



GUN FREE KITCHEN TABLES

A project of Isha L'Isha Haifa Feminist Center

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

We don't know who she is, but we know we can save her life...



NORMALCY MEANS DISARMAMENT

Following our comments in October 2023, Gun Free Kitchen Tables (GFKT) continues to mourn and rage at the eruption of militarized violence we are witnessing. The current genocidal destruction of life and livelihood in Gaza must be stopped, in full adherence to the recent UN resolution just as all hostages and prisoners must be released. At the same time, GFKT is greatly concerned about the fast-changing reality of proliferating firearms among Israel's Jewish civilians, aggressively advanced by the government since its decision on October 15th on much loosened regulations for gun licensing. The racist incitement promoting this gun-drive will likely aim these weapons at Palestinian citizens of Israel "importing" the gun violence against Palestinians already spiraling throughout the West Bank. **GFKT proposes and supports a view of this mass civilian armament as a crisis-related, temporary measure.** Learning from the varied experiences of other societies and activists from other countries, we envision and call for a roll-back of small arms proliferation in the civil sphere which, we contend, must be a key material manifestation of the country's return to calm and normalcy.

THE GUNS OF OCTOBER: THE MASS ARMAMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN ISRAEL

GFKT has never before seen comparable dimensions of intentional government-led licensing of private gun owners and other gun bearers. Exploiting the widespread public sense of a total breakdown of security following the events of October 7th, Israel's far-right drastically loosened gun licensing regulations on October 15th and encouraged record numbers to apply for private gun licenses. **In mid-March 2024, the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, celebrated the approval of 100,000 new gun licenses, five times the number of new licenses approved during the previous year.**

Additional channels for civilian armament include over 1,100 companies that are permitted to arm employees, and the formation of some 900 new "community security squads" aiming to recruit and arm 18,000 volunteers. Meanwhile, the military arms of hundreds of thousands of reservists travel to and from Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. On top of this,



estimated hundreds of thousands of unlicensed guns, mostly stolen from licensed sources, are reportedly held by criminal groups, most of them among Palestinian citizens of Israel, enabling record murder rates in this community (244 in 2023, almost 90% of them shot). **In the context of the unfolding conflict in Gaza, and the precedent of May 2021, we view the ready availability of these weapons as a likely catalyst that may escalate conflict, enable crimes and war crimes, and even ignite civil war.**

The mass armament of Jewish civilians, moving freely throughout Israel and the West Bank, has already figured in sharply increased attacks, intimidation, and control of Palestinian communities in the West Bank and may easily exacerbate analogous violence against Israel's Palestinian citizenry. Proliferating guns will likely increase the violent persecution of Palestinians throughout the whole of historic Palestine, underlining the strong, immediate linkage between Israel's small arms policies and the violent, militarized measures currently underway in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

At the same time, these developments impact women of all backgrounds who are disproportionately endangered by guns in homes and families. In addition, they pose specific, differential threats to refugees and asylum seekers as well as members of additional marginalized groups. Moreover, armament endangers oppositional non-violent protestors, demonstrators, and activists.

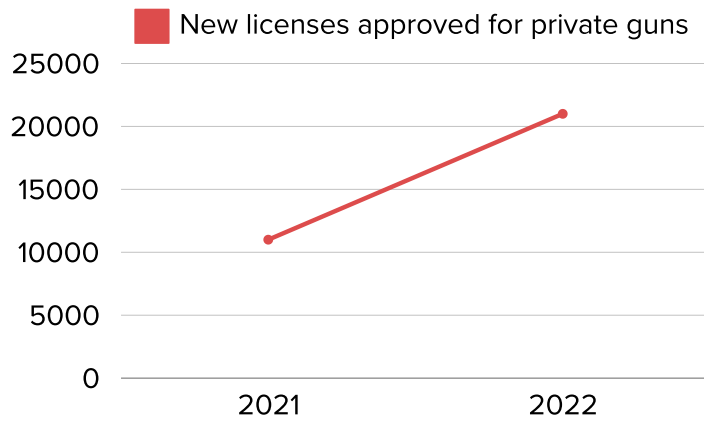
While the root problems and looming threats remained largely the same, the scope and pace of their impacts at the end of 2023 were unprecedented.

