

Israel and the Palestinian Minority

Political Monitoring Report

April 2010 through May 2010

Issue 9, 2010

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Introduction

At the beginning of this millennium, the Jewish population in Israel began to adopt ethno-national and strong neo-Zionist positions and values. These are reinforced by the state's governmental apparatus. Simultaneously, the state began to more actively pursue the social engineering of Palestinian citizens, hoping to blot out notions of collective identity and dispossess them of their cultural and national heritage. These efforts, if successful, are liable to completely exclude Palestinian citizenry from the realm of political activity, and eventually erase the collective population itself.

The prevailing political culture in Israel supports ethno-national and anti-democratic elements, evident in their penchant for increasing security at the expense of human rights and freedom of speech. A survey conducted in late April 2010 by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research of Tel Aviv University shows that 57.6 percent of Jews in Israel think human rights organizations that expose immoral actions by Israel should not be allowed to operate freely, and 50 percent believe there is too much freedom of speech in Israel.¹

In response to the question "if Israelis who support sanctions or a boycott of Israel should be punished," 56.5 percent responded positively, and 73.9 percent said that harsh penalties should be imposed on journalists who publish information on immoral acts committed by the army and the Israel Security Service (Shabak). In addition, 64.8 percent are of the opinion that the media in the country should be prohibited from reporting items that security officials think might endanger state security, and 42.6 percent think the media should not publish reliable information

¹ Or Kashti. (2010, April 28). 74 Percent of the public: punish persons who disclose security cases. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

from Palestinian sources if it might cast a negative light on the Israeli army.² “In Israel, there is a distorted conception of democracy. The public indeed recognizes the importance of democratic values, but when the time comes to apply them, we find that most of the population is almost anti-democratic,” says Professor Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University’s School of Education. Bar-Tal added,

“faith in democratic values is measured precisely in test cases, when the principles have to be applied. The educational system teaches pupils about the governmental authorities and about the procedures in elections, but there is no deep discussion on democratic values and inculcating them. The whole subject is perceived as Leftist.”

Professor David Newman of Ben-Gurion University agrees that, “the statistics are very worrisome.”³

According to Gidon Levy of *Ha’aretz* the survey’s findings leave very little leeway for interpretation:

The only democracy in the Middle East is perhaps unique, but it’s doubtful if it’s the real thing. Results of a poll published in *Ha’aretz* yesterday reflect what has been known for a long time: a combination of ignorance, a basic lack of understanding and a fascist mood. An ill and dangerous wind is blowing toward a government that is threatened with collapse...

Punishing and punishing, and delighting in the silencing of the critics – that’s what the people want. That’s their opinion. Most Israelis are also tired of all the monitoring and control mechanisms, which are the real test of the regime. In this atmosphere, it is easy to pass a wide variety of legislation and bills in the Knesset that mainly seek to punish citizens and Palestinians and restrict political action and protest.⁴

Palestinian citizens have long understood this reality and have historically attempted to bring awareness of this phenomenon to Israeli society. They did not need the survey – they suffer the reality. The survey’s findings offer further empirical support for arguments made in Mada al-Carmel’s Political Monitoring Reports. The results illustrate that Israel’s political culture and ideology legitimizes both the state’s and Jewish citizens’ treatment of Palestinians and their leaders.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gidon Levy. (2010, April 29). The only democracy. *Ha’aretz*. (in Hebrew).

This report describes this frightening reality, primarily through a focused analysis of Knesset legislation and government policy. We shall particularly focus on the unique incident in late May: the freedom flotilla to Gaza. The flotilla incident and the particular reactions to the event within Israel clearly reveal the status of Palestinian citizens and the ease with which their representatives are accused of treason, are portrayed as a foreign element in Israeli politics, and are prohibited from expressing a political or ethno-national opinion that runs against the Israeli consensus. Any such expression of dissent offers a pretext for removal from the political arena.

The Legislative Branch

Israel Beitenu's efforts to declare citizenship dependent on loyalty is a reoccurring subject in Mada's Political Monitoring Reports. Although Israel Beitenu is indeed spearheading this campaign, it is not alone in the struggle. Other parties in the Knesset are in strong agreement. For example, on May 26 2010 Knesset members of Israel Beitenu presented *Proposed Citizenship (Amendment - Revocation of Citizenship for an Act of Terrorism or Espionage) Law, 5770 - 2010*.⁵ The Knesset approved the bill, on preliminary reading. Twenty Knesset members voted in favor and ten members against.⁶

The bill states:

Where a person has been convicted for an offense and the court determined that it was an act of terrorism within its meaning in the Prohibition on Financing of Terrorism Law, 5765 - 2004, or has been convicted for an offense under section 97 to 103, 112 or 113(b) of the Penal Law, 5737 - 1977, the court may, in addition to any penalty, revoke his Israeli citizenship.

The explanatory notes offer more details:

This bill is presented against the background of involvement of residents holding Israeli citizenship in recent years, in harming the state through acts of espionage. The bill's purpose is to emphasize that the connection between the right to Israeli citizenship and loyalty to the state is inextricably linked . . . The purpose of the bill is to deter everyone from taking part or assisting any terrorist organization by giving assistance or carrying out terrorist actions, directly or

⁵ The bill, Proposed Law PL/18/2377, was submitted by Knesset members David Rotem and Robert Ilatov (both Israel Beitenu) on May 10 2010.

⁶ Jonathan Lis. (2010, May 26). Knesset Plenum gives preliminary approval to bill revoking citizenship of a person convicted of terrorist activity. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

indirectly, against the State of Israel or its residents, and to revoke the person's entitlement to an allotment, grant, support, remuneration, or financial assistance, given by law and by the state or an entity budgeted by it.

Despite the neutral language of the bill, the time of its presentation to Knesset perfectly coincided with recent charges made against two Palestinian citizens for espionage and allegedly making contact with a foreign agent. The Israeli media made clear associations between the objective of the bill and charges made against these Palestinian leaders.⁷ Journalist Aviad Glickman wrote in *Ynet*:

The bill was submitted after former Knesset member Azmi Bishara left the country subsequent to his being questioned a few times on suspicion of aiding Hezbollah by providing information during the Second Lebanon War. No indictment against him has ever been filed. In September, the High Court of Justice ruled that Bishara will continue to receive the monthly pension paid to him as a former member of Knesset. The president of the Supreme Court, Dorit Beinisch, and justices Miriam Na'or and Edna Arbel denied the petition of Knesset member Danny Danon that sought to revoke Bishara's citizenship. The justices held the constitutional process had not yet been completed, and therefore it was not possible at the present time to interfere.⁸

The bill was submitted to provide a legal foundation to penalize citizens and Knesset members accused of security offenses, even if they have not been prosecuted and convicted.

Proposed Rights for Persons Performing Military or National Service Law, 5770 – 2010⁹

In this report, we again provide an updated survey and analysis of Knesset bills, which give preferential treatment to Jewish citizens. Currently, such bills benefits to persons who take part in army service. This is an accepted political tool in Israeli legislation to indirectly discriminate against and further alienate Palestinian citizens. For instance, examination of one bill presented in May stipulates:

⁷ The two Palestinians are Amir Makhoul, executive director of Ittijah, and Omad Sa'id, who are alleged to have transmitted information to Hezbollah. See Jack Khoury and Amos Harel. (2010, May 28). Amir Makhoul charged with transmitting information on security installations and attempting to recruit agents against Israel. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

⁸ Aviad Glickman. (2010, May 23). Ministers approve revocation of citizenship of spies against Israel. *Ynet*. (in Hebrew).

⁹ The bill, Proposed Law PL/18/2405, was submitted by Knesset members David Rotem and Robert Ilatov (both Israel Beitenu) on May 24, 2010.

