



Separate but Unequal

Despite the promise in Israel's Declaration of Independence of "complete equality of social and political rights," severe inequalities exist between Jewish and Arab Israelis. Arab citizens of Israel comprise 19.5% of the total population of the State of Israel, numbering 1.37 million. Unlike the Palestinians in the territories, they are full citizens of Israel who vote and pay taxes, yet they suffer pervasive discrimination, unequal allocation of resources and violation of their legal rights. On an individual basis, Arab Israelis enjoy formal equality, including voting rights, freedom of worship and expression. Arab Israelis are not drafted in the Army---they may voluntarily serve, but very rarely do.

- 48 of the 61 poorest towns in Israel are Arab towns.
- Although Arab Israelis represent nearly 20% of the population, local Arab authorities have jurisdiction over only 3% of the land, leading to overcrowding and poverty.
- The 160,000 Negev Bedouin live in extreme poverty. Half live in 36 "unrecognized" villages and nine recently-recognized villages lacking basic services such as water, sewage, electricity, and health clinics.
- Arab schools receive half the budget, per capita, of Jewish schools. Arab students have the highest dropout rates and lowest achievement levels in the country.
- Many Arab communities lacked bomb shelters and early warning systems to cope with rocket attacks during the summer 2006 war in the North; 40% of the civilians killed were Arab Israelis

Successive Israeli governments have acknowledged the inequities and discrimination, yet no comprehensive steps have been taken to remedy the situation.

Challenges

- While Arab Israeli citizens are granted full rights and full protection, Israel has never integrated its Arab population socially or economically, treating them as second-class citizens and excluding them from public life.
- Jews and Arabs generally live in segregated neighborhoods and towns, send their children to separate schools, and have little personal contact with one another.
- Arab Israelis have many ties—including family ties—to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and are thus treated with suspicion as potentially disloyal to the State.
- Israel's immigration policy is based on the Law of Return, which favors the Diaspora Jewish community over non-Jewish citizens and immigrants. Although Israel is not a theocracy, the public culture of the state is Jewish.

Social and Cultural Rights

- Since Arab Israelis do not join the army, they have less access to social and economic benefits for which military service is a prerequisite or advantage, such as public housing, new-household subsidies, and employment, especially government or security-related industrial employment.
- Arab Israelis face various challenges relating to cultural and political rights, including the right to determine the content of the cultural and historical curriculum in Arab schools, and the lack of recognition of their historical narrative alongside the Jewish Israeli historical narrative.

Land Rights

- There is a lack of planning for Arab neighborhoods and towns that has led to ongoing difficulties in obtaining building permits, and as a result, the demolishing of illegal buildings in the Arab sector.
- Since 1948, almost no Arab neighborhood or town has legally been permitted to expand; in the "mixed cities"—Jaffa, Ramle, Lod, Haifa, and Akko—where Arabs co-exist with Jews, Arab neighborhoods have glaring deficiencies in infrastructure and funding relative to their Jewish neighbors.

NIF Activities and Achievements

NIF believes that equality and peaceful coexistence between Jewish and Arab citizens is both a moral and democratic imperative as well as a necessity for the long-term stability of the State of Israel. NIF is working to:

- Obtain equal access to social, cultural, economic and educational rights;
- Reduce the violation of Arab Israelis' legal rights;
- Achieve per capita equality in land distribution;
- Achieve equality in investment in housing and infrastructure in Arab areas within mixed Jewish-Arab cities.

Our grantees include:

- **The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)**, Israel's leading human and civil rights group. ACRI is the only organization dealing with the entire spectrum of rights and liberties issues. Through legal advocacy, litigation, human rights education and public outreach, ACRI has led the fight to protect rights in Israel and the territories under its control. www.acri.org.il;
- **Adalah: the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel**, the first nonprofit and nonsectarian Arab-run legal center in Israel. Its work draws on Israeli law, comparative constitutional law, and international human rights conventions in order to achieve equal rights and minority rights protections for Arab citizens of Israel. www.adalah.org;
- **The Mossawa Center**, working to obtain equal rights for Palestinian-Israelis and to gain equal representation for Palestinian-Israelis in state bodies and institutions. It conducts advocacy efforts, empowerment programs for Arab personnel, and public education programs to promote the importance of activism for equal rights. www.mossawacenter.org;
- **Association of Bedouin Women to Promote Education**, which encourages and assists Bedouin girls and young women in pursuing higher education. It implements programs for high school girls to achieve higher matriculation scores, offers scholarships for women students at institutions of higher learning, and raises consciousness within the Bedouin community.

