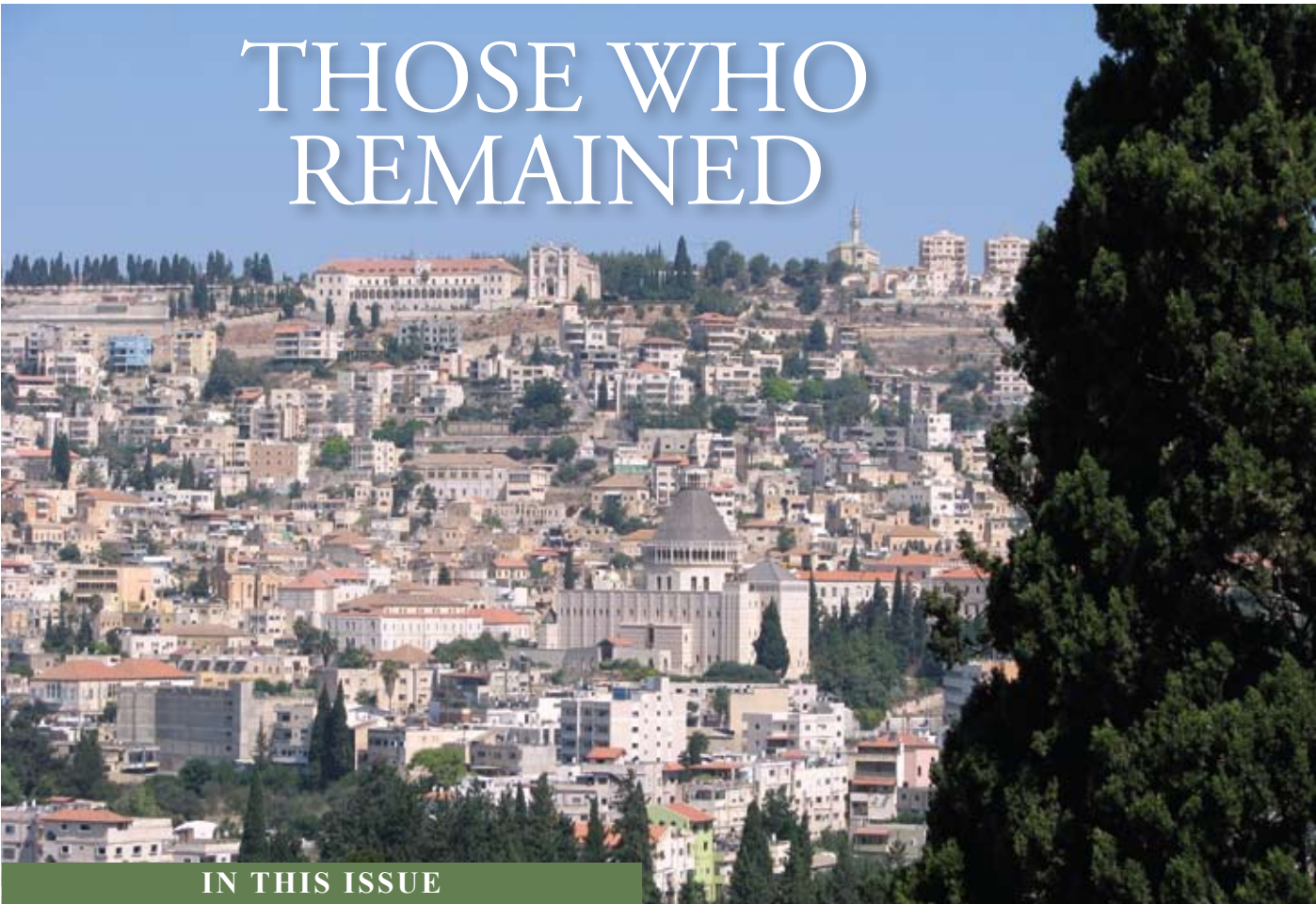


# CORNERSTONE

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



## THOSE WHO REMAINED

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*Nazareth, view from Mt. Precipice, taken by Mike Shehadeh*

### Some Are More Equal

*by Naim Ateek*

*When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:  
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*



The message of Jesus acquires renewed relevance. His message of justice and liberation helps us focus on the inequalities and discriminations that are apparent within the society. At the same time we need to consider the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving a just peace in the political realm.

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." ' And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. (Luke 4:16-28)*

Nazareth today is the largest Arab Israeli city in Israel. It has over 70,000 inhabitants. At the time of Jesus, Nazareth was a small village, built around a spring of water, situated in the middle of a basin surrounded by hills. This spring still flows and is known to this day as "Mary's Well."

The Gospel of Matthew (chapter 2) tells us that after their return from Egypt, Joseph and Mary decided to live in Galilee. They chose Nazareth as a home probably because Joseph heard about the possibility of finding employment in the nearby Sephoris (Arabic: Saffuria) that was being rebuilt, expanded, and beautified by Herod Antipas in the first part of the first century A.D.

Jesus was brought up in Nazareth where he spent his formative years, and "increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" (Luke 2:52). The Gospel of Luke mentions a visit to Jerusalem for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus when he was twelve years old. The next event that is recorded in the life of Jesus was his baptism in the Jordan River at the age of 30 by John the Baptist.