1. The purpose of the law is to recognize the importance of military service and national service of citizens of the state, to benefit IDF soldiers and those who perform national service, and to grant to these persons preferential civil rights compared with persons who do not serve.
2. The bill gives preferential and favorable terms with respect to higher education and housing to those who perform military or civic service.
3. For example, a soldier who has completed his/her service and studies in an institution of higher education in a 'priority' area of the country is entitled to a grant of 9,350 shekels for the first year's tuition (Bachelor's degree studies). Those who participate in alternative forms of service are entitled to similar aid.
4. For assistance in purchasing an apartment: those who perform full army service or at least two years of national service receive a 10 percent point bonus for each year of service. This is used in calculating the amount of the mortgage that the state treasury pays towards the first residential apartment.
5. Furthermore, citizens who completed their service are entitled to an exemption from any housing-related fees to the state for the first year following discharge.
6. In every land allocation transaction, at least 25 percent of the plots or housing units are reserved for those who have completed their service.

In the explanatory notes to the bill, the initiators of the bill explain their objectives:

The citizen's loyalty to the state is expressed, in part, by fulfillment of his duty toward it and by his allegiance to its values and goals. The very existence of the State of Israel is based on the Israel Defense Forces and on all citizens serving in the IDF or in national service as an alternate to military service. The state has a duty to provide loyal citizens with the esteem and recognition owed them, by giving them preferential treatment for having borne the burden of the security of the state.

Therefore, this bill proposes to grant, to persons who performed military service or national service, rights in acceptance for

educational studies and for work and in allocation of land, to prevent evasion of fulfillment of duties and to express the esteem that the state has for the loyal citizens who perform this service.

The Executive Branch

Palestinian under-representation in the civil service

A special report published in 2009 by Sikkuy addressed government decisions regarding the use of affirmative action in the civic service:

The government and the Knesset have adopted, in recent years, decisions capable of improving the representation of Palestinian citizens in the civil service. The first decision, *Government Decision No. 2579* from November 11, 2007, states that by the end of 2012, at least 10 percent of state employees will be Arab. The second, adopted by the Knesset in early 2008 with government support, established a parliamentary commission of inquiry on absorption of Arab workers in public service, headed by Member of Knesset Dr. Ahmad Tibi. which began its work on March 18, 2008. The third decision, *Government Decision No. 4436*, of January 25, 2009, allocated additional resources, such as an addition of twenty earmarked positions in the work complement yearly, additional jobs for students, establishment of a pool of examiners for acceptance committees for positions in the civil service, and institution of an educational program for the new workers.¹⁰

These decisions join others made in 2003, whose purported objective was to improve the representation of Arab citizens in civil service. Yet decisions (both old and new) that might help improve the socioeconomic status of Palestinian citizens are rarely, if ever, implemented.

In early May, the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Absorption of Arab Workers in Public Service issued an interim report. According to its findings, Arabs constitute only 6 percent of the civil service work force, a figure that is not representative of the proportion of the Arab population.¹¹

¹⁰ Yasser Awad. (December 2009). *Summary of Activity for 2009*. Sikkuy. Available in Hebrew, at www.sikkuy.org.il/equalityHeb.html.

¹¹ Arik Bender. (2010, May 4). Commission of inquiry: Discrimination against Arabs in public service. *Ma'ariv Nrg.* (in Hebrew). See also, the interim report of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on

The findings further show that in the Ministry of Absorption, the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, the Ministry of Pensioner's Affairs, and the Geologic Institute, not one Arab was employed. In the Office of the Prime Minister, which had 973 employees, seven Arab and four Druze workers (as distinguished in the Parliamentary Commission report) employed, representing only 1.13 percent of the office's personnel. The Water Authority employed only one Arab and one Druze. In the Ministry of Construction and Housing, which had 741 employees, only 1.6 percent of the employees were Arab. In the Ministry of Finance there were ten Arabs, and in the Civil Service Commission there were three. The ministries that had the highest percentages of Arab employees were the Ministry of Information (13.8), the Ministry of Welfare (8.15), and the Ministry of Health (7.6). In the Ministry of the Interior, 22.7 percent of the employees were from the Arab sector, with this large proportion due to the inclusion of Muslim religious-court judges and officials, who are deemed Ministry employees. The Knesset employed only six Arabs, comprising 1.3 percent of its total workforce.

The report concludes, "not only has the Appropriate Representation Law not been implemented, it has also served as a pretext for not absorbing Arabs according to a predetermined number that conforms to the proportion of Arabs in the general population."¹²

Appointment of imams: Only with Shabak approval

On April 23, 2010 *Ha'aretz* reported that the Israel Security Agency interferes in the appointment of Muslim religious officials.¹³ According to the report, agents from the Muslim Department in the Religious Sects Division of the Ministry of the Interior employ sixty persons to specifically monitor the activity of Muslim religious officials. This fact arose from the testimony of the Division's head, Yaakov Salameh, at a hearing in the Tel Aviv District Labor Court on a claim filed by Sheikh Ahmad Abu Ajawa against the Ministry of the Interior, which had nullified his candidacy as an imam in the Jabalya Mosque in Jaffa.

Salameh admitted that fieldworkers report on the personal life and moral conduct of imams in mosques. Regarding the substance of the monitoring of Muslim religious officials, Salameh further said that he expects to receive additional information regarding Muslim religious officials who cheat on their wives, since "such information is very important, because a cleric is supposed to minister to problems

Absorption of Arab Workers in Public Service. Available at http://www.knesset.gov.il/committees/heb/docs/arab_workers17.pdf.

¹² Press release by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Absorption of Arab Workers in Public Service". (2010, May 4). Available on the Knesset's website at <http://www.knesset.gov.il/spokesman/heb/Result.asp?HodID=8438>.

¹³ Akiva Eldar. (2010, April 23). Shabak and Ministry of the Interior Monitor candidates for Muslim religious posts. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

of couples, to bring them to forgive one another, and to unify families.” He added: “The Shabak is required to give notice the moment it has information which, in its opinion, affects job appointments.”

The hearing exposed identical statements made by a Shabak agent, referred to as “Max” in his report on the sheikh. The Tenders Committee of the Ministry of the Interior reiterated these statements and nullified his candidacy. The two documents stated that the candidate “is a threat to public safety and security in Jaffa, especially because of the sensitivity of the delicate fabric of relations between the Jewish and Arab populations in Jaffa.”

In response, the sheikh contends that following questioning by Jaffa police regarding some of his previous sermons, “Max” told him that the Shabak would determine who serves as imam in the mosque.

Attacks on Palestinian Leadership

Palestinian leadership and the recent trip to Libya

In April and May, hostility toward Palestinian Knesset leadership has significantly increased. All levels of Israeli society, from the government, the media, and the public, attacked the position of Palestinian leaders that expressed ethnic and national identification with the Arab world. Since 1948, and especially in recent years, the state and the Israeli establishment have actively stifled Palestinian relations with Arab countries, particularly those without diplomatic relations with Israel. Also actively suppressed is the expression of opinions opposing Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories and Gaza.

In late April, the Arab Higher Monitoring Committee in Israel received an official invitation from the Libyan ambassador to Jordan to make an official visit to Libya.¹⁴ The Monitoring Committee accepted and organized a delegation that included some forty persons drawn from the Palestinian leadership in Israel; current Knesset members, former Knesset members, heads of local authorities, and journalists.¹⁵ Libya does not hold diplomatic relations with Israel, but is not classified an enemy state by statute.¹⁶ Therefore, the visit by the Monitoring Committee’s delegation did

¹⁴ *Al-Arab Online* (www.alarab.net), (2010, April 15). (in Arabic).

¹⁵ The Arab Knesset members in the delegation were Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (DFPE) chairman MK Muhammad Barakeh, National Democratic Assembly chairman MK Jamal Zahalka, and MKs Haneen Zoabi, Talab El-Sana, and Ahmad Tibi (United Arab List), and MK Afou Agbaria (DFPE).

¹⁶ Under the *Prevention of Infiltration (Offenses and Jurisdiction) Law, 5714 – 1954*, the countries classified as enemies of Israel are Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Yemen, or “any

not violate Israeli law. Still, Israeli political leaders viewed the visit as a punishable offense.