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH IN CIVILIAN ARMAMENT

Since 2018, successive governments in Israel have led a consistent process of civilian armament, feeding into multiple, intersecting forms of gun violence. GFKT tracks and correlates trends in the numbers of civilian gun licenses and levels of gun violence. Data extracted from the Ministry of National Security in July 2023 showed a sharp rise in new licenses approved for private guns. **The toll taken by criminal gun violence is most pronounced among Israel's Palestinian citizenry, but media also recorded a rise of over 50% in the number of Jewish victims of homicide in the first 8 months of 2023.** The Knesset Research & Information Center reported that 43% of all women murdered in Israel in 2021-2022 were killed with firearms, all of the Jewish women and two of the 27 Palestinian women with licensed civilian guns.



Data extracted from the Ministry of National Security in July 2023:



GUN FREE KITCHEN TABLES: PROVIDING A HUB FOR KNOWLEDGE BUILDING REGARDING SMALL ARMS

GFKT was founded in 2010 as an independent project under Isha L'Isha Haifa Feminist Center to challenge steadily loosening gun policy. GFKT was the first (and for many years the only) small arms disarmament and gun control initiative in Israel. Since we have been tracking and documenting the reality of civilian armament since 2010, we bring leading expertise and a broad network of activists and organizations. **Leading a coalition of 20 civil society and women's organizations, GFKT has amassed a distinct body of knowledge on small arms in Israel analyzed through a gendered and intersectional lens.** Through persistent work, the GFKT Coalition has become a widely acknowledged leader in promoting gender-aware gun control across Israel.



WHAT GFKT ADDRESSED AND HOW WE RESPONDED PRIOR TO OCTOBER 7TH

OBFUSCATION & POOR GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

As stressed by The Knesset Center for Research and Information in 2023, “the Israeli police cannot provide most of the requested information.”

Towards extracting and correlating the existing data, in 2023, GFKT:

- Submitted 4 requests for information under the freedom of information law, to the Welfare Ministry, the police, the army, and the Ministry of National Security, continuing to push for transparent information on gun thefts, violence, and murders. Notably, in July 2023 the Ministry of National

LIMITED CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

To date, due to largely unquestioned assumptions that firearms provide security, civil society organizations in Israel have engaged insufficiently with the dire threats posed by proliferating guns.

Working to enhance recognition of, and action on, these threats, in 2023, GFKT:

- Engaged organizations planning the large November 25th march against violence against women in Haifa, including city hall representatives, who agreed on a central message opposing government plans for mass civilian

ESCALATING PROLIFERATION

Over 2023, the newly elected government and particularly the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, loudly promoted a policy of loosened licensing regulations and the mass, swift armament of civilians.

Raising an oppositional voice and soundly based dissenting arguments, in 2023, GFKT:

- Submitted a written testimony, to the UN CEDAW committee (responsible for member states' implementation of the convention to end violence against women), detailing how Israel's small arms policies breach the state's obligations under CEDAW.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

Due to extensive militarization and the normalization of military arms, Jewish society in Israel lacks a clear grasp of the dangers of proliferating firearms.

Broadly publicizing and visualizing these dangers, in 2023, GFKT:

- Ran a media campaign designed to heighten public awareness of the damages of mass civilian armament to human security. In May, the powerful graphics, cogent statistics, and vivid animation of the campaign were viewed 910,500 times and reached 225,000 people. The final, animated post, can be found [here](#).



Security wrote us that they do not conduct any oversight of private license holders.

- Initiated the development of an independent data-collection tool tracking incidents of gun violence, accidents, and thefts, in partnership with the Disrupt Foundation.

armament.

Unfolding events prevented this year's march, but the decision demonstrated GFKT's success in generating consciousness of the problem throughout a strong feminist network.

- Expanded its networking considerably and, for the first time, began doing collaborative work with the Israeli Democracy Institute, the Mizrahi-Civil Collective, the Rackman Center, the Forum of Law Professors for Democracy, and others.

- Was drawn on as a precedent by the High Court in June, when GFKT language and evidence served as grounds for a ruling that held private security firms responsible for failing to reduce predictable risks and sending a guard home after duty with his gun, which then served to kill two people. Two private security firms were instructed to pay the families reparations.
- Demanded the involvement of the Welfare Ministry in ensuring that suspects of domestic violence and/or substance abuse are not granted gun licenses. The Ministry is now demanding new legislation that would allow it to pass information to the licensing authorities prior to issuing a license.