In chapter 4, Luke records Jesus' visit to the Nazareth synagogue on the Sabbath. He read a passage from the book of Isaiah and commented on it. The people were impressed by his words and knowledge. Luke does not give us details, but the implication is clear. Jesus detected a sense of bigotry and chauvinism among the people. In order to address it, he gave them two examples from their own faith tradition where two popular prophets, Elijah and Elisha, showed openness towards and acceptance of non-Israelites.

Elijah, during a period of famine, was hosted by a non-Israelite woman who had compassion on him and took care of him. She was a Phoenician from the north (today's Lebanon). In the case of Elisha, although there were Israelite lepers in the ancient Samaria region, the only person reported to have been healed by the prophet was Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army who was an ardent enemy of the ancient Israelites.

Jesus' message was unambiguous: God loves and cares for all people. God does not show bias or distinction regarding race or ethnic background. There is no bigotry or chauvinism in God; it is all contrived by humans. God's people include even "our" enemies. Jesus was stretching people's narrow theology of God. His words were in line with the theology expressed by the writer



*Traditional site of synagogue in Nazareth*

of Jonah a few hundred years before. Jonah also critiqued the chauvinism of his day and their narrow theology of God (See Ateek, 2008 pp. 67-77).

In addition to this, Jesus gave a personal and inclusive meaning to the Isaiah text. He explained that the words of Isaiah were being fulfilled in his own coming. Such a commentary on an obviously messianic text that was awaiting fulfillment with the advent of the messiah seemed unpalatable to the ears of the synagogue worshippers. Jesus was claiming to be the one anointed by the Spirit of God and in him Isaiah's words have found fulfillment. For Jewish listeners, what Jesus was implying seemed blasphemous, especially since it was coming from the lips of a local boy whose unpretentious and ordinary family had long been residents in the village.

Furthermore, Jesus' inclusive message left out the specialness of the Jewish people. In effect, Jesus was articulating a new theology of God and God's people that shocked the Nazareth religious elders, unsettled them and questioned their long-held beliefs.

Jesus' message continues to be as revolutionary today as it was then. It is a message to all those who are poor and oppressed, the prisoners and captives as well as the sick and the blind. By mentioning "the year of the Lord's favor," Jesus was referring to the jubilee year when justice was done and the land was restored to all those who, for economic or political reasons, had forfeited it to the rich and powerful landlords. Jesus was presenting God's vision for society where poverty is satisfactorily addressed through just economic structures, where captives and prisoners are released so that they can enjoy the love and care of their families. He was, in effect, speaking about the dawning of a new messianic age where the blind will receive sight and the sick will find well-being and healing (which Jesus himself practiced). Jesus was talking about the restoration of justice and liberation for all the oppressed people in the land. This was the inclusive and revolutionary message of Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue.

As we look today at the Israeli Arab situation in the Galilee and, indeed, in the

Israeli state, the message of Jesus acquires renewed relevance. His message of justice and liberation helps us focus on the inequalities and discriminations that are apparent within the society. At the same time we need to consider the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving a just peace in the political realm.

In 1948, approximately 150,000 Palestinians remained in that part of Palestine that became the state of Israel. Today they number 1.3 million, making up one fifth of the population of the country and in a few years they will comprise one fourth. From 1948 to 1967 the Israeli Arabs were completely cut off from the Arab world, and so peace between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab world is vital for them. But what is more important is that this sizable minority has not been able to shape its future in its own home within the state of Israel in such a way that will give hope to its future generations.

There are serious endemic economic uncertainties within the Israeli state. Economically the Israeli Arab municipalities, including the Druze, are facing hard times. Their municipal allotments from the government do not match what their counterparts on the Jewish side receive. The same applies to the Arab schools and other services. The rate of unemployment among the Israeli Arabs is also high compared to that of the Jewish community. The Israeli Arabs have a high percentage of people living under the poverty line.

Moreover, since the beginning of the peace process in 1993, the Israeli government's focus has been on the peace negotiations with the Palestinians. These negotiations did not touch in any way the Israeli Arabs (Palestinians

inside the state of Israel) nor did it involve them. They continued their life and struggle for equal citizenship with their Israeli Jewish counterparts and against government discrimination.

The 2009 election of the new Israeli government with Netanyahu as Prime Minister exposed disturbing trends within the Israeli society. In fact, these are more dangerous and fundamental than the economic and financial ailments the Israeli Arabs are facing. The Israeli government perceives the very existence and presence of the Israeli Arab community as a threat to the state. The Netanyahu government is attempting to remove any distinction between Israeli Arabs and their Palestinian brothers and sisters in the occupied territories. All of them combined seem to pose a threat to Israel and all must be encouraged to go. In fact, the Israeli Arabs who possess Israeli citizenship are perceived as a greater threat to Israel and its government than those Palestinians inside the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip that Israel had literally placed behind the separation wall in order to forget about them. It is now these "Israeli citizens" who constitute the problem and, therefore, must be removed.

Racism is waiting at the door and Israel faces hard and difficult choices ahead. Either it extends to all of its citizens equal rights or it runs the risk of having its democracy ("the only democracy in the Middle East") considered a farce. If the government of Israel continues with its present policies of discrimination against its own citizens and the suppression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, sooner rather than later, more people in the world will see Israel as it is, an apartheid and pariah state.