During the visit, the delegation met with Libyan president, Muammar Gaddafi, and discussed the situation of Palestinians in Israel and ways to end the Israeli occupation.¹⁷ A historic and auspicious occasion, this was the first time a Libyan president met with representatives of Palestinians in Israel.

While the meeting was underway, demands were already being made to punish the Arab Knesset members in the delegation. Member of Knesset Zevulun Orlev (National Religious Party) demanded, in accordance with the 2008 amendment to the *Basic Law: The Knesset*, that the Central Elections Committee (CEC) ban the Knesset members who traveled to Libya from participating in the next elections.¹⁸ In a letter to Justice Ayala Procaccia, head of the Central Elections Committee for the Nineteenth Knesset, Orlev requested that the CEC convene as soon as possible to enforce the amendment upon the Knesset members and their respective parties. Orlev also wrote to the Attorney General, Yehuda Weinstein, requesting that an order for an immediate criminal investigation be placed against the Arab Knesset members.

The chairman of the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, Member of Knesset David Rotem (Israel Beitenu), criticized the Arab Knesset members:

Libya and its leader Gaddafi are not great lovers of Zion. Arab Knesset members traveling to a country that identifies with the major enemies of Israel is a slap in the face to Israeli citizens, and again shows their lack of loyalty to fundamental values of the State of Israel.¹⁹

MK Michael Ben-Ari (National Union) wrote to the Speaker of the Knesset, Reuven Rivlin, demanding that the MKs be stripped of their rights as Knesset members. In his opinion,

part of the Land of Israel outside of Israel." Over the years, with the signing of peace agreements, Egypt and Jordan were removed from the list, and in 2007, Iran was added. On June 30, 2008, the Knesset plenum approved on Second and Third Reading the Amendment to the Basic Law: The Knesset (Candidate who Stayed Unlawfully in an Enemy State). This law revokes the right of an Israeli citizen to run in the Knesset elections if he/she visited, without the approval of the Minister of the Interior during the seven-year period preceding the elections, a country classified in Israeli law as an enemy state. Reference available at: <http://www.mada-research.org/UserFiles/file/PMP%20PDF/PMP-ENG/pmp1-eng-final.pdf>.

¹⁷ Jack Khoury and Yehonatan Lis. (2010, April 25). The Arab MKs met with Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi. (in Hebrew).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Arab Knesset members who met with Gaddafi have acted against the State of Israel for some time, and actually constitute a fifth column inside the Knesset...A few days ago, the same Knesset members chose to fly and meet with an enemy of Israel, the Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi. This is an act of treason and a stab in the back of the nation. Any properly functioning country would arrest these traitors at the airport and prosecute them.²⁰

These attacks on Arab Knesset members led to a special session of the Knesset's House Committee. In this session, the committee debated the "parliamentary" means to punish the Arab Knesset members. On May 24, the Committee met and debated removal of their immunity. This initiative began with Committee chairman, MK Yariv Levin (Likud), who stated, "the certificate of a member of Knesset is not a license to act against the state, and immunity cannot be used as a means to cause prolonged harm to the state and disregard for both the public and the Knesset." Before the session, MK Ben-Ari (National Union) said, "This is an historic opportunity to remove once and for all the immunity and rights of Knesset members who hate Israel and ridicule the state."²¹ The Arab Knesset members decided to boycott the Committee session, believing its purpose was to launch a racist offensive whose results were known in advance.²²

Chairman Levin responded:

Rather than carry out their public duty and their duty to the Knesset, and to appear here and be here, they choose to do other things. I think that the climax came to a point in events involving Knesset member Haneen Zoabi. While we are sitting here, she has returned from Libya and already joined the flotilla headed toward Gaza rather than appear here and do her work in the Knesset, for which she receives a salary and for which she was elected. The way I see it at least, anyone who sails to Hamas must be expelled from the Knesset.²³

No vote was held on the demand to revoke the rights of the Arab Knesset members. The vote on the matter was adjourned to early June.

²⁰ Arik Bender. (2010, April 27). Ben-Ari: Revoke rights of MKs who traveled to Libya. *Maariv*.