WHAT GFKT ADDRESSED AND HOW WE RESPONDED AFTER OCTOBER 7TH

OBFUSCATION & POOR GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

Given the fast-changing, confusing, and obfuscated small arms reality, GFKT:

- Urgently prioritized building a body of clearer, more solidly grounded knowledge on questions directly affecting life and death. We formed a network of volunteer data activists who committed to intensive fact-finding on arms distribution, on multiple, new channels of armament, on gun-related incidents and more.
- Researched and authored [a factsheet](#) on the new reality of fast-proliferating guns, issued in mid-November. The document emphasized the

LIMITED CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

As many civil society organizations and activists belatedly and suddenly recognized the threats posed by radical government-driven small arms distribution, GFKT:

- Convened lawyers from multiple organizations in late October to discuss petitioning the High Court against the new licensing regulations. The gathering and discussion themselves were momentous, including representatives from a broad range of civil society organizations, although the joint decision was to refrain from legal action at this time.
- [Produced a position paper](#) in partnership with Physicians for Human Rights (a member of the GFKT

ESCALATING PROLIFERATION

While government-driven armament was clearly spiraling out of control, GFKT:

- Prepared and dispatched a total of seven different letters to various authorities, between Oct. – Dec. 2023, with and (some) without GFKT Coalition partners, demanding concrete steps to reduce the many risks inherent in the current mass distribution of firearms. Among other topics, these letters have included formally submitted critique of the proposed emergency amendment automatically extending civilian gun licenses beyond expiration dates, a

PUBLIC AWARENESS

On a background of spreading public recognition of the irresponsible nature of mass armament, GFKT:

- Engaged with public figures who have begun voicing opposition to the current gun drive. These include, among others, the Chair of the Union of Public Health Physicians, Dr. Hagai Levine, and the Union Treasurer, Dr. Nadav Davidovitch.



danger posed by proliferating guns, in the hands of hundreds of thousands of (mainly) Jewish men, to Israel's Palestinian citizens, first and foremost. It underlined the linkage between Israel's small arms policies and its militarized occupation, dispossession, and oppression of Palestinians throughout the whole of historic Palestine. The fact sheet was shared and discussed with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Territories, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and other partners abroad.

- Continued development of the technological tool for independent, automated data-collection on firearm-related incidents.

Coalition), determining it unethical for doctors to serve as gatekeepers for small arms licensing, as proliferating guns directly endanger public health and doctors have zero training for assessing risk levels to an individual or his/her surroundings if he/she is armed.

- Joined the meetings and activities of a new informal network of organizations initiated by Shatil to oppose fast-proliferating guns while providing the network with extensive experience and knowledge of the field (to which many other organizations were new).
- Fielded requests from multiple civil society organizations and groups to share accumulated knowledge and analysis, also occasioning GFKT appearances at several webinars and lectures.

demand for oversight of private gun bearers, and a demand for enforcement of safe storing. We hold the documentation and formal submission of these claims to be significant exercises of democratic citizenship, for future reference, even if they remain unheeded by decision makers.

- Accompanied and counseled "bottom-up" work by municipal players such as social workers at the Haifa municipality and a group of residents in Pardes Hannah to demand measures for gun control from municipal authorities.



THE GFKT COALITION: A SWIFT & FLEXIBLE RESPONSE

While the GFKT Coalition could clearly fall under the heading of "Civil Society Engagement," we wish to extend our special thanks and respect for our many long-time partner organizations and activists. We cannot exaggerate the importance and resilience of this civil society body over the last months of 2023. As we all began to realize the extent and the recklessness of the post-October gun drive, GFKT's core staff was heartened by the swift, active engagement of many Coalition member organizations, through multiple staff members, alongside the commitment of independent GFKT activists. We were moved by the many women (and some men) who contributed spontaneously and wholeheartedly to following, documenting, understanding, and opposing proliferating arms. People shared constant updates, media items, and information, raised and discussed innovative suggestions for joint practical steps, participated in strategic decision-making, worded letters, attended, addressed, and summarized meetings of parliamentary committees, and responded to a stream of requests from media, foreign representatives, and others. An emergency Coalition meeting and subsequent team meetings for strategic planning were attended by dozens of staff and activists from a long list of organizations. As recent developments have taught us, flexibility is a vital component of our approach and responses if GFKT is to stay relevant in a fast-unfolding context. **The work of over a decade was evident in the collaborative patterns with which we were able to confront the new reality.**

