give up weapons, either voluntarily or happily.

Thus a peoples' mass movement for abolishing all weapons and limiting them to the exclusive domain of the state may be the only way forward. It is heartening that individuals and organisations such as the Citizens Against Weapons (CAW), the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the Pakistan Institute of Labour & Education Research (PILER), Shehri CBE, Shirkat Gah, Tehrik-e-Niswan, Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), the Citizens Trust Against Crime (CTAC) and the Children's Literature Festival (CLF), have come together to endorse their support for a nation-wide dewaposition programme. While these are much needed and encouraging developments, they need to be scaled up many times in order to dewaposition the minds and hearts of our decision makers.

"Slavery wasn't a crisis for British and American elites until abolitionism turned it into one. Apartheid wasn't a crisis until the anti-apartheid movement turned it into one," writes Naomi Klein in her book, 'This changes everything.' What is needed in Pakistan is a similar people's social movement for the abolition of weapons. Our state has become a helpless hostage to gun-wielding individuals and militias. Should we not break away from a system that makes access to automatic weapons easier than access to decent schooling or clean drinking water? ■