Instead of charting a future where they can live with the Arabs as peaceful neighbors within one Palestinian state, the Zionists were charting a future that negated them and conspired against them. Even before the beginning of the first World War, some people feared the consequences of the Zionist agenda. It was like "sleeping on volcanoes" (Amy Dockser, "Jerusalem 1913," p. 86).

Indeed, there were voices within the Palestinian Jewish population that were emphasizing a cultural Zionism and not a political one – a Zionism that could coexist with the indigenous Palestinians and share the land with them. One of these was Martin Buber who immigrated to Palestine from Germany in 1938. For Buber, "Jewish settlement must oust no Arab peasant, Jewish immigration must not cause the political status of the present inhabitants to deteriorate, and must continue to ameliorate their economic condition." (Quoted by Ellis, 1987, p.104) Buber's dream for the Jewish community in Palestine was to live in peace with the Palestinians and work with them to develop the land. Zionist leaders, however, were not interested in such coexistence. They wanted the land without its indigenous inhabitants.

The same basic Zionist policy is being implemented today by the Israeli government. Israeli leaders still live in the illusion that if they can strip the Palestinians of as much land as they can and get rid of as many of them as possible, including Israeli Arabs, they can achieve the peace and tranquility they long for. It is noteworthy to remember the words of Chaim Weizmann, the first president of the state of Israel (1949-1952). He said: "I am certain the world will judge the Jewish state by how it will treat the Arabs (Palestinians)." (Carter, "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid" 2006, p. 34)

The message of peace that was first heard in Nazareth still rings true in our time. It specifically means: Addressing the issue of poverty, releasing all political prisoners and captives, offering health care to all those who desperately need it, and giving justice and liberation to all those who are oppressed.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century can bring peace to our region, but only when the government of Israel perceives its Arab Palestinian Israeli citizens not as a threat that must be removed, but as a great asset that can help it achieve the desired peace with the Palestinians. Instead of considering them a liability, they can be the bridge for peace. In its xenophobic blindness, greed for land, and disdain for the Arabs and Palestinians, the government of Israel has missed many golden opportunities for a genuine peace with its own citizens as well as with its neighbors. What we need today is partnership and not alienation, cooperation and not separation, liberation and not domination. This is our only future.

**A postscript:** It appears, however, that we are, indeed, "sleeping on volcanoes." We must find a permanent solution to this conflict. I do not believe that the present Israeli and Palestinian leadership are capable of finding the needed solution or concluding the needed peace. Help must come from outside – from an empowered United Nations where America and the European Union have to play an effective major role. This must be done before the sleeping volcanoes erupt and bury us all with their ashes.

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*The Rev. Naim Ateek is the Director of Sabeel, Jerusalem.*

# SABEEL NAZARETH ACTIVITIES



**Children's Programs** Monthly meetings, Ascension Day, May 23, 2009. Handicrafts by the children



**Youth and Young Adult Programs** Weekly meetings, bible studies, volunteer work, tours and trips



**Community Building** Sabeel organizes a variety of programs for the local community: holiday programs, performances, worship services, etc. Married Couples meeting about Christian Education for Children



Part of the audience at the performance, "Lord of Light – Jubran K. Jubran", performed by Nabil Azaar, Nibal Malshe and Yosef Makhoul



**Family Programs** Jaffa Tour on May 24th  
Visit to the old city, mass with the community, meeting with Mr. Fakhry Jedai



**Women's Monthly Meetings** Tours and visits to different communities in the north. Joint trip with Sabeel Jerusalem to Akka (Acre) on July 17<sup>th</sup>.

# ALIENS IN THEIR OWN LAND

*by Ms. Haneen Zoabi*



The Israeli Knesset concluded its summer term with the current government. At the internal level, two major trends characterized this term: first, the Knesset adopted policies more hostile towards Arabs; and second, these policies were transformed into basic laws that will not change even when governments change. With regards to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the past five months have demonstrated that Netanyahu's government believes in imposing new facts on the ground much more than previous governments which, to a certain extent, tried to reach agreements and understandings with the Palestinian people.

Therefore, one can say that the current Israeli government has taken on two approaches toward Palestinians: In the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, Israel is breaking pre-existing agreements with Palestinians. Within Israel, the state is creating new laws that transform unofficial, hostile policies toward Arab citizens of Israel into official laws that infringe on Arab citizens' access to democratic processes and rights.

Lieberman's (Israel's extreme right-wing Minister of Foreign Affairs) danger goes far beyond his party. The Netanyahu administration is showing readiness to

accommodate and embrace Lieberman's hostility towards Arabs and opposition to an Arab presence in this country. The current government has offered support to pass Lieberman's legislation in record time. However, the danger of this government is not limited to its policies only; the real danger lies in the ability to transform the special policies of this government into laws that govern the political legitimacy of future governments. The policy of the present government can be understood through the speed with which these laws were passed, a record four month period, when considering the gravity of these laws and their impact on Arab citizens of the state.

