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Governmental Responsibility for Social Inclusion and Jewish-Arab Equality in Israel

◆ **PLATFORM FOR DISCUSSION** ◆

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Overview

Pointing to the exacerbation of Jewish-Arab relations over the past decade, this paper proposes government actions towards achieving social inclusion and integration in our divided society, inspired by examples of similar initiatives in Northern Ireland.

This paper includes the following sections:

1. Background on the State of Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel

2. Government Action for Social Inclusion and Equality: The Northern Ireland Experience

3. Government Policies for Social Inclusion and Jewish-Arab Equality: The Benefits

4. Principles for Governmental Responsibility

5. Summary

1. Background on the State of Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel

The Orr Commission Report, conducted in the wake of the October 2000 events, constituted the first official recognition by a government agency of the depth of discrimination and institutional exclusion experienced by Israel's Arab citizens since the establishment of the state. Many had believed that this seminal event would serve as a positive turning point and an opportunity for a change in the government's policy toward its Arab citizens. In practice, the Commission's recommendations have not been implemented. In the past seven years, no genuine improvement in the state's stance toward its Arab citizens has been evident. This is

despite the fact that the Orr Commission explicitly cited the failure to address the discrepancies between the two populations, and the policy of "no-policy," as a central factor, among others, for the fueling of frustration and alienation.

Since the early 2000s, we have witnessed a sequence of events that signal the deterioration of relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. Among the main events in recent years that have attracted the focus of the media and which have signaled the ongoing decline, the following are noted: the October events; the establishment of the Orr Commission and its subsequent report; the population/land transfer discourse; the rise of Israel Beiteinu in the recent elections and its inclusion in the government; Balad MK Azmi Bashara's departure from Israel; the "Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law", which prevents Arab spouses residing on both sides of the Green Line from living together in Israel;[1] the failure of the "Constitution by Consensus" initiative; publication of the "Future Vision" documents by several prominent groups in Arab civic society;[2] the Second Lebanon War and the subsequent deepening divide between Jews and Arabs; the decline in election participation rates of the Arab population; the continued demolition of homes in Arab towns; the Peki'in events; the debate over civic/national service for Arab citizens and the establishment of a special governmental body promoting this issue; the passage of the first reading of the Jewish National Fund Law (JNF);[3] the publication of the Association for Civil Rights' report, and additional annual reports, pointing to a deterioration in relations and increasing racism; socio-economic gaps between Jews and Arabs widened, according to the Poverty Report, especially in regards to Arab children; and finally, the call by sections of the Arab public to boycott Israel's 60th Independence Day celebrations.

The polarization in Jewish-Arab relations is tangibly reflected in the figures which follow: **Figure 1** presents the change in attitudes of the Jewish public in Israel toward the Arab population between 2005 and 2006, published in the 2007 Racism Index and the 2007 Report of the Association of Civil Rights. These statistics indicate a rise in ethnocentric and racist attitudes. They are consistent with the statistics of the 2007 Democracy Index presented in **Figure 2**, which show a gradual decline between the years 2000 and 2007 in the support by

