

## **Development**

# **The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel**

Report, *The National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel*, 12 January 2007

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*The following is an excerpt from "The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel," a report issued in December 2006*

We are the Palestinian Arabs in Israel, the indigenous peoples, the residents of the States of Israel, and an integral part of the Palestinian People and the Arab and Muslim and human Nation.

The war of 1948 resulted in the establishment of the Israeli state on a 78 percent of historical Palestine. We found ourselves, those who have remained in their homeland (approximately 160,000) within the borders of the Jewish state. Such reality has isolated us from the rest of the Palestinian People and the Arab world and we were forced to become citizens of Israel. This has transformed us into a minority living in our historic homeland.

Since the Al-Nakba of 1948 (the Palestinian tragedy), we have been suffering from extreme structural discrimination policies, national oppression, military rule that lasted till 1966, land confiscation policy, unequal budget and resources allocation, rights discrimination and threats of transfer. The State has also abused and killed its own Arab citizens, as in the Kufr Qassem massacre, the land day in 1976 and Al-Aqsa Intifada back in 2000.

Since Al-Nakba and despite all, we maintained our identity, culture, and national affiliation; we struggled and are still struggling to obtain just, comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East region, through achieving fair and lasting resolution concerning the Palestinian refugees' resolutions status according to UN and for reaching peace through the declaration of an independent Palestinian State.

Defining the Israeli State as a Jewish State and exploiting democracy in the service of its Jewishness excludes us, and creates tension between us and the nature and essence of the State. Therefore, we call for a Consensual Democratic system that enables us to be fully active in the decision-making process and guarantee our individual and collective civil, historic, and national rights.

In light of this modern complex history, we are moving towards a new era of self-recognition, where it is necessary to create our

future path, crystallize our collective identity and draw up our social and political agenda. The establishment of the High Follow up Committee for the Arabs in Israel was a pivotal point in the history of our community where such committee became the highest representative body for all other public and political organizations.

Based on this reality of collective internal changes, the project presented by this document is a continuation of our struggle towards crystallizing clear strategic future vision for the Arab Palestinians in Israel. The project aims at answering the question, "who are we and what do we want for our society?"

In order to obtain this goal, the future vision will be followed by tangible practical steps and a concrete action plan with specific goals. We recommend such document to be a public reference. This document includes all streams of the Arab society, as this vision is an independent Palestinian rhetoric. We hope this future vision would yield unity between different and sometimes contradicting viewpoints and beliefs on the basis of our national collective principles and interests.

The National Committee of the Local Arab Authorities in Israel is responsible for implementing this project, a project which was presented to the High Follow up Committee of the Arabs in Israel.

This project was implemented in two stages:

1. A Steering committee was created. It contributed to the objectives and strategies of the project to include its actual implementation and check the scope of conformity of the goals with the mechanisms of the program.
2. A future vision was crystallized by meetings of Arab intellectuals and activists throughout the year. This stage is concluded by holding a general conference and a presentation of a conference book that will include the final and complete version of the future vision.

We hope that our vision would contribute to change our reality and to impact the Israeli agenda, in an effective and positive way. This is a continuous process of the public action that the High Follow up Committee had been implementing since its establishment. We also hope to enrich the public discussion amongst us, Palestinians in the Diaspora, the Jewish society in Israel and the international public opinion.

The group had discussed eight aspects:

### *The Palestinian Arabs in Israel and their relation to the State of Israel*

The Palestinian Arabs in Israel are in need of changing their status. While they are preserving their Arab Palestinian identity, they need to obtain their full citizenship in the State and its institutions. They also aspire to attain institutional self-rule in the field of education, culture and religion that is in fact part of fulfilling their rights as citizens and as part of the Israeli state. They also seek to obtain full equality with the Jewish majority.

Such self-rule within the State poses a system based on Consensual Democracy. A system embodies the presence of two groups, the Jews and the Palestinians. Such system would guarantee real resource, leadership and decision making participation.

### *The legal status of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*

Our legal vision concerning equality of the Palestinian Arabs depends on the transformational group perspective of equality. Through this principle we seek to obtain practical equality and partnership on the national-collective level, and, opposing economic dependency from which the Palestinian Arabs suffer. This is to achieve a comprehensive structural societal change that fulfils living conditions for the minority not less in its social and economic level than those of the majority. We seek to obtain total freedom of national dependency, exploitation and oppression.

On the basis of this broaden democratic vision we seek to crystallize our collective future vision of the legal status of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel, so it is based on equality, partnership and mutuality.

### *Land, Planning, and Housing Policy of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*

In order to change the existing reality we recommend the following: Adoption laws of distributional justice between the Arab citizens and the Jewish citizens within the consensual democracy. To cancel all laws of confiscation and the regulations and measures that discriminate against the Arab minority; Changing the Israeli policies within the fields of land and planning starting with recognizing the historic oppression that inflicted the Palestinian Arab minority. The boundaries of the Israeli land must conform to the boundaries of citizenship and not to the boundaries of the Jewish people; Administrative reconstruction of the Israeli institutions that work in the fields of land planning and housing; Expanding the area of jurisdiction boundaries for the Arab villages and towns so that public land (state land) becomes part of this sovereignty; Adoption of a new public rhetoric concerning land and planning. So that it includes a demand to stop the implementation of the current law of planning and housing that discriminated against the Arab citizens.