INCREASED ATTENTION

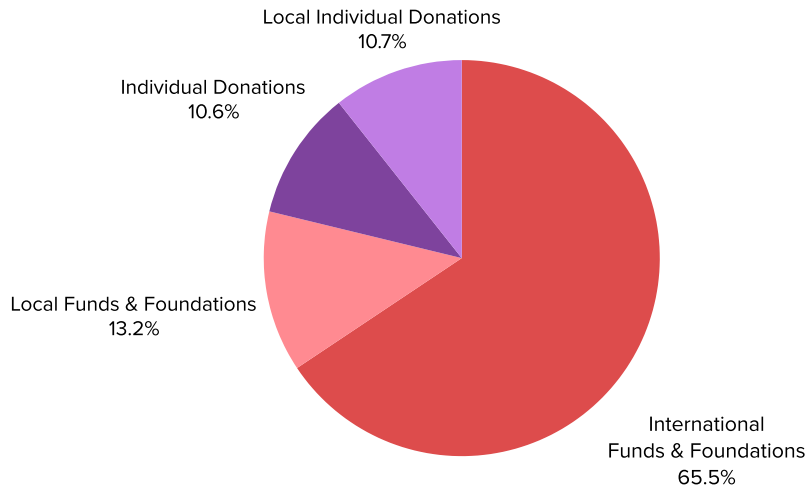
From being a subject very rarely highlighted in media, fast proliferating guns has become one of the main subjects in media since October 2023. GFKT has been quoted, interviewed, and referenced in Hebrew, English, Arabic, and more. For a period, however, we asked to be quoted as "a source from GFKT" after online slander and threats seemed to raise the level of personal risks. Our involvement has been intensive and informed articles like:

- The [Washington Post](#)
- [Haaretz](#) (in several cases)
- [The Trace](#)
- [BBC](#)
- [NBC News](#)
- [Jerusalem Post](#)
- [The Media Line](#)
- An op-ed by Rela Mazali, GFKT Coordinator, in [Physicians for Human Rights'](#) newsletter

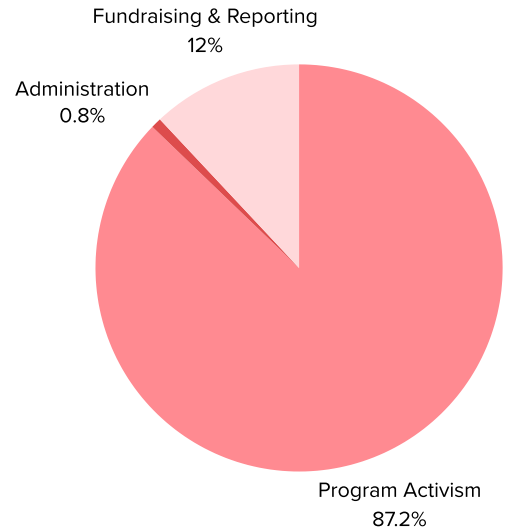


GRATITUDE: FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2023

Total Revenue: \$206,000*



Total Expenditure: \$131,500



*Revenue excess has been allocated to GFKT's 2024 budget.

GFKT continues to grow our local and international circles of support. **To all of you who supported our work in 2023, thank you! Your friendship and support have continued to strengthen our resolve and increase our impact at this historic juncture!** GFKT's 2023 supporters are listed in alphabetic order:

- Alexandra Senfft
- Anita Altman and Gilbert Kulick
- Anne Germanacos through Firehouse Press
- Anonymous
- Anonymous
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- Account #: 413461
- Swift code: FIRBILITXXX
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- 1 Natan Komoi St., Ziv Center, Haifa 3276101, Israel

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- PO Box 70358, Philadelphia, PA 19176-0358, USA
- In the memo line, write: "Donor Advised for Gun Free Kitchen Tables"

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Ceramic art by Shani Mazali, from the exhibit "Gun Kitchen;" Photographs: Shani Mazali.