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1   The law precludes that official status in Israel be granted to residents of Gaza and the West Bank. This law was passed in 2003, extended in 2006, and its restrictions expanded in 2007. As a result of a judicial decision, thousands of Arab-Palestinian families are unable to live together due to their nationality. For additional information, see http://www.adalah.org/heb/famunif.php.
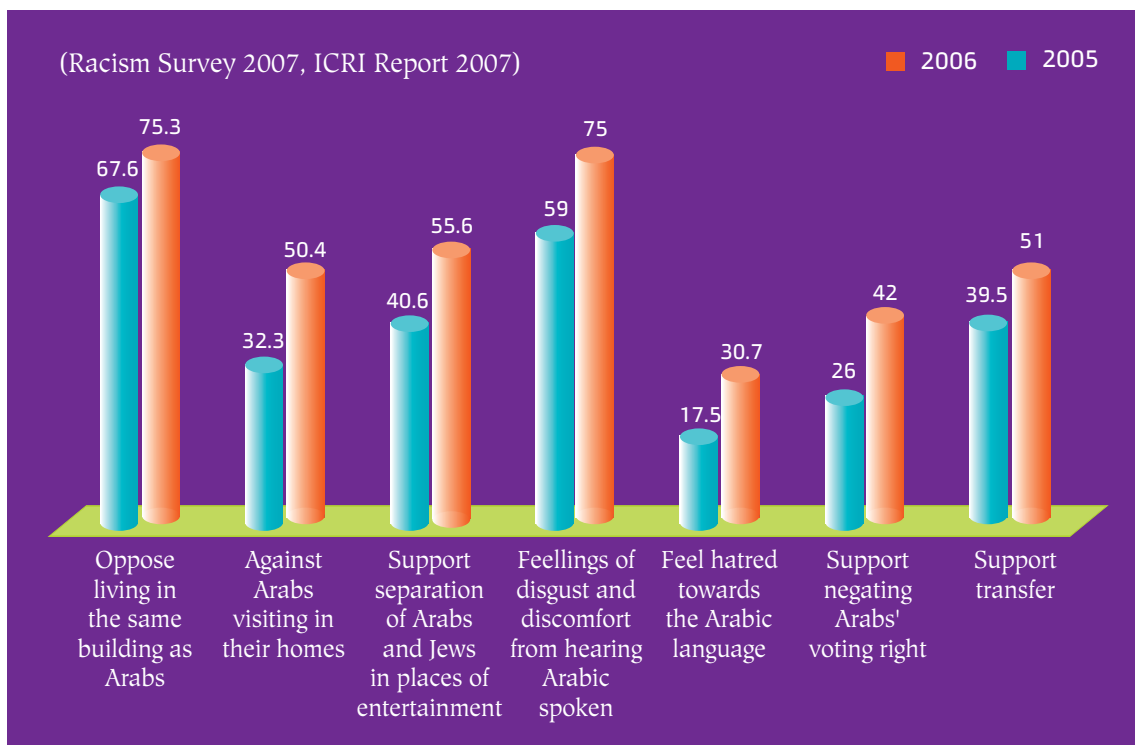
2   The following four documents were published between 2006 and 2007: Equal Constitution for All? Mossawa Center (November, 2006); The Future Vision for Palestinian Arabs in Israel published on behalf of the National Committee for Arab Heads of Local Governments in Israel (December, 2006); The Democratic Constitution by Adalah (February, 2007); and The Haifa Declaration, published by Mada-al-Carmel Institute (May, 2007). The documents are available on the websites of the above organizations.

3   A bill proposed by MK Uri Ariel of the National Union-Mafdal provides that land owned by the JNF (13% of the lands in Israel which were originally owned by Arab refugees or Internal Displaced Persons) will be allocated exclusively to Jews. The bill was approved by a significant majority of 64 for16 against, and 1 abstention. For more information, see http://www.adalah.org/heb/jnf.php.