NIF and our grantees' accomplishments include:

- Adalah won a precedent-setting decision when the Supreme Court ordered a new plan for Kammaneh, an Arab village that is in the process of receiving official recognition. The original plan excluded more than 40% of the houses, which would have resulted in the residents being evicted and their homes demolished. By requiring a new, inclusive plan, this marks the first time that the Supreme Court has ruled that recognition must be provided to an unrecognized Arab village.
- Since NIF initiated its Early Childhood Education program, over 200 pre-schools have been opened for Bedouin children.
- The Supreme Court established the State's obligation to ensure fair representation for Arab citizens on publicly appointed bodies. The decision came in response to a petition by ACRI over the membership of the Israel Lands Administration Council. The Council is a pivotal economic body in Israel, overseeing allocation decisions affecting 93% of the land in Israel.
- After a lengthy legal battle of more than nine years, the Supreme Court established that an Arab family should be allowed to purchase a plot of land in the Jewish residential community of Katzir, which had previously denied their request. Although the decision has yet to be implemented, it set an important legal precedent against discrimination.

Kicking Racism Out of Israeli Soccer

In 2003, New Israel Fund initiated **A New Voice from the Stadium** with the aim to kick racism out of Israeli soccer. The campaign has rapidly become one of the best-known social change projects in Israel, and has led to improved legislation and law enforcement to crack down on perpetrators, as well as a rise in public awareness. Modeled on the successful English campaign “Let’s Kick Racism out of Football” and carried out in partnership with the Israel Football Association and with support from the English Football Association, the action mobilizes fans and players to promote a more sportsmanlike atmosphere on and around the soccer field.

Israeli soccer has a paradoxical nature. On the one hand it is a highly integrated arena that has made national heroes of players from Arab-Israeli towns, from poor Jewish development towns and of Ethiopian immigrants and foreign nationals. On the other hand the soccer field is also a backdrop for hooliganism, racism and violence that have cast a pall on Israel’s national sport. The racist epithets—against Ethiopian and African players, but most of all against Arab players—hurled in stadiums have alarming resonance in a society that bears the scars of communal tragedies and deep social schisms. Today, more than ever, the blurring of the lines in what is considered acceptable public discourse in Israel is evident in increasing expressions of incitement and racism and a lack of recognition of the civil and human rights of those who are different or disempowered. A recent poll (March 2007) revealed that over 50% of the Jewish population in the country believes that Israel should encourage Arab emigration. In the wake of increased Jewish-Arab tensions following the summer 2006 war, there is an urgent need to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

Volunteer Observers Forum: NIF-trained volunteer observers collect data on violent or racist remarks directed at players and other fans due to their religious, racial or national origins, and on incidents of physical violence. The data is published in a weekly Index in leading newspapers and sports Internet sites.



Racist Incitement on the Field: Abbas Suan, an Arab-Israeli citizen from the Galilee town of Sakhnin and a midfielder on the Israeli national soccer team, electrified thousands of Israeli fans when he scored the tying goal in a World Cup-qualifying match against Ireland. Weeks later though, when his Bnei Sakhnin club met Betar Jerusalem, Betar fans held up signs that read “SUAN: YOU DON’T REPRESENT US!” In April 2007, Bnei Sakhnin was upgraded to the Premier League, which is expected to cause an increase in racist reactions and incitement.

Questions for Discussion

General Discussion

1. How do you relate to Benny and Jimmy's respective attitudes in pursuing their goals?
2. How do you react to Jimmy's statement, "Israel is a racist country"? How would you characterize Jimmy's experience?
3. The enclosed issue sheet describes some of the challenges faced by the Arab minority in Israel. In what ways is Jimmy's experience characteristic of the situation?

Going Deeper

1. The State of Israel has the challenge of a significant national minority (Arab citizens) that does not identify with the Jewish character of the state.
In your view, what obligations does the state have to this group? Some areas to consider include:
 - a. education (who controls curriculum, whether the minority's narrative is incorporated in addition to the majority's);
 - b. language (e.g. having street signs include Arabic as well as Hebrew);
 - c. symbols (e.g. the flag and national anthem of Israel are based only on Jewish symbols)
2. What important are small-scale "people to people" peacemaking approaches like Benny's in reducing racism and facilitating peaceful coexistence? What other strategies can you think of to attain these goals?

Further Resources

Official Summation of the Or Commission Report, September 2003:

www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=335594

New Israel Fund website (Issue Area: Arab Citizens): www.nif.org/content.cfm?id=1746&currbody=1

The US State Department 2005 Report on Human Rights: www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61690.htm

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/People/SOCIETY-%20Minority%20Communities

www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFArchive/2000_2009/2001/8/Arab%20Israelis

www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Facts+about+Israel+The+State/A+Free+People+in+Our+Land+The+Arab+Sector.htm