



# Israel's discrimination against its Arab citizens

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## **Israel's discrimination against its Arab citizens**

Racism was, and still is, an inherent feature of Zionism and the state established on its back, Israel. From its declaration of independence up to this day, the 20% of Israel's citizens who are Arabs have suffered from the state's racist policies and have been subjected to a fierce campaign of repression. Through racist laws and the demolition of their homes, the confiscation of their land and looting, the Arabs of Israel have seen their overwhelming majority ownership of the land pre-1948 reduced to just 2.5%, even though they make up more than 20% of Israel's population. This is not an accident, but a planned programme by successive Israeli governments, with several goals: Forcing Arab citizens who hold Israeli citizenship to migrate and leave and, in the process, stirring up Jewish Israeli public opinion against their Arab compatriots by calling them "enemies" and "traitors" who are "working to undermine the Zionist project".

A survey by Prof. Sami Smooha of the University of Haifa of Israeli looking at relations and coexistence between Jews and Arabs was published by Ha'aretz newspaper in May 2010 and presented to the Knesset within the context of the deterioration of such relations over the past decade. The poll revealed that 48% of Israel's Arab citizens are dissatisfied with their lives in the Jewish state, compared to 35% in 2003; the number of Arabs who are not willing to befriend Jews has doubled and, perhaps most seriously, 62% of Israeli Arabs fear "transfer" (forced migration or, as it has been called, "ethnic cleansing"), compared to just 6% who expressed that fear in 2003. It is also noted that 40% of the respondents expressed their distrust of Israel's judiciary system while almost 41% supported an Arab boycott of Knesset elections.

In terms of demography, 58% of Jewish respondents said that they fear the threat of the demographic situation changing in favour of Arabs, due to the higher birth rate of the latter, at three children per family compared with 2.1 among Jews.

This data as a whole is significant in the search for reasons for the lack of peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Jews in Israel, as it results from racist and discriminatory policies against Israeli Arabs.



Yet more statistical evidence came in a poll devoted to the views of Jewish youth, conducted by the Institute of Studies, Magar Mouhot ("treasury of brains"), which found that 50% of young Jews surveyed believe that Arabs should not have the same rights as Jews in Israel; 56% said that Arabs must be prevented from running for the Knesset and 48% reject any notion of evacuating the [illegal] settlements and outposts in the occupied West Bank. Such extremism is more prominent among young ultra-orthodox Jews, with 82% demanding that Arab citizens should not be granted equal rights and 82% opposing the election of Arabs to the Knesset; 56% say that their fellow citizens who are Arabs should not be allowed to vote in Israel's national democratic elections.

In a report on racism in 2010 (see Maariv, 22 March, 2010), an independent anti-racism organisation claimed that the current parliament in Israel, Knesset number 18, is the most racist since the establishment of Israel in 1948, with the number of draft racist laws that aim to deprive Arab citizens of their rights has reached a new high. In 2008 there were eleven such drafts submitted to the Knesset members for consideration, in 2009 there were twelve and already in 2010 there have been twenty-one. All of these laws seek to demote the status of Arab citizens and reduce their rights, along with a constant threat to the legitimacy of their presence in Israel. Some of the issues covered are as follows:

1. Anyone denying the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state faces imprisonment.
2. Government support for student tuition fees is available only for those who serve in the Israel Defence Forces.
3. An amendment of the Jerusalem Law so that Jerusalem is recognised as the capital of the Jewish people.
4. An amendment to the nationality law so that the Interior Minister has the right to revoke the citizenship of people who violate allegiance to the state of Israel.
5. The Nakba Law, which makes it illegal for citizens inside Israel to organize demonstrations on the anniversary of the creation of the Palestinian refugee catastrophe.
6. The provision for harsher sanctions against Palestinian prisoners, particularly those who are members of Hamas.
7. The withdrawal of citizenship from those convicted of terrorism or spying.



8. The withdrawal of nationality and revocation of the right of citizenship, and denying the Arab Knesset Members who visited Libya parliamentary immunity and other rights.

And the list goes on...