²¹ Jonathan Lis and Jack Khoury. (2010, April 28). Knesset to debate removal of immunity of MKs who visited Libya. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

²² (2010, May 24). Knesset members in delegation to Libya boycott Knesset House Committee session. *Al Arab Online*. (in Arabic).

²³ Protocol No. 86 of the House Committee. (2010, May 24). On removal of immunity and rights from six Knesset members: Talab El-Sana, Ahmad Tibi, Muhammad Barakeh, Afou Agbaria, Jamal Zahalka, and Haneen Zoabi, available at <http://www.knesset.gov.il/protocols/data/html/knesset/2010-05-24.html>.

Silencing the victim: Reactions to participation in the flotilla to Gaza

In late May, four ships boarded by international activists, humanitarians, political leaders, journalists, and the like set sail from Turkey en route to the Gaza Strip to deliver needed humanitarian aid. Organized by the Gaza Liberation Committee,²⁴ the flotilla made a strong political statement to the Israeli government: the international community stands in opposition to the blockade of the Gaza Strip and will act in solidarity with the Palestinian people of Gaza. The Israeli government declared from the start that it would not permit the ships to reach the Gaza Strip and would stop the ships, even by military means.

This report will not describe the details of the events that took place on the Freedom Flotilla ; rather, we shall present Israeli's political reaction to the participation of four individuals: MK Haneen Zoabi; Muhammad Zidan, head of the Arab Higher Monitoring Committee; Sheikh Ra'ad Salah, leader of the Islamic Movement-Northern Branch; and social activist Lubna Masarwa. The public reactions in Israel indicate a complete lack of tolerance for political support for solidarity with the Palestinian people, political opinions that conflict with the Israeli consensus or for any challenge to the Israeli establishment's ability to dictate the political activity of Palestinians citizens. In fact, before the flotilla embarked, MK Yariv Levin (Likud), chairman of the Knesset's House Committee, assailed MK Zoabi for daring to act against the Israeli consensus and challenge the permitted limits of political conduct under the rules of Israeli "democracy."

Before embarking, MK Zoabi explained the flotilla's objectives:

Unfortunately, the world is ignoring this tragedy...Israel has imposed an inhumane blockade 1.5 million people. We are firm in our intention to break the blockade on Gaza and bring humanitarian aid to its residents, and put the inhumane tragedy of residents of the Strip on the international political agenda.²⁵

MK Zoabi was in the company of activists and humanitarians from around the world, in a display of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Before the flotilla set sail, Member of Knesset Danny Danon (Likud) requested that Attorney General Weinstein order the police to arrest MK Zoabi upon her return to Israel.²⁶ Danon also sought to have the Knesset's House Committee revoke her diplomatic passport: "MK Zoabi is operating hand in hand with enemies of Israel to encourage terrorism and humiliate Israel in the international community. These

²⁴ Anat Shalev. (2010, May 22). 'Freedom Flotilla' en route to Gaza. *Ynet*. Ynetnews.com

²⁵ Arik Bender. (2010, May 22). Even if the Navy fires at us – we'll sail to Gaza. *Ma'ariv nrg*. (in Hebrew)

²⁶ Arik Bender. (2010, May 28). Arrest MK Zoabi because of the Flotilla. *Ma'ariv nrg*. (in Hebrew).

actions constitute treason. Zoabi belongs behind bars.”²⁷ MK Miri Regev (Likud) contended that MK Zoabi was committing a moral crime against the State of Israel, stating that, “bwith this step, MK Zoabi is expressing her lack of allegiance to the State of Israel, for which she should be punished.”²⁸

In late May, following delays and postponements, the ships approached Gaza’s shores. At 4:30 AM on May 31, while the ships were still in international waters, Israeli commandos raided the ships. On most of the ships, the raid proceeded without problem, and with no violence to speak of. On the *Mavi Marmara*, however, the largest ship in the flotilla, carrying 600 passengers among them Palestinian leadership and parliamentarians from other countries, the commandos resorted to violence, including the use of live ammunition, to gain control of the ship. Nine passengers were killed and five soldiers were injured.²⁹

As a result of the raid, the ship’s communication systems were also jammed, and media equipment, such as video cameras and computers were also confiscated. Without a real information outlet regarding the events that took place on the ship, much was left uncertain immediately following the incident. An IDF Spokesperson later confirmed on Monday night, May 31, the nine civilian casualties.

Although the raid on the *Mavi Marmara* began around 4:30 in the morning the ships did not arrive at Ashdod Port until night. Throughout the day, the international community received no word of the whereabouts or condition of the hundreds of passengers aboard the ships. The tension grew following reports that Sheikh Ra’ad Salah, leader of the Islamic Movement-Northern Branch, had been injured or killed. A special police deployment in Arab communities only increased the tension and fear.

Three days after the raid, the Knesset debated the events.³⁰ MK Zoabi was to address the plenum. The conduct of Knesset members at the session revealed deep hostility toward the country’s Palestinian citizens and their representatives. Knesset members from non-Arab parties brutally attacked MK Zoabi and other Arab Knesset members. Press reports of the debate clearly reflect its severity:

For years, we haven’t seen such a melee in the Knesset: MK Zoabi, who took part in the flotilla to Gaza, intended to speak from the Knesset’s podium, but a number of Knesset members...tried to remove

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ron Ben Yishai. (2010, May 31). This is how it happened: Planned ambush of the commando on the *Marmara*. *Ynet*. (in Hebrew).

³⁰ Knesset Session No. 139. (2010, June 2). The complete protocol is available at http://www.knesset.gov.il/plenum/heb/plenum_search.aspx.

her by force. The Knesset's ushers tried to control the melee, but failed. "Traitor," "collaborator," "you belong in jail," and "go to Gaza" were only some of the statements hurled at her.³¹

In another report:

The Knesset was in a tempest today following the speech of the member of Knesset from the National Democratic Assembly, who participated in the flotilla to Gaza. Knesset members from all factions, except the Arab factions, did not miss the opportunity to express their rage at Zoabi's action, to revile her and call for her removal from the Knesset.³²

In another report:

The atmosphere in the plenum was almost at the boiling point. Knesset members cursed and reviled, jeered, and insulted each other. . . At least three times, it appeared that the verbal confrontation might become physical, and only the intervention of security guards brought calm. Knesset members seemed to be competing with each other to make the harshest and most vicious statements.³³

Knesset members attacked MK Zoabi because she dared to express her opposition to the blockade on Gaza, to take part in the international protest against it, and to promote awareness of the great suffering taking place in Gaza. Some of the comments hurled at MK Zoabi follow.³⁴

Member of Knesset Israel Hasson (Kadima) labeled Zoabi and all Arab leadership "killers" and leading their people to destruction.

MK Miri Regev (Likud) said that Zoabi was guilty of two crimes: joining terrorists and a moral crime against the State of Israel. According to MK Regev, the flotilla to Gaza was a terrorist flotilla, and MK Zoabi must be punished. "We do not need Trojan horses in the Knesset," Regev said. She added a comment to Zoabi in Arabic, "*rohi ala-Aza, ya hayena*. [Go to Gaza, you Traitor]."

³¹ Arik Bender. (2010, June 3). Zoabi's speech almost ends in blows: 'The Siege is Inhumane'. *Ma'ariv nrg*. (in Hebrew).

³² Jonathan Lis and Jack Khoury. (2010, June 2). MK Miri Regev to MK Zoabi: You're a Trojan Horse. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

³³ Amnon Meranda. (2010, June 2). The MKs against Zoabi: Melee, expletives, and almost blows. *Ynet*. (in Hebrew).

³⁴ Source of the quotations: Bender, footnote 27; Meranda, footnote 29; complete protocol of Knesset Plenum Session No. 139, footnote 26.

MK Yohanan Plesser (Kadima) said, "I would only like to see you go to Gaza...so we can see you speaking there about women's rights, about human rights, and about civil rights. One week in Gaza and we'll see what happens to you. One week in Gaza, a single woman thirty-eight years old, we'll see how they treat you there!"

MK Arie Bibi (Kadima): "The presence of Arab Knesset members disgraces all members of the Knesset."

MK Yulia Shamalov Berkovich (Kadima): "All of you are parliamentary spies."

MK Arieh Eldad (National Union): "Today the Jews realized that Arab Israelis are enemies of the state. Arab Israelis have equal rights, but they identify themselves with Israel's enemies. *Hatikva* is your national anthem, and if you don't like it, drink the sea of Gaza."

MK Michael Ben-Ari (National Union) called Arab Knesset members "the enemy's advance fortress, sitting here. They wander around the world with a diplomatic passport on which 'State of Israel' is written. We'll take this from them. The Jewish people cannot consent to this advance fortress."

At the end of the debate, MK Zoabi took the podium, unable to speak due to the constant shouting from Knesset members. At this point, MK Anastasia Michaeli (Israel Beitenu) tried to go onto the podium, verbally assaulted MK Zoabi, and even attempted to forcibly remove her.

In her comments, MK Zoabi said:

I would like to relate to the inciting and provocative comments. I scorn these comments. When I was asked by a group from Gaza to take part in the flotilla, I immediately accepted. In my view, it is a moral and political right to object to the imprisonment of one and a half million people. The siege is illegal and inhumane and illegitimate. ...Every politician who holds a moral position objects to the siege, everyone whose positions are immoral supports the siege. The piratical military operation [of Israel] was a criminal act in contravention of international law.

The debate in the Knesset did not end the assault on Palestinian citizens or Knesset representatives. Quite the opposite: it only the opening bombardment of demands for concrete punishment. The debate

continued into June, and we will report on its development in our next Political Monitoring Report.

At this time, the primary demands for punishment made by Knesset members are expressed as follows:

- To revoke MK Zoabi's rights as a Knesset member. A debate on was set to take place in the Knesset's House Committee on June 7, 2010.
- A campaign against MK Zoabi following the debate in the plenum. Knesset members received by e-mail, public notices attacking MK Zoabi. The notices showed an IDF soldier being beaten during the raid on the *Mavi Marmara*, and alongside it, the words "restoring respect for the IDF." Next to the picture was a photo of MK Zoabi smiling, and the text states, "wiping the smile off the faces of terrorists." MK Michael Ben-Ari (National Union) is responsible for the campaign.³⁵
- The day after the debate in the plenum, MK Danny Danon (Likud) proposed a law that would allow the Knesset to remove an MK who supports: the armed struggle of an enemy state, or of a terrorist organization against the State of Israel, who takes part in inciting racism, or denies the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.³⁶
- Interior Minister Eli Yishai (Shas) requested that the Attorney General allow him to MK Zoabi's citizenship if her immunity is removed for taking part in the flotilla. In his letter to the Attorney General, Interior Minister Yishai labeled Zoabi's acts as treason.³⁷

Conclusion

Palestinian citizens in Israel maintain no illusions regarding the state's attitude towards them on matters of national identity, or their political economic, or social status. Based on this report, the failure of the government to address the problem of Arab under-representation in the civil service; the interference of the Shabak in

³⁵ Jonathan Lis. (2010, June 5). Campaign in Knesset against Zoabi prior to debate on removal of Her Immunity. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

³⁶ Jonathan Lis. (2010, June 5). Ministers to discuss 'Haneen Zoabi Law' tomorrow. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

³⁷ Barak Ravid. (2010, June 3). Interior Minister Yishai to Attorney General: Let me revoke MK Haneen Zoabi's citizenship. *Ha'aretz*. (in Hebrew).

matters of religion; the proposed legislation that proposes “no citizenship without loyalty” and gives preferential treatment to Jewish citizens; political and public reaction to participation of Arab Knesset members in a meeting with a leader from an Arab country; and the harsh reaction against an Arab Knesset member participating the Gaza flotilla, it seems Palestinian citizenship status is only further deteriorating.

Through the events described, and conclusions drawn from earlier reports, the institutionalized exclusion of this minority population continues to stand as the status quo.

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