### *Economic strategy for the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*

The Arab citizens in Israel should merge with a new economic system through a development plan based on activation of the economic resources. This will promote implementation of a social welfare system that includes the basic services and provides work opportunities for all.

The best choice for the Arab citizens in Israel is to adopt a two-fold development: First, merging in the Israeli work market as a legitimate right of equal opportunities in employment and investment market being citizens of the state, second, creation of internal momentum within the economic movement that would lead towards an increase in the chances for the Arab society and relatively free from dependency and attain social unity and equality.

### *Strategy for social development of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*

The process of social development is a very expansive and comprehensive one and includes all aspects of life. Social development aims at creating a sound and cordial atmosphere that guarantees the solidarity and social equality, where the individuals can enjoy a better life. This means upgrading the status of women through equating them with men in all aspects of life, especially self-assertion aspect; Participation of individuals both men and women in the process of social change; Treatment of social diseases that exhaust social resources and harm social relations; Creating harmonic pace between growth and structural development and between growth and individual and local development; Achieving balance between creative- innovative individuality and collective interest; Guaranteeing a sound social base to nurture collective identity.

### *Educational vision and strategic planning of the Arab educational system in Israel*

The Arabic educational curriculum needs clear educational strategy that takes into accounts the cultural developments and knowledge wide exposure and technology revolution.

The status of the Arab women should be taken into account, in addition to the economic, political and environmental aspects of society.

The strategic work plan should depend on the following:

The right of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel (as indigenous people in their homeland) to self-administration of the educational system and to self-determination of its policy; Adoption of the Arab education objectives as drafted by the Follow-Up Committee for Arab Education in Israel after the fourth Arab education conference back in 1994, taking into consideration the possibility of adjusting such objectives according to current developments,

empowering the universal and social values education; The educational systems tasks are made up of the following: 1. The creation of a generation that enjoys crystallized values and identity and confident personalities. 2. Teachers should have the chance to exploit and nurture the abilities and potential of their students; considering educational system as the basic component for any socio- economic, cultural and political collective growth project.

#### *The Palestinian Arab culture in Israel*

"Historic Palestine" is the homeland and is the unifying element between all even though this homeland is occupied. The land is wherever Palestinian creative people meet. Sense of belongingness to this place remains the priority of the national, cultural and civilized identity. For the Palestinians artists and intellectuals, this place provides the primary literary language with its special vocabulary of the history, geography and culture.

We, the Palestinians in Israel, are an integral part of this place as it creates our consciousness and our literary language and crystallizes our identity. Israel tried over the past decades to disengage us from this place not through physical transfer but through intellectual emotional transfer. Israel tried to create a new identity on the basis of "loyalty to the state" - as outlined in the goals of the Arab educational curricula. This policy did not succeed as after the Nakba, an Arab Palestinian cultural movement surfaced and became a natural extension to the Palestinian cultural movement that was crystallized back in the early twenties of 20th century.

Thus, we suggest developing a high board of cultural affairs creating higher board to follow up the Palestinian cultural affairs in Israel does not pose a substitute to any already existing framework. Rather, it will back these frameworks and activities and collect and intensify work to maintain and develop our culture.

#### *The Institutional and Political Public Work*

The creation of national institutions and clarification of their internal roles and their relations with the State institutions, the elected local authority, individual initiatives, the private sector and the political institutions are the most prominent challenges that require discussion and decision making. Development of the national institutions would promote real change in our collective status in terms of the ability to face the regional conflict. It would promote our status in the State and our collective vision that is being crystallized - especially after the Oslo agreements.

Thus, any strategic vision to be developed has to propose the following objectives: Continuing internal and collective organization aiming to obtain individual and collective rights of the Palestinian Arabs as citizens of the State, being the indigenous

people and as part of the Palestinian People dispersed throughout the world and as part of the Arab region and contributors to the global dialogue; Deepening the consciousness over the national Palestinian identity and the democratic humanitarian civil values of the Arab society as basic points to resist the institutional control and challenge ethnic divisions and internal social problems; Developing and empowering the work of Arab institutes aiming to promote social change, and creating a mechanism of networking and coordination between them; Building strategies and institutions aiming to end the regional conflict and promote the peace process by benefiting from the unique status of the Arab society, both locally and regionally; Developing relations and activities with other countries and organizations on the international arena including International Jewish organizations in order to stress the importance of international recognition of the national, cultural, economic and social needs of the Arab society in Israel. This aims promote the status of the Arab society and develop a democratic system equal and just for all groups of people in Israel.

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