



مكتب النائب أيمن عودة

לשכת חבר הכנסת איימן עודה

MK Ayman Odeh's Office

April 21, 2016

Dear Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon,

I write to you as a son of the Arab Palestinian national minority in Israel. We, Arab Palestinians living in Israel, are native to the land and citizens of the state, are a part of the Palestinian people and the Arab nation and cultural sphere, and the human one.

We, who remained in our homeland after the 1948 War (some 160.000 people at the time) found ourselves within the borders of Israel, detached and separated from the rest of our people, and have overnight become a minority in our historical homeland.

Since the Nakba and Israel's establishment we have been subjected to severe systematic discrimination and nationality-based oppression, we lived under a military regime until 1966, have been dispossessed of our lands, suffered from discriminatory budget allocations and repression of our most elementary civil rights, and have been living with the constant threat of population transfer and violent assaults by the state, such as the 1956 Kafr Kassem massacre, the 1976 Land Day killings, and the occurrences of October 2000. The poverty rate among Palestinian citizens is the highest in Israel--two thirds of our children live in poverty. Since 1948 Israel has established 700 new towns, of which 0 are Arab (with the exception of towns built in the Negev in order to concentrate the Bedouin population in them), and our towns suffer from an acute lack of land, industrial zones and cultural centers.

In the face of all of that, we have maintained our identity, culture and national belonging, and are continuing to struggle for national unity in order to bring about a just peace, national and civil equality based on mutual respect, a true democracy and social justice for all of the country's people.



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Despite continuous incitement against us, exemplified recently in the campaign led by Prime Minister Netanyahu--the elevation of the electoral threshold in order to prevent the Arab population from being represented in the Knesset, his saying on Election Day that the Arabs are coming out in droves to the polling places, generalizations and unfounded accusations against an entire public, the banning of Northern Islamic Movement, and a bill aimed to impeach Arab Palestinian members of Knesset--we remain committed to a different path, that of a Jewish-Arab partnership for a true democracy and a shared and just society for all.

As the chairman of the Joint List, representing Israel's Arab minority and Jewish forces who support equality and democracy, we choose to break away from a prevalent 'common sense' in Israel according to which Jews and Arabs are doomed to a life of enmity, and choose the path of hope.

As an Arab minority in Israel, we choose participation over sectarianism, we aspire to influence and be an integral and central part of Israeli politics, we choose to speak to the country's Arab and Jewish population both, thus bringing together our %20 of the population and the Jewish democratic forces in order to strive, united, for peace, equality, democracy and social justice.

These days the atmosphere in both the Jewish and Arab publics is one of fear and despair. Angst is apparent in peoples' eyes and that is surely understandable. Yet this reality is the result of manmade policy, and as such it can be changed.

The illusion Prime Minister Netanyahu is trying to sell the Israeli public, that the conflict can somehow be 'managed,' shatters time and again at the face of our bloody reality. This conflict cannot be managed, but only solved. One cannot manage a people under military rule, and occupation will forever breed resistance.

The Palestinian people demand its right to self-determination so that it too will have a place under the sun, and the right to shape its future, live a life of dignity without checkpoints, occupying soldiers and military tribunals.

Israel's Palestinian citizens are often absent from the international discourse on Israel-Palestine, although we are %20 of Israel's population. As Palestinian



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citizens of Israel we have a unique outlook on what is occurring in Israel and the Occupied Territories, one that allows us to witness this painful situation and care for both peoples sharing this land.

We have a long tradition of democratic, popular struggle against the occupation and for civil and human rights. Our struggle is that of a minority nationality inside Israel--a struggle for recognition, for our culture and consciousness-- as Palestinians seeing their brothers and sisters suffering under occupation, and as Israeli citizens who witness the occupation's deleterious effects on Israeli society itself.

But our struggle is also a civil one; for creating equal citizenship in Israel for Jews and Arabs, a struggle for equal budgetary allocations in education, infrastructure, the labor market.

We know both struggles are interrelated and tied together.

So long as Israel occupies another people it can't be a true egalitarian democracy.

Our struggle has taken various forms and has been going on for generations. So for example the just struggle of the uprooted people of Iqrit and Bir'aam who were evicted from their homes after the 48' War and were guaranteed they will be allowed to return--a promised which to date has not been fulfilled.

These villages' residents are Israeli citizens who have been bravely struggling to bring about the fulfillment of the promises made to them; to return to their original villages and live once more as a community on their lands.

Throughout the years, the villages' residents have continuously visited their villages and lands and through their cultural institutions of their community-- their church and cemetery that remained--kept alive their communal ties to the place. The villages' displaced people refused to abandon this crucial struggle, and have waged since Israel's establishment a steadfast legal battle to return to their homes and property.

Israel's Supreme Court in 1949 ruled that the state must allow the displaced villagers to return to their villages. Despite that, the Court's ruling was never complied with, for in 1953 the Minister of the Treasury issued a special decree



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allowing the state to appropriate the villages' lands. Since that day, the villagers and their descendants have continued their struggle and haven't given up on the hope to return to their native communities.

In the Negev, in Israel's south, 100.000 Israeli citizens live without the most basic infrastructure and services: running water, electricity, healthcare, paved roads, or educational facilities.

These citizens live in villages the state does not recognize, although most of them have existed before the state itself was founded or were relocated to their current locations by the state.

The village of al-Arakib, whose residents currently live amidst their ancestors' graves, has to date been demolished 97 times by the state, but despite the daily fear of yet another demolition, the residents' spirit hasn't been broken.

One of the most fundamental and crucial matters we are facing today is that of the state's plan to evict two such unrecognized villages--Umm al-Hiran and A'tir--only to build in their stead an exclusively Jewish township named Hiran. The eviction of Umm al-Hiran, the displacement of one population only to replace it the another, is a red line and a new low in the government's assault on the country's Palestinian Arab population. We shall steadfastly and staunchly oppose this resolution and stop it from passing.

On behalf of the Arab Palestinian minority in Israel and in the name of all those--Arabs and Jews alike-- in Israel who support democracy and equality, I would like to ask you to dispatch a fact-finding mission to the Negev to examine the dire situation of the land's indigenous Arab population, and work to secure their rights as guaranteed by international law and conventions.

Sincerely yours,
MK Ayman Odeh
Head of the Joint List