These new policies create a political climate in which racism against Arabs shifts from a "security necessity" that is imposed when needed, to a normal component of Israeli law. By backing such extreme policies so early in the life of the administration, Netanyahu has proclaimed an identity for his government as well as the Israeli judicial system. This is an ideological identity and not mere laws and policies that are enacted under "necessity" claims as in the case with every law that violates the values of democracy and that restricts the political freedom margin.

## Seizing the land is a war on the Arab presence

Land is the core of the conflict between Israel and its Arab population. By controlling land, Israel can disrupt cohesiveness amongst communities, stifle economic development, and limit municipal expansion. Currently, there are four signs that clearly indicate the very effective tactics employed by Israel for seizing Arab land.

First, amendments to the so-called law of the "Israel Land Administration" will allow the transfer of state owned land to individuals. This includes the lands that are now under the control of the Custodian for Absentee Property, which is the property of Palestinian refugees.

Second, the Israel Land Administration has, for the last two years, been selling properties belonging to refugees to the Development Authority, a clear violation of international law that prohibits the transfer or sale of properties belonging to refugees.

Third, there is a large land exchange process underway between Israel's Land Administration (ILA) and Israel's National Fund (INF, the Zionist organization which owns 13% of the Arab-owned lands that the state confiscated and whose constitution stipulates that land under its control must not serve the interests of Arabs but be used for public interest, i.e., Jews, only). In this exchange the ILA will transfer lands owned by Arabs in the Negev and Galilee (around 70,000 dunums) to the INF as compensation for lands that the INF intends to sell elsewhere.

Fourth, the racist statements of Israeli Housing and Construction Minister Ariel Atias indicate Israel's intentions and future policies. Atias recently made several statements that Arabs should live in their own cantons and must be separated from Jews. The statements point to the real Israeli intentions behind the plan to build Hareesh Settlement on the lands of the Wadi Arah Triangle and the construction of a city for religious Jews on the lands of Galilee near the city of Nazareth.

The amendments to the land law are the most dangerous legislation since the establishment of the state of Israel. Enacting them is like a burglar selling stolen items. The danger lies in abolishing the legal grounds for any current or future claims to regain the lands of the Palestinian people and the return of refugees to their lands. Thus, it can be seen as an attempt to liquidate the properties of the Palestinian people in clear violation of the international humanitarian laws and laws pertaining to times of war. International law states very clearly that the transfer of refugees' properties to the state or a third party is illegitimate because the lands came under the control of the state as a result of a war. Furthermore, such an action would be a violation of Israel's explicit promises to not touch the lands of refugees until a political settlement is reached with the Palestinians in accordance with international law.

Changes of the land law also go against the political "spirit" of the time which prevails between colonialist countries and the indigenous people where countries like Australia and New Zealand are making constitutional and legal changes to redistribute land between the white population and the

indigenous people as part of a process to achieve relative justice.

The law will also lead to transfer of ownership of lands which were confiscated from the Arab residents and which have not been used over the past years for their confiscation purposes, and which the authorities might now use for other purposes.

## Ideological laws: the Nakba commemoration and loyalty to Zionist values

Besides the land law, the bills that have been presented to the Knesset since the current government took office are considered ideological bills whose aim is not to protect the citizen or the security of the state, but to protect Zionist ideology along with attempts to impose it on the Palestinians inside the 1948 borders and punish any Palestinian who does not adopt this ideology. The Zionist convictions which make up the core of this ideology justify the seizure of the land and the eradication of any signs that might prove that these lands make up the natural homeland of the Palestinians. Therefore, these bills do not protect freedoms of individuals but, instead, suppress political convictions in an attempt to protect the Zionist ideology.

Several other bills were presented to the ministerial committee:

- The so-called Nakba Law which bans commemorating the Nakba as a day of mourning.
- The Penalties Bill which requires everyone to recognize Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.
- The Population Register Bill which stipulates declaring loyalty to the state, flag and national anthem, which really means declaring loyalty to the

values of Zionism as a condition to enjoy Israeli citizenship!

In addition to the above mentioned bills, several political decisions were posed in line with the logic and motives of the previous laws:

- The decision of the Israeli Minister of Transportation Yisrael Katz to remove the Arabic names of Arab cities and villages which date back hundreds and thousands of years and keep the Jewish names that were introduced after the establishment of the state of Israel.
- The decision of the Minister of Culture Gideon Sa'ar to remove the term "Nakba" from the school textbooks (the term "Nakba" was only mentioned in two school textbooks).
- The refusal by the Minister of Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau to meet with MK Talab al-Sane' because his political views are not appreciated by Minister Landau.

Moreover, Palestinians are aware of the existing contradiction between the Jewishness of the state and its democratic nature. Therefore, Palestinian citizens in Israel will continue to struggle using all democratic means not only for the sake of their rights but also for the benefit of the "state for its citizens" which is the sole democratic political formula that can challenge the racist constitutional structure of "the Jewish state".

The Jewish state, in practice, is a state based on racist Zionist ideology which considers allegiance to its core principles as a condition for citizenship and goal of its legal structure.

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## Statistics

- In 1948, 156,000 Arabs [remained] in Israel. By 2001 the number had increased to 1.2 million, 19% of the population. Researchers predict that by 2020 the number will increase to 2 million people and will comprise somewhere between 21% and 24% of Israel's population.