the Jewish public for equal political rights of Arab citizens and the inclusion of Arab parties in the coalition government. In 2007, only 22% of the Jewish public supported political equality, compared to 46% in 2000, reflecting the lowest rate since the early 1990s.
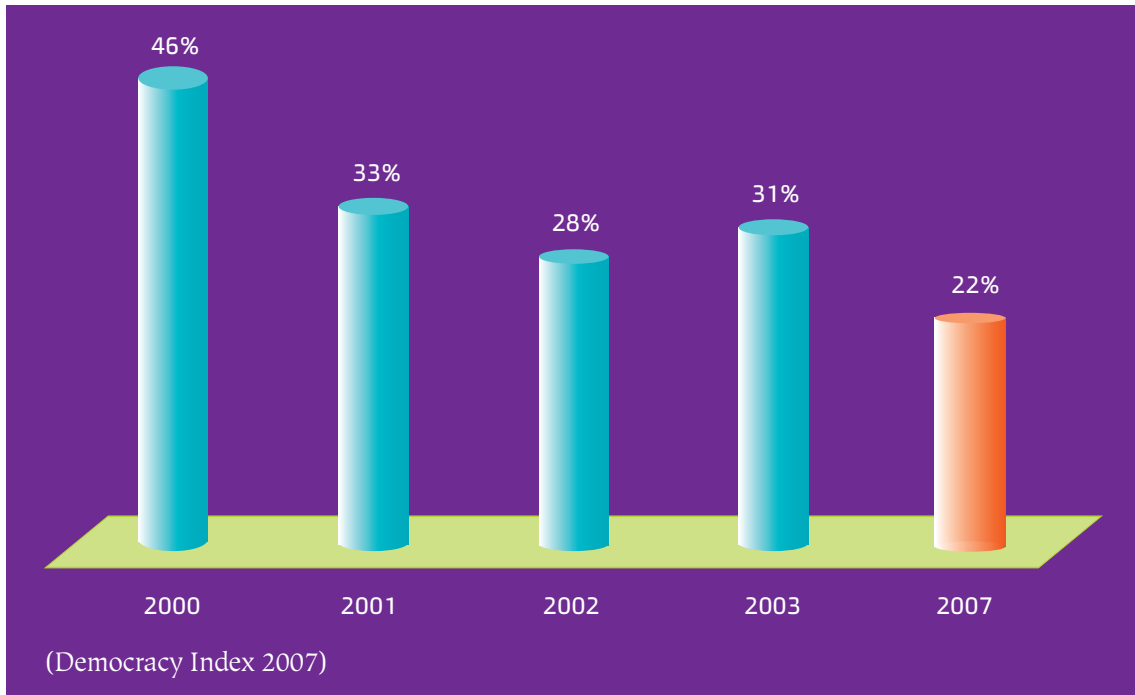
The polarization is also clearly reflected in statistics regarding the Arab population. **Figure 3** presents the declining participation rate of Arab citizens in Knesset elections between 1996 and 2006. These statistics express their deepening sense of alienation. These figures are highlighted by the turnout for the special Prime Minister elections in 2001, in which the voting rate of the Arab population was a mere 18%, compared to 77.2% for the Jewish population. In view of these figures, it is not surprising that only 33% of the Arab citizens believe that Israel is a democracy, according to a survey conducted by the Mada-al-Carmel Institute. Of the survey participants, 62% believe that Israel cannot simultaneously be a Jewish and democratic state; 87% view the Law of Return as discriminatory legislation; and 94% view Zionism as a racist movement (Mada-al-Carmel, 2004).

Chart 1: Attitudes of the Jewish Population

(Racism Survey 2007, ICRI Report 2007)   ■ 2006   ■ 2005

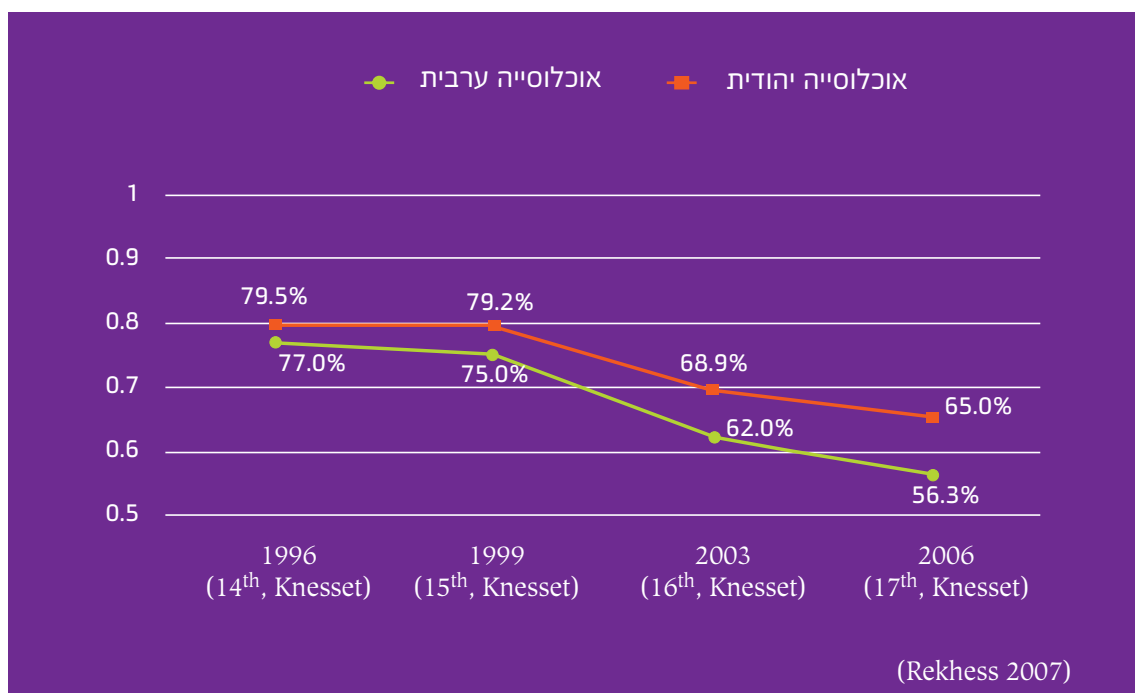| Category	2005	2006
Oppose living in the same building as Arabs	67.6	75.3
Against Arabs visiting in their homes	32.3	50.4
Support separation of Arabs and Jews in places of entertainment	40.6	55.6
Feellings of disgust and discomfort from hearing Arabic spoken	59	75
Feel hatred towards the Arabic language	17.5	30.7
Support negating Arabs' voting right	26	42
Support transfer	39.5	51

Chart 2: Support Amongst the Jewish Public for Political Equality for the Arab Minority

(The Inclusion of Arab Parties in the Government, Including as Ministers)

46%	33%	28%	31%	22%
2000	2001	2002	2003	2007

(Democracy Index 2007)

Chart 3: Voter Participation Rates in Knesset Elections

אוכלוסייה ערבית   אוכלוסייה יהודית

	1996 (14th, Knesset)	1999 (15th, Knesset)	2003 (16th, Knesset)	2006 (17th, Knesset)
אוכלוסייה יהודית	79.5%	79.2%	68.9%	65.0%
אוכלוסייה ערבית	77.0%	75.0%	62.0%	56.3%

(Rekhess 2007)

2. Government Action for Social Inclusion and Equality: The Northern Ireland Experience

Northern Ireland offers one of the most significant examples of vigorous, effective government action to promote social inclusion and equality in a divided society. This document does not address the basis for comparison between Northern Ireland and Israel, the features of the Northern Ireland situation, nor the types of government action being practiced there. These issues warrant a separate, in-depth discussion. Nonetheless, we note several areas of government action in Northern Ireland that may contribute to the discussion on the development of potential tools and government strategies for social inclusion and Jewish-Arab equality in Israel.

FORMULATING A VISION OF A SHARED FUTURE

In 2005, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for Northern Ireland published the "A Shared Future" document that was disseminated as official ministerial policy and served as a strategic framework for generating good relations between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. The document was the result of a vibrant public debate on this topic, involving community representatives from diverse arenas of public activity. The document's broad scope and aims were designed to transform the existing political structure, while instigating changes to increase inclusion and equality in all areas of life, and promote conciliation between the communities. Since its publication, government agencies and the communities in Northern Ireland are actualizing the documents, declarations and policies into implementation.

(Additional information is available at http://www.asharedfuture.gov.uk).

LEGISLATION

Northern Ireland has one of the world's most progressive sets of legislation in the area of social inclusion and equality,[4] most notably in the wake of the 1998 Belfast Agreement ("Good Friday"), which contains a collection of laws known as Section 75 that guarantees equality, fair representation and human rights in diverse areas of life. It must be noted that legislation in these areas preceded the Agreement by several years, and significant constitutional reforms were also conducted after the Agreement was signed. The system of laws, and its concomitant enforcement, has proven to be highly effective in reducing discrimination and enhancing equal opportunities in Northern Ireland, despite the fact that Northern Ireland (like the rest of the United Kingdom) has no constitution.

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4   The following is a list of the major laws on inclusion and integration in Northern Ireland: Equal Pay Act, 1970; Sex Discrimination, 1976; Race Relations, 1997; Fair Employment & Treatment, 1998; Northern Ireland Act, 1998; Equality Order, 2000; Employment Equality, 2003; Hate Crime Legislation, 2004; Special Educational Needs, 2005.

ESTABLISHING INSTITUTIONS

Several statutory governmental and quasi-governmental institutions (with independent Boards of Directors, receiving government funding, yet not formally subordinate to the government) have been established through legislation in Northern Ireland. In order to institutionalize policies of inclusion and equality, these organizations have been structured to be independent of the changing political composition of the government or any given individual. The main areas of action of these organizations include drafting and monitoring legislation and policy; supervision; enforcement; and establishment of local and national partnerships between communities. Several government agencies, such as the Northern Ireland Commission for Human Rights, are active in areas that would be considered in Israel to be within the scope of civil society.

Furthermore, one of the governmental areas that underwent the most significant transformation in Northern Ireland, and which is considered one of its success stories, is the Policing Service of Northern Ireland. The transformation of the police force in Northern Ireland is a topic of study all over the world. This significant process was rooted in changing the notion of policing as a means of control by the majority over the minority and developing a new awareness and service orientation for equitable policing services for all sections of the population. These changes have been achieved by involving local communities in decisions dealing with policing, inclusion of all communities in the police force, ending the exclusive dominant status of the majority group in the police force, the establishment of supervisory and consulting agencies to the police, and increased transparency and accountability of the police force in general.

For additional information on the major government and quasi-governmental institutions that implement policies of inclusion and equality in Northern Ireland, please refer to the following:

First Minister and Deputy First Minister http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk

Police Service of Northern Ireland http://www.psni.police.uk

Northern Ireland Policing Board http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/

Equality Commission http://www.equalityni.org/site/default.asp?secid=home

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission http://www.nihrc.org

Community Relations Council http://www.community-relations.org.uk

3. Government Policies for Social Inclusion and Jewish-Arab Equality: The Benefits

There are diverse benefits that can derive from government policies for inclusion and Jewish-Arab equality in Israel and the realization of full and equal citizenship for Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens. The far-reaching significance of implementing such policies is reflected in the following areas:

SECURITY

- National security
- Personal security
- Social cohesion

ECONOMY

- Economic growth
- Reduced government expenditures

VALUES

- Strengthening democracy
- Cultural wealth and diversity
- Religious and ethical values
- Universal and humanitarian values
- Fulfilling the vision of Israel's Declaration of Independence
- Equal opportunities

POLITICS

- Regional integration
- Palestinian-Israeli agreement
- International legitimacy

Support for these claims may be found in studies and publications of The Abraham Fund Initiatives and other organizations, based upon research and experience in Israel and worldwide.

4. Principles for Governmental Responsibility

In light of what has been addressed in this document, we call for governmental responsibility, informed by the following principles, amongst others:

- **Granting tangible expressions of the centrality of majority-minority relations in Israel**

  Public statements and declarations are needed by leaders, especially the government, addressing the urgency and significance of strengthening Arab-Jewish relations in Israel

- **Dialogue with Arab leadership**

  It is essential that the Israeli Government conduct ongoing dialogue with influential public figures in Arab society, including the elected leadership, intellectuals, and other representatives of the Arab community.

- **Developing a shared vision for both populations**

  Formulation of a shared vision for all of Israel's citizens is essential for a shared future. Absence of a shared vision encourages separatist tendencies, and deepens the divisions between the different communities.

- **De-legitimizing exclusion and inequality**

  Government institutions must serve as a model for inclusion and equality by guaranteeing fair representation of Arab citizens in the public sector, and by combating discriminatory practices within the civil service and beyond.

- **Legislation**

  Specific progressive legislation is necessary to prevent discrimination against the Arab community, and should be accompanied by effective means of enforcement.

- **Establishment of statutory agencies for inclusion and equality**

  Agencies should be established in order to advise, supervise and enforce inclusive and equitable practices, established though legislation. These agencies should operate independently of any specific government composition or coalition.

- **Creating "shared spaces" promoting interaction and partnerships between the communities**

  It is imperative to nurture existing models, as well as develop new models for a shared society in all realms of life, including education, joint industrial zones, and others.

- **Confidence-building measures between government institutions and the Arab public**

  Israel's governmental and legal institutions must take action to build trust with the Arab community, include Arab citizens in decision making processes, and guarantee equitable services to Arab and Jewish citizens.

5. Summary

If we wish to halt the distressing deterioration in Jewish-Arab relations that we have witnessed in recent years and embark on a path towards a shared society, it is urgent and essential to promote social inclusion and Jewish-Arab equality. This can be achieved through the development of sustainable frameworks for addressing majority-minority relations in Israel, and prioritizing these issues as a major national goal. The Government of Israel must recognize and fulfill its responsibility in this area, which will make a significant contribution to the prosperity, stability and cohesion of Israeli society for the future.