The shift to the extreme right in Israeli politics calls for the expulsion of Arab citizens of Israel and the prohibition of having Arab MPs able to defend their rights. Not so long ago, the trend was to limit parliamentary participation to those who serve in the Israeli military. Moves in this respect have been postponed due to accusations of bias against the nature of Israel's democracy. Nevertheless, on the eve of the last general election the right-wing representatives in the Central Elections Committee tried to cancel the participation of at least two Arab lists of candidates. Legal considerations blocked that attempt but this is not the end of the matter. Other moves to block Arab participation in Israeli democracy include the removal of parliamentary immunity from Sa'id Nafa, from the Balad Party, for travelling to Syria with a delegation of Druze clergy. Several Israeli organizations have called for criminal charges to be brought against Knesset Member (MK) Jamal Zahalka, also of the Balad Party, for his condemnation of the blockade imposed on Gaza and participation in a demonstration at the Beit Hanoun border crossing; he also called Defence Minister Ehud Barak "the murderer of the children of Gaza".

Israel's Finance Minister, Yuval Steinitz, has called for revoking the citizenship of some leaders of the National Democratic Assembly and the Islamic movement inside Israel, in particular its chairman, Sheikh Raed Salah. The Internal Security Minister, Yitzhak Aharonovich, considers the Islamist movement led by Sheikh Salah to be the biggest threat to the existence of Israel.

The Zionists have targeted Sheikh Raed Salah ever since the emergence of the Islamic movement, when he was described by security sources as the most dangerous of the leaders of the Islamic movement and at the same time the most popular among the Palestinians inside the Green Line (the 1948-1967 armistice line). He was named the most "extreme" of the Arab leaders and "the most Islamic figure in the whole world" for "inciting" Arabs against Israel over its policies on Al-Aqsa Mosque. Sheikh Salah was extremely successful in bringing Al-Aqsa back onto the public agenda whenever Israel sought to take it out of the spotlight; the Sheikh has dedicated himself to the issue of Jerusalem and its importance to Arabs and Muslims.

In 2002, Sheikh Salah faced accusations that he had "established relations with hostile organisations" within and outside Israel. He was arrested in 2003 and spent two years in prison for alleged money laundering on behalf of Hamas. During the Aqsa Intifada the Sheikh was shot in the face in what was regarded as an assassination attempt by Israeli forces. Early in 2010



Sheikh Salah was sentenced to nine months in prison for protesting against the attacks and excavations in Jerusalem, but was acquitted on appeal.

Sheikh Raed Salah took part in the Freedom Flotilla which was attacked and hijacked by Israeli forces in international waters at the end of May 2010. The Israeli authorities then spread the false rumour that he had been wounded seriously. On arrival in Ashdod port, he was duly arrested and only released on condition that a) he would be under house arrest for a week; b) he could not travel for 45 days; and c) bail of 150,000 New Israeli Shekels was set. Sheikh Salah said that one of the Turkish civilians killed by Israeli commandos during the assault on the flotilla looked very like him, prompting concerns that he had actually been the real target of yet another assassination attempt.

Haneen Zoubi MK also took part in the flotilla and has since faced insults and assaults from her right-wing parliamentary colleagues. There have been demands for her to be tried and imprisoned, for her citizenship to be revoked and for her expulsion from the country. Undemocratic moves have also been called for, including the removal of her parliamentary privileges, including the right to travel freely.

Israel has detained since April 24 Dr Omar Saeed, who was taken from his home in the village of Kafr Kana inside what Palestinians call "1948 Palestine". Dr. Saeed was one of the founders of the National Democratic Alliance, headed by Dr. Azmi Bishara. On May 6th, the authorities arrested Ameer Makhoul from his home in the city of Haifa. Mr. Makhoul is a community activist and chairs the Union of Arab Civil Society Organizations (Itijah).

The charge against the activists, on the sixty-second anniversary of the Nakba, is that "they committed serious security offences, including espionage and holding contact with a foreign agent in Hezbollah". The same charges were made against Dr. Bishara in 2006 after his widespread political activity inside and outside Palestine and because of his visit to Syria and Lebanon.

This is how Israel seeks to limit political activism by some Palestinian leaders, who face life imprisonment, removal of their democratic and parliamentary rights and even assassination if they try to expose the racism that is rife in Israel.

When this is viewed along with the planned expulsion of Palestinians originally from the West Bank or Gaza we see the creation of a scenario and climate where the wholesale "transfer" (ethnic cleansing) of Arabs from Israel will be acceptable, even though the reasons are based on racial discrimination.



In a speech to the Knesset earlier this year, parliamentarian Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsour touched on four religious/legal opinions issued by Jewish rabbis which have been described as “fascist, extreme and insane”:

1. A call to prevent Palestinians entering their own land.
2. The destruction of Palestinians’ olive trees, farms and vineyards, and the burning of Palestinian property, wherever it is located.
3. The deliberate poisoning of Palestinian water sources and sabotage of Palestinian holy places.
4. The wilful killing of Palestinians, including children, because of “the risk” they pose to the future of Israel.

For more than sixty years there have been systematic attacks on Arab villages, towns and cities; on Muslim and Christian holy places, including the demolition of mosques and churches and the conversion of some into bars and dens of prostitution; and the destruction and vandalism of graves. All of this has been part of the effort by Israel to obliterate any evidence of the existence of the Palestinian people along with their legitimate national rights, including the right for refugees to return to their homes and the city of Jerusalem as their capital.

The Israeli Antiquities Authority has published photographs and reports of excavation operations and violations of many of the Islamic cemeteries in the country with total indifference to the sanctity of the dead or the living, and in defiance of religious and secular laws. For example:

Ramle Cemetery: Excavations were carried out by the “Alexander On Company” in September 2005 during which four graves were defiled.

Bint Elkafer Cemetery: Excavations were carried out by the “Prince of Jorzelani Company” July and August 2006, south of Ramle; part of the cemetery was dug up.

Ramle Cemetery: Excavations by the “Giora Vrnos Company” in October and December 2003. Exploration was carried out after violating the cemetery through which the authorities wanted to pass a sewer pipe.

Historic Qishlah Islamic Cemetery: Adjacent to the Grand Mosque in Jaffa, Israel is planning to build a five-star hotel on the cemetery’s ruins.



Abdel Nabi Cemetery in Jaffa: The Hilton Hotel was built on the ruins of the cemetery.

Aljemasin Cemetery in Jaffa: A street was passed through the cemetery, with a waste pipe in the 1980s.

Taso Cemetery: In 2008 the Israeli authorities confiscated two-thirds of its area and sold it to developers for residential and commercial buildings.

Salamah Cemetery had apartments built on it.

Sheikh Munis Cemetery: The site on which the University of Tel Aviv was built.

“Ma’aman Allah” Cemetery in Jerusalem: Multiple buildings have been built and streets laid out on much of the cemetery. A “Museum of Religious Tolerance” is to be built on what is left of this historic site.

The Vice-President of the Islamic movement in Israel, Sheikh Kamal Khatib, has reviewed a number of Muslim graves in the occupied territories that have been violated and claims that cemeteries remain a target for Israel, as they destroy any historical evidence of the existence of Palestinians in the land.

Sheikh Khatib also claims that many mosques have been violated in different parts of occupied Palestine, such as the mosque of Caesarea, which was turned into a pub, and the Red Mosque in Safed, which was converted into a film studio, and the Mosque of Ein Hod, which was turned into a centre for the visual arts. He added that the Israeli authorities have also turned the mosque in the village of Hattin into a cattle fold, while another is now a store of farm equipment and machinery; the mosque of Afula and several others have been converted into synagogues. News reports reported recently that extremist settlers attacked a mosque in the village of Ebtin near Haifa, writing graffiti that calls for the mosque to be demolished.

Between 1948 and 1967 around 480 mosques were demolished by the Israelis, with 400 cemeteries suffering the same fate.



Israel is carrying out ongoing displacement and Judaising schemes making what is in effect a “new Nakba” for the population of cities occupied in 1948. Historic Palestinian cities in the 1948 territories represent a main target for Zionist “conversion” projects. This scheme is carried out through four main activities:

1. Cracking down on Palestinian citizens and depriving them of services and marginalizing them in an effort to induce them to leave the old areas voluntarily.
2. Removing the Palestinian Arab identity from an area and falsifying its history, including Judaising its landmarks.
3. Buying homes and land through institutions and government companies.
4. Introducing legislation to control Muslim and Christian religious endowment (Waqf) properties.

Judaisation operations have accelerated in recent years, with extremist settlers’ groups intensifying their activities in, notably, Jaffa and Acre, so-called “mixed cities”. This includes building settlements in areas with Arab majorities.

According to various sources, the Israeli authorities have demolished more than 120 houses in occupied Arab towns and villages in the past year, under the pretext that they were built without a permit. The number of homes still threatened with demolition is around sixty. Their owners will not only be fined but also be forced to pay the cost of the demolition.

About 22,000 Palestinian citizens live in Lod and they are now a minority due to an influx of settlers who have taken over the city and its facilities. There are vigorous attempts to displace the Palestinian population through the “no building permit” route and Israeli claims on homes “deserted” by their rightful owners during the Nakba. Although the government has established many Jewish neighbourhoods in Lod, it has not permitted any new Arab neighbourhood since 1948. It is worth noting that dozens of houses have been demolished and their residents displaced and “compensated” with replacement (but much smaller) homes in the industrial zone where Jews refuse to live because of toxic fumes from the factories. The authorities have plans to bring 15,000 more settlers to the city, to counter the higher birth rate of the Palestinians.

In Jaffa, the Arab citizens face tempting financial inducements and offers to sell their properties to Zionist investors taking advantage of their poor economic circumstances. Palestinian Arabs in Tel Aviv are being forced to build wherever they can – which is a limited choice – or move out of the city.



The city of Jaffa is considered to be one of the most important cities in Israel because of the port, which was the gateway to the world for Palestinians pre-1948.

The Israeli authorities are extremely concerned about the presence of Arabs in the most important areas of Tel Aviv, specifically near the coast, to the extent that foreign and Jewish investors are “forced” to pay a premium to entice the indigenous residents to sell up and move. Again, as in Jaffa, these investors also exploit the poor economic condition of the Arab population. According to Omar Siksik, a member of the Jaffa-Tel Aviv Municipality, “there are 400 Arab homes in Jaffa threatened with demolition; fourteen have been demolished in the past year, all of them belonging to Arabs”.

Mr. Siksik stressed that the Israelis target Palestinians in the “mixed cities”, in particular those living side by side with a population that is mostly Jewish, and attempts to exclude indigenous people and deport them in various ways in order to gain control of their land. He pointed out that the demolition policy is not limited to houses and shops, but includes anything identifiable as Palestinian so that the national memory is also demolished.

In the annual report on racism prepared by the Centre for Equality and Coalition of Anti-racism in March 2010, to coincide with the International Day against Racism, statistics showed an increase of 28% over last year in discriminatory and racist incidents. The Centre’s data is based on documentation put together by a large number of human rights organizations representing different social groups, with the participation of representatives of these groups who also announced the establishment of a lobby against racism in the Knesset.

Last year, 286 racist incidents were reported. The authors of the report found an increase in racism and discrimination in an overwhelming majority of the areas examined, with the most serious indicator being the discriminatory laws noted above.

The report’s main findings were:

1. 45 Arab citizens were killed in the last decade in identifiably racist attacks; 35 of these people were killed by the police or security forces.
2. 15 incidents of violence by the security forces against Arab citizens.
3. 91 racist incidents by Jews against Arabs.
4. 19 cases of prejudice against the legitimacy of the leadership of the Arab population.
5. 26 cases of incitement on racial background.



6. 21 discriminatory and racist laws were introduced.
7. 65 racist events in football stadiums.
8. 27 cases of ethnic discrimination against eastern, Ethiopian and Russian immigrants.
9. 11 cases of racism against refugees and migrant workers.
10. 9 cases of prejudice towards religious feelings.

**Comparative data for 2008 and 2009 and 2010**

<u>2010</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2008</u>	<u>Manifestation of racism</u>
45	42	41	Arab citizens killed due to racial background in last decade*
15	17	6	Security forces violence against Arabs
91	70	16	Racist expressions from Jewish citizens against Arab citizens
19	23	27	Prejudice to the legitimacy of the Arab masses leadership
26	29	27	Incitement on racial background
21	12	11	Racist and discriminatory draft laws 111 221
65***	39**		Racist events in football stadiums
27	14	14 (including work immigrants)	Ethnic discrimination against a group of Ethiopians, a group of Easterners and a group of Russians in Israel
11	10		Attack on the refugees and immigrants workers in 1011
9	9	8	Cases of prejudice against religious feelings
286	224	109	Total

\* The number of people killed since October 2000.

\*\* Until week 19.

\*\*\* Until week 15.



It is widely expected that Israel will continue its policy of racism and incitement against its Arab citizens, and that this will be reflected in many ways. These include the insistence on the recognition of Israel as a Jewish State, a mantra for all major Israeli political bodies whereas before it was limited to the far right; a rejection of the Palestinians' right of return; and the introduction of racist and discriminatory laws that seek to expel the indigenous Arab population and the Judaisation of Jerusalem. Despite the inherent racism of Zionism and its Israeli state, which has been exposed for all to see, weak Arab governments and the complicity of Western states support the Zionist lobbies to help the Israeli political and military establishment to keep these policies for the foreseeable future. That this should be so is a massive test for the rule of international law and the bodies established to implement it. It is a test that they are failing.