- The proportion of Moslems will increase to 85% and Christians will decrease to 7%.

- The Arab community in Israel is very young; more than 50% are under 19 years of age.

(Above statistics provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel)

- According to Wikipedia: in September 2009 the total population of Israel is 7,465,000 people of whom 1,513,200 are Arabs. Israel's total population is comprised of 75.5% Jews and 20.3% Arabs.

- Among the Arabs today: 83% are Moslems (16% of the entire population), 9% are Christians (2.5% of the entire population) and 8% are Druze (1.5% of the population).

## Contemporary Way of the Cross

*A Ministry of Sabeel*

If you are planning a group visit to Jerusalem, contact us at Sabeel to take your group on the Contemporary Way of the Cross, one of Sabeel's ministries to pilgrims seeking to know not just the history but also the contemporary reality of the Palestinian experience. Build in to the final days of your visit two or three hours which will tie together the faith, politics and spirituality of your pilgrimage.

The Contemporary Way of the Cross is a journey, but it is also an act of worship. It is our hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity to listen, to walk and to pray with us as we look to a just, comprehensive and enduring peace.

Contact us: [world@sabeel.org](mailto:world@sabeel.org)



*“The ‘Hebraisation of road signs will mean that ‘Jerusalem’ will eventually be replaced in both Arabic and English with the Hebrew transliteration, ‘Yerushalayim’”*

## THE NAME GAME

*by Jonathan Cook*

Since the Israeli elections earlier in the year, the cabinet ministers in Benjamin Netanyahu’s rightwing government have been busy upstaging each other, apparently keen to be seen as taking the hardest line possible against the country’s Palestinian minority.

Leading the way by some margin has been Avigdor Lieberman and the legislators in his openly racist Yisrael Beiteinu party, the third biggest faction in the Knesset. In keeping with their campaign platform – “No citizenship without loyalty” – they have proposed a raft of measures undermining the

position of the 1.3 million Palestinian citizens.

The party’s most controversial proposal has been a bill that sought to enshrine what Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has termed “memoricide”, by threatening with jail anyone who commemorates the Nakba (or Catastrophe), the word used to describe the dispossession of the Palestinians in the 1948 war.

The bill was subsequently passed in a modified form and will mean that any institutions marking the Nakba will lose government funds, posing not



Although signs on major roads in Israel, East Jerusalem and possibly parts of the West Bank will continue to include place-names in all three languages, the English and Arabic names will be straight transliterations of the Hebrew name.

least a major threat to the future of the country's four binational schools, which uniquely make a point of exposing their Jewish and Arab pupils to the other's narrative.

Two other Yisrael Beiteinu bills, both of which were eventually rejected by a ministerial oversight committee, would have required all schools to teach Zionism studies and conditioned citizenship on declaring an oath of loyalty to Israel as a Jewish state. Both measures are expected to resurface during this Knesset sessions as private members' bills.

Last month (August) Lieberman opened another front against the Palestinian minority by issuing a decree that, as foreign minister, he would prevent anyone who had not performed national service from joining the ministry's course for trainee diplomats. The move was clearly directed at Palestinian citizens, who are currently exempted from such service.

The foreign ministry currently employs only 11 non-Jews, a tiny fraction of its total employees and is obligated by law to increase the proportion of Palestinian citizens among its staff. Lieberman's measure would ensure even greater Palestinian under-representation in the ministry. But Lieberman is far from alone in devising new measures to increase the marginalisation of the Palestinian minority.

In July the housing minister, Ariel Atias, of the Shas party, called for strict segregation between Jewish and Arab citizens as he announced new plans to Judaise – or make more Jewish – traditionally Arab areas of Israel. He unveiled a settlement drive to bring thousands of ultra-Orthodox Jews

to the Wadi Ara region to prevent what he called an "Arab takeover" of northern Israel.

Not to be outdone, the education minister, Gideon Saar, of Mr Netanyahu's Likud party, made two announcements in the same month.

The first is that the term "Nakba" will be expunged from a new textbook that was recently issued to Arab school children under the more liberal regime of Saar's predecessor, Yuli Tamir. The second is a requirement that all pupils study the national anthem, Ha-Tikva. The ministry has issued special kits to schools to assist them with the programme.

In most countries, the latter demand might not be considered unusual. But in Israel the anthem's lyrics are based on a Zionist poem and have been a running sore with Palestinian citizens for decades. The lyrics speak of how the "soul of a Jew yearns" to return to Zion, and refer to "the hope of two thousand years, to be a free nation in our land", sentiments that entirely exclude the Palestinian minority.

The Higher Follow-Up Committee, a national political body representing Israel's Palestinian citizens, has staunchly opposed the use of the kits. It wrote to Saar, warning that the initiative would "only deepen the alienation of Arab students and teachers".

Figures released by the education ministry in July showed that only 32 per cent of Arab students passed their matriculation exam last year, compared to 60 per cent of Jewish students. The pass rate was a dramatic drop from the 50.7 per cent of Arab pupils who matriculated in 2006.

Yet another minister, Ian Katz, in charge of transport and also a member of the Likud party, jostled for his position as the prime minister's chauvinist-in-chief by ordering that all road signs be "standardised" to include place-names only in their Hebrew form, in what appeared to be a transparent attempt to erase Arabic heritage from the Holy Land.

Although signs on major roads in Israel, East Jerusalem and possibly parts of the West Bank will continue to include place-names in all three languages, the English and Arabic names will be straight transliterations of the Hebrew name.

Under the scheme, the Arab identity of important Palestinian communities will be obscured: Jerusalem, or "al-Quds" in Arabic, will be Hebraised to "Yerushalayim"; Nazareth, or "al-Nasra" in Arabic, the city of Jesus' childhood, will become "Natzrat"; and Jaffa, the port city after which Palestine's oranges were named, will be "Yafo".

Palestinians in Israel and Jerusalem responded with alarm to a policy they argue is designed to make them ever less visible. Ahmed Tibi, a Palestinian legislator in the Israeli parliament, said: "Minister Katz is mistaken if he thinks that changing a few words can erase the existence of the Arab people or their connection to Israel."

The transport ministry has made little effort to conceal the political motivation behind its policy of Hebraising road signs. In announcing the move, Katz said he objected to Palestinians using the names of communities that existed before Israel's establishment in 1948. "I will not allow that on our signs," he said. "This government, and certainly this minister, will not allow anyone to

turn Jewish Jerusalem into Palestinian al-Quds."

Other Israeli officials have played down the political significance of the decision. A transport department spokesman, Yeshaayahu Ronen, said: "The lack of uniform spelling on signs has been a problem for those speaking foreign languages, citizens and tourists alike." "That's ridiculous," responded Tareq Shehadeh, head of the Nazareth Cultural and Tourism Association. "Does the ministry really think it's helping tourists by renaming Nazareth, one of the most famous places in the world, 'Natzrat', a Hebrew name only Israeli Jews recognise?"

Meron Benvenisti, a former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, said Israel had begun interfering with the Arabic on the signs for East Jerusalem as soon as it occupied the city in 1967. It coined a new word, "Urshalim", that was supposed to be the Arabic form of the Hebrew word for Jerusalem, "Yerushalayim".

"I was among those who intervened at the time to get the word 'al-Quds' placed on signs, too, after 'Urshalim' and separated by a hyphen. But over the years 'al-Quds' was demoted to brackets and nowadays it's not included on new signs at all."

He said Katz's scheme would push this process even further by requiring not only the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew word for Jerusalem, but the replication of the Hebrew spelling as well. "It's completely chauvinistic and an insult," he said.

The transport ministry's plans for the West Bank are less clear. In his

announcement, Katz said Palestinian-controlled areas of the territory would still be free to use proper Arabic place names. But he hinted that signs in the 60 per cent of the West Bank under Israeli military rule would be Hebraised, too. That could mean Palestinians driving across parts of the West Bank to the Palestinian city of Nablus, for example, will have to look for the Hebrew name "Shechem" spelt out in Arabic.

Israel's Palestinian minority, one-fifth of the population, have had to battle in the courts for the inclusion of Arabic on road signs, despite Arabic being an official language. Many signs on national highways were provided only in Hebrew and English until the courts in 1999 insisted Arabic be included. Three years later the courts ruled that Arabic must also be included on signs in cities where a significant number of Arabs live.

However, as the political climate has shifted rightward in Israel, there has been a backlash, including an unsuccessful bid by legislators to end Arabic's status as an official language last year.

The right's current domination of the Knesset and policymaking appears to reflect popular opinion among Israeli Jews. The largest annual survey of Israeli opinion, the Democracy Index, revealed in this year's poll that 53 per cent of the Jewish population supported encouraging Palestinian citizens to emigrate from Israel.

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*Jonathan Cook is a journalist based in Nazareth. His latest book is "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed, 2008). His website is [www.jkcook.net](http://www.jkcook.net)*

# THE NAZARETH VILLAGE

by *Gosayna Karam*

The Nazareth Village began as the dream of Dr. Nakhle Bishara, a current treasurer of the Executive board of the organization. After many years, with the support of staff and volunteers, the Village came alive.

Based on solid New Testament scholarship and the most up-to-date archaeology, Nazareth Village brings to life a farm and Galilean village, recreating Nazareth as it was 2,000 years ago. As an ecumenical organization, visitors from all over the world experience first-century hospitality. Stepping through a stone doorway into the dim interior, they smell the smoke from the oil lamps as it was years ago.

The focus of the guided tours (which are offered in nine languages) is to present the parables and teachings of Jesus in the context in which they were given. The tour begins in the Visitors' Center which features four rooms providing historical and informational displays about bygone eras in Nazareth. The Nazareth Village site is an authentic, full-scale recreation of first-century Nazareth based on research, and includes houses, an olive press, a wine press, and a synagogue. It is set on the last remaining field that was farmed by Nazareth villagers at the time of Jesus. Sheep, goats, and donkeys meander on the land. Restoration of the farm site

*Gosayna Karam is the manager of the Nazareth Village. She and her husband, Habib, are active members in the Sabeel Young Couples program in Nazareth.*



and re-construction of the Village were done utilizing first-century building techniques and methods. Surrounding terraces dating back to the Early Roman Period bloom with crops grown in ancient Galilee: olives, almonds, figs, carob, grapes, wheat and barley.

Visitors to Nazareth Village encounter it like a resident of that time as they follow the rocky path up the hillside. Villagers dressed in first-century costume recreate the culture and commerce of village life. The villagers, assuming an actual character from that time, such as a farmer, weaver or carpenter, greet visitors on a tour of the village and surrounding farm site.



## Nazareth...

a place that is neither a village nor a city. It does not have the intimacy of a village, nor the scope of a city. A place, just a place, which has lost its connection to the fields, the graves, and the smell of earth, and which has also lost its connection to the clubs, the cinema, and the city square...

For Nazareth, in a strange way, it seems that years of neglect and lack of investment have done more to kill the spirit of the capital of Galilee, than years of bloodshed and soldiers have achieved in Nablus and Ramallah. It is an odd type of depression that seizes hold of you. Visiting Bethlehem under curfew, Nablus under siege by settlements or Qalqilya surrounded by the wall, you feel that people at least know what they are fighting for, a vision for a future however far away that may be.

Sometimes it feels like Nazareth has forgotten how to dream.

*Isabelle Humphries, Catastrophe Remembered (ed. Nur Masalha), 2005, p. 156.*

Village guides bring to life the teachings and activities of Jesus that they have witnessed firsthand.

Biblical meals are provided upon request. Foods that would have been grown on a first-century Galilean farm are served with fresh herbs and savory flat bread to groups of 10 or more in a beautiful stone dining area with arched spans that provide a special ambiance for a unique Middle East dining experience.

Nazareth Village aims “to create a living presentation of the life, times and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth for all peoples of the world.” With

the guided tour, the visitors gain a greater understanding of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine.

The Nazareth Village offers 6 different programs for local school children of various ages with their teachers. Additionally, we welcome and encourage school children to volunteer during their holidays to dress up as villagers and become part of the experience at the Nazareth Village.

To find out more about the Nazareth Village, please visit our website: [www.nazarethvillage.com](http://www.nazarethvillage.com)



*Arab village of Jish in the Upper Galilee*

# The Political, Legal, Socio-Economic Status of the Palestinian Citizens of Israel 2009

*by Jafar Farah*

While the international community turns its eye towards two levels of the Middle East conflict - the external conflict between Israel and Arab states, and the quasi-external conflict between Israel and the Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem - a third level exists that has the potential to greatly complicate the Middle East conflict. The Arab minority, Palestinians that remained within the state borders after 1948, constitutes 1.4 million citizens of Israel. Internal confrontation between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian Arab minority, as seen in the Acre violence in October 2008, reflects a new phase of these internal tensions.

Each of these levels of conflict in the Middle East region can directly

affect one another. Internal tension and instability inside Israel has the potential to derail the peace process and regional stability. Peace must therefore be cemented at the grassroots level, between the Arab and Jewish communities inside Israel in order to support any foundation for wider, sustainable peace. As citizens of Israel and part of the wider Palestinian nation, the Arab citizens of Israel are uniquely positioned to contribute to a just, sustainable human rights based resolution to the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians and the wider Arab world.

However, internal tension and instability between the two communities at a grassroots level inside the borders of Israel sets a dangerous precedent for

relations between Israel and Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories with negative ramifications for the wider peace process, which will in turn affect regional stability. Coexistence and horizontal peace within the country is essential to lay the foundation for wider peace both vertically, between Israel and the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, and diagonally, between Israel and neighboring states.

Socioeconomic, legal and political discrimination against the Arab community has been well documented by civil society and the Israeli government itself. The Or Commission Report, released in 2003, is a review of the events of October 2000 in which 13 Arab citizens were killed during demonstrations, and comprehensively outlines socioeconomic and legal discrimination against the Arab community. The definition of Israel as a Jewish state has profound implications for the political and legal status of the Arab minority as truly equal citizens of the state. For example, law and policy on the right to return and land distribution is based on ethnically preferential treatment towards Jews. In 2007 it was recorded that 53 percent of the impoverished families in Israel are Arabs and of the 40 towns in Israel with the highest unemployment rates, 36 are Arab towns.

Over the years there has been much inequality in the allocation of public funding for Jewish and Arab needs which has created huge economic development hurdles for Arab citizens of Israel. The Arab community is allocated just 7.6% of the state development budget, which grossly under-represents the needs and requirements of the community.

Israeli support for laws, which directly and indirectly target Palestinian citizens of Israel, has grown since an extreme right-wing government was formed following the February 2009 election. The following are issues of concern for the Arab citizens and require immediate action from the international community.

### **Law to outlaw Nakba mourning**

The Nakba day is observed by Palestinian citizens of Israel who mourn the dispersal of hundreds of thousands of Arabs who were forced to leave their homes during Israel's 1948 War of Independence, a war which is known to Arabs as the Nakba.

A private members bill, initiated by Yisrael Beitenu MK Alex Miller, proposed a prohibition on marking Israel's Independence Day as a day of mourning, which would effectively outlaw the commemoration of the Nakba. Nakba demonstrations are an integral part of the Palestinian Arab minority's national identity and history, which should be protected as a minority right in accordance with international law. In June, the proposed legislation for a ban on Nakba demonstrations passed the first reading in the Knesset. The proposed bill entailed a jail term of up to three years for violators.

However, given several ministerial objections to the bill, it was later amended so that it does not punish individuals for commemorating the Nakba but prohibits the allocation of money to any state-funded institution that is in any way involved with the commemoration of the Nakba. This law will have a particularly severe impact on

Arab institutions and organizations that are already subject to discrimination by governmental ministries and will now be further undermined. Moreover, the implementation of this law will, in effect, destabilize the already weak ability of Arab NGO's to challenge the nature of the state and its discriminatory behavior towards the Arab minority. By denying Arab institutions their cultural and historic rights to commemorate an event that in many ways defines the existence of the Arab minority, the Nakba law reinforces the delegitimization of the Arab minority in Israel and denies them their freedom of expression and right to human dignity.

### **Bill to criminalize publicly denying Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state**

Additionally, a bill had been proposed which would criminalize any public denial of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state by outlawing the publication of any material that could be interpreted as negating the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. The bill envisioned a sentence of up to a year in prison for any breach. Forty-seven MKs have voted in favor of the bill and 34 have voted against. This bill would inhibit Arab citizens from continuing their struggle for equal rights and against discrimination, as well as further eroding their freedom of expression.

### **Bill to discriminate in allocation of child allowances**

The Prime Minister's Office intends to reduce or end child allowances to families in which the father has children from more than one wife. Currently, this law conditioning child



The Israeli basic laws already violate Arab citizen's rights by defining the character of the State. While Israel regards itself as a democratic state, as well as a Jewish State, it continues to give preference to its Jewish citizenry on all levels while discriminating against the already disadvantaged Arab citizen

allowances on school registration and immunization for certain diseases adversely affects Bedouin children and families living in unrecognized villages because of the lack of access to basic services in the Negev and of unrecognized villages, to schools and health care. Such a move, regardless of its aim to combat polygamy, would be detrimental to large Jewish and Arab families, and the bill in effect victimizes the children of these families.

### Loyalty Oath bill

The ministerial legislative committee rejected on June 7<sup>th</sup> a bill stating that those who wish to retain Israeli citizenship would have to declare their loyalty to Israel as a Jewish state. The proposed bill was central to Yisrael Beiteinu's election campaign last February, and as such, it is expected that the bill will be presented again in the near future in a different form. Yisrael Beiteinu MK David Rotem, stated that the oath would include a pledge of loyalty to Israel as a 'Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state', to its emblems and values, and to serving Israel either through military service or through any equivalent alternatives, before they could be issued a national identity card. The proposed oath was to apply to all citizens, although it would indirectly discriminate against Arab citizens of Israel and is a reaction to the Arab community's dissent during the War in Gaza earlier this year.

### Bill to revoke citizenship

Interior Minister Eli Yishai, of Shas, has introduced a bill that would give authority to the minister to revoke the citizenship of a citizen without the involvement of the Attorney General.

Currently, the Attorney General must approve such a move. The bill is being introduced officially by Shas MK David Azoulai with the provision that revoking one's citizenship will not leave a person without any citizenship. That means the bill takes into consideration a person who does not possess any other citizenship. The bill is intended to curtail the complex revocation of citizenship process that exists today, primarily intended to permit the minister to revoke the citizenship of those who are accused of betraying the state. Yishai has already announced that if the bill passes, he will revoke the citizenship of former MK Azmi Bishara, and 34 other Arab citizens. These calls fail to include Jews connected with terrorist activity, such as Rabin's killer, Yigal Amir.

### Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law

The 'temporary' Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law has been consistently renewed since its inception in 2003. This law denies citizenship and Israeli residence to Palestinians who reside in the West Bank or Gaza Strip and who marry citizens of Israel. In 2005, the Israeli ministerial committee for issues of legislation once again amended the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, to restrict citizenship and residence in Israel to Palestinian men over the age of 35 only, and Palestinian women over the age of 25. Although this law theoretically applies to all Israelis, it has disproportionately affected Arab citizens of Israel; Arabs are far more likely to have Palestinian spouses than other Israelis. Thus the law has been widely considered discriminatory and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination



*An Arab village in northern Israel*

has unanimously approved a resolution saying that the Israeli law violates international human rights law.

### **Socio-Economic Discrimination against Arab Citizens**

The Israeli government continues to implement policies that directly discriminate against its Arab Palestinian citizens. From 1999 to the present, the regular governmental budget has disproportionately allocated funds to its Jewish population. Despite representing 20% of the total population of Israel, Arab localities are discriminated against in the development budget and in the regular government budget where they

receive only 3% of the funds. The Arab citizens' share from the governmental development budget for the year 2008 was 944 million NIS; just 7.6% of the 12.4 billion NIS total development budget. Arab citizens are also underrepresented in the government offices with only 6% representation despite the Law for Arabs and Women. Finally, and quite significantly, only 3.5% of land in Israel remains in Arab-Palestinian citizens' ownership.

The socioeconomic gaps between the Jewish majority and Arab minority in Israel are huge. There is extensive inequality in human resources, employment, higher education,

health and in government. The Arab community, comprising 20% of Israel's population is represented by just 11 Arab MKs out of 120 (a shortfall of 11 MