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## **Israel's Arab Citizens: Progressive Responses**

**10 December 2012**

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### **A. Israeli Government Response**

*The current Israeli government's commitment to the needs of the 20% Arab population was affirmed shortly after it was elected, with the establishment of The Authority for Economic Development in the Minorities Sectors in the Prime Minister's Office and the appointment of MK Avishay Braverman as Minister for Minority Affairs. At the same time, the first 'Information Manual on Israel's Arab sector for policy makers' produced by the Abraham Fund was endorsed by MK Braverman and distributed across all Israeli government departments. MK Braverman resigned in January 2011 but The Authority for Economic Development in the Minorities Sectors continues its work under the leadership of Arab civil servant, Aiman Seif.*

- **Economic Development**

The Authority for Economic Development in the Minorities Sectors was created in 2009 – shortly after the government was elected – in order to tackle socio-economic gaps between Arab and Jewish communities. Under the direction of Aiman Seif, himself an Arab, the authority is currently implementing economic development plans in Arab, Circassian, Druze and Bedouin communities.

In March 2010, the Israeli government launched a major initiative to reduce poverty in Arab areas of the country, as part of this five year programme. Government Resolution No. 1539 allocated NIS 800 million (£135 million) to develop employment, provide housing solutions, improve access to transportation, empower human capital, and increase personal security and safety. It is focused upon 12 specific Arab and Druze localities: Mughar, Sakhnin, Shefar'am, Nazareth, Arabeh, Tamra, Dalyat al- Carmel and Isifya, Tira, Kfar Qassem, Umm al-Fahm, Qalansuwa, and Rahat.

The government is also allocating funds for 13 industrial parks in Arab communities, which will not only boost employment levels but will also accrue more money for local municipalities through tax levies on commercial buildings.

In the wake of the Trajtenberg committee's recommendations in September 2011, the government allocated an additional NIS 1bn to Arab communities over five years, focussed on two areas: a. Employment in the Arab sector (NIS 750m) and b. Capacity building and service delivery in Arab municipalities (NIS 250m).

- **Tackling public sector underemployment**

In 2000, an amendment to the Civil Service Law was introduced in the Knesset that would institutionalise fair representation of Arabs in government ministries. The Cabinet

mandated that Arab employees should constitute at least 6% of all employees in government agencies, organizations, and ministerial offices by 2006, and 8% by 2008.

This target was not reached, even though Arab employment in these positions increased from 4.8% to 5.9% between 2000 and 2008.

Nevertheless, government ministries remain committed to affirmative action. In November, 2007, the government passed a decision which stipulated that by 2012, Arab and Druze employees should comprise 10% of all civil service employees. In June 2008, the Director-General of the Ministry of Justice announced that "30% of the vacancies to be filled in the civil service will be set aside for Arabs." According to the Israeli Civil Service Commission's report for 2008, between 2006 and 2008 the proportion of Arab candidates who commenced work at the Civil Service almost doubled: from 5.7% (180 out of 3,161) to 10.4% (517 out of 4,955).

The government has also initiated a number of incentive packages for educational and housing expenses that would make it more viable for Arabs to relocate to Jerusalem for government employment.

- **Increasing Arab participation in national service**

In June 2011, the Ministerial Committee on Legislative Affairs approved a government bill that calls for extensive reforms in the National Civic Service System to make it easier for Arab sectors of the population to undertake community service as an alternative to IDF enlistment. Over the past five years the number of Arabs volunteering has risen from 240 to 1,459.

- **The Police Force: representation and service in Arab communities**

Following clashes between Israel's police force and Arab protestors during the October 2000 riots, in which 13 Arab citizens were killed, an investigation was launched that resulted in the publication of the 2003 Or Commission Report. The report criticised the heavy-handed approach of the Israeli police force.

In response to this, in 2004, the Israeli police formally recognised the Abraham Fund as its official provider of educational activities on issues of democracy, civil rights and egalitarian service in a multicultural society – and instituted the organisation's Community-Police Initiative as part of the formal activities of its Human Resources Department. This has led to community police units, comprising of both Jewish and Arab personnel in over 100 Arab towns, in contrast to 3 towns a decade earlier. Each of these units is comprised of both Jewish and Arab personnel, increasing the Arab representation in the Israeli police from 1 to 4.5 percent.

This, in turn, has paved the way for the commitment of Israel's police force to a more measured response, for example in its preparations for the UN vote on Palestinian statehood. Israeli Police Commissioner Yohanan Danino announced that if and when protests occur in Arab society as a result of the UN statehood bid, subordinates will be instructed to act with restraint and sensitivity to prevent an escalation of violence. He said the police "will ensure that all those that will protest will return home safely."

- **Arabic language teaching**

In 2010 the government implemented an Arabic language requirement for fifth graders in 170 Jewish schools in northern Israel. The programme, entitled 'Ya Salam', forged in conjunction with the Abraham Fund, makes Arabic language and culture studies mandatory in state schools, as well as creating 50 new jobs for Arab teachers. There are plans to roll out the programme more widely.

- **Investment and business**

An Investment fund for the Arab sector, Al-Bawadir, was launched in March 2010 and is the first ever government initiative to enhance private sector investments in Arab businesses. Run by Pitango, Israel's leading capital venture group, Al-Bawadir was awarded a government tender to advance minority sectors of NIS 80m and has raised a total of NIS 177m (around £30m). The fund is investing in Arab-owned technology, manufacturing and service companies. It will make investments within five years, after which it will help the portfolio companies expand and provide other assistance.

The high-tech employment of Arab college graduates has almost doubled in the last three years, helped by the joint Arab-Jewish organisation, Tsofen. Recognising its 83% placement rate, the government has provided funding enabling Tsofen to double again the number of Arab graduates enrolled in its transitional programmes. In addition, the government has agreed to pay 25% of the salary of all Arab citizens hired in the high tech sector.

The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange (TASE) launched a programme in 2010 to boost listings of Arab companies this year as part of a bid to improve relations with Israel's Arab community. In line with broader government efforts to develop the Arab business community within Israel, it has launched a programme to encourage Israel's Arab businesses to list on the Israeli exchange. The TASE has a modest target of attracting 10 listings in the next two years.

## **B. Civil Society Response**

A wide range of Israeli civil society organisations work in this area, some with government funding. One such major NGO is The Abraham Fund Initiatives, which seeks to advance coexistence and equality between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens. Its Language as a Cultural Bridge programme, run in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and a number of municipalities, seeks to improve the teaching of Arabic, and the Arab culture, in Jewish schools. By 2009 it had reached 11,000 students.

Through its Mirkam in the Galilee, Economic Development and Government Training and Advocacy programmes, the Abraham Fund Initiatives promotes: partnership between Jewish and Arab local political leaders and bureaucracies for regional economic development; helps Arab women to play a greater role in the workforce; and trains government agencies and employees, so they become more aware of and responsive to the needs of the Arab population.

Following the publication of the Or Commission Report (see above), the Abraham Fund Initiatives launched its Community-Police programme to improve relations between the police and the Arab community. In 2004, the Israeli police formally recognised the Abraham Fund as its official provider of educational activities on issues of democracy, civil rights and egalitarian service in a multicultural society, and instituted the Community-Police Initiative

as part of its formal training activities. In 2009 more than 450 police officers participated in a variety of Abraham Fund Initiatives training activities. In 2009, the Abraham Fund Initiatives led a study trip to Northern Ireland, and produced the 'Policing in a Divided Society: Lessons from Northern Ireland' report [http://www.abrahamfund.org/img/upload/0/0\\_3497.pdf](http://www.abrahamfund.org/img/upload/0/0_3497.pdf)

Tsofen is a non-profit organisation that seeks to integrate the Arab community into the high-tech industry and into other advanced industries. This is a challenge since the high-tech sector is based in and around Tel Aviv, whilst most Arabs live further north. To tackle this, Tsofen aims to establish and aid the establishment of high-tech centres in Arab communities by encouraging high-tech companies to move operations to the Galilee and Nazareth. To support this Tsofen trains Arab university engineering graduates to work in the high-tech industry.

Tsofen and Israel's Ministry of Trade and Labour announced the joint venture on 6 January 2012. This partnership means that the Israeli government will provide some funding for Tsofen's core activities allowing other initiatives to benefit. Israeli Trade and Labour Minister Shalom Simhon said that "the ministry would like to develop joint ventures with civil society to promote and encourage employment among special populations and job seekers in the Negev and Galilee."

Hand-in-Hand operates a network of award-winning bilingual (Hebrew-Arabic) schools where Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel study together. There are five bilingual schools in Israel, and three are operated by Hand-in-Hand. Hand-in-Hand also provides support to one of the two remaining schools. Increasing the number of bilingual schools in Israel is a challenge due to the geographical separation between most Jewish and Arab towns.

Hand-in-Hand was co-founded by Israeli Arab educator Amin Khalaf and Israeli American educator Lee Gordon in 1997 with 50 students at two campuses. The first high school graduates of Hand-in-Hand's bilingual, integrated school system (who had been with the school since kindergarten) received their diplomas at a ceremony on June 29, 2011. The 14 students were the first to complete 12 years of formal education at the high school in Jerusalem. They were part of a school body of 530 students.

The Hand-in-Hand schools, like all public schools in Israel, receive government funding. However, since each classroom requires two teachers the schools are almost twice as expensive to run as most schools, and they therefore rely on additional donations and fees.

**This is just a small selection of the broad array of NGOs that work within the Arab sector, providing services, advocating for greater government support and campaigning in the courts and parliament.**

### **C. What is the UK doing to advance equality?**

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Israel Matthew Gould has taken a strong interest in supporting Israel's minorities since becoming ambassador in 2010. Speaking at the Israeli Equal Opportunities Commission's 2011 conference, Ambassador Gould asserted that: "Israel enjoys the most extraordinary diversity in its population," adding that "the diversity of Israel's population is something that should be celebrated."

However, he warned that "the fabric of Israel's society" could be damaged if this diversity leads to increasing division, and pointed towards socio-economic gaps between a number of

groups, including Arabs and Jews, as posing a particular challenge. The priorities of the British embassy in Tel Aviv reflect this focus on challenging inequality. In addition to projects supporting UK-Israel bilateral relations and the Middle East peace process, the embassy currently supports the following programmes via its own core budget and the Conflict Prevention Pool (CP) – a London-based fund jointly administered by the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development:

- The Abraham Fund Initiatives, which seeks to advance coexistence and equality between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens
- Tsofen, which seeks to integrate Israel's Arab community into the high-tech industry
- Injaz's Forum 2030, which supports the leaders of the Arab local authorities in Israel
- The Israel Youth Award, which develops social leadership through the participation of 1,220 Arab Israeli youth in its award programme
- The Arab Jewish Centre for Equality, Empowerment and Cooperation (AJEEC), which seeks greater equality for the Arab minority in Israel, including the Arab-Bedouin community; and better cooperation between Jews and Arabs in Israel
- The Arab Centre for Alternative Planning (ACAP), which seeks to represent the needs and interests of the Arab citizens of Israel on issues of planning, land, housing, and development
- Two projects and campaigns supported by the New Israel Fund's Shatil NGO, which campaign for better housing and planning for Arab Israelis in the towns of Akko and Lod
- This is in addition to language projects backed by the British Council in Israel, including Hand-in-Hand bilingual schools, and English language and Communications training for NGOs; and the Israeli-Arab component of the embassy's new High-Tech Hub, established to strengthen relationships between the British and Israeli high-tech industries.

British funding of Tsofen, AJEEC and Shatil was secured via the UK Task Force on Issues Relating to Arab Citizens of Israel, and is matched by funding from four members of the Task Force coalition: the New Israel Fund UK, Pears Foundation, Samuel Sebba Charitable Trust and the UJIA.

The UK Task Force is a coalition of Jewish community organisations working to raise awareness of issues relating to Arab citizens of Israel and leverage resources to provide effective solutions on the ground.

In addition to project funding, the British Embassy has recently appointed an Arab sector manager in its new UK-Israel Tech Hub to oversee business links between Britain and the Israeli Arab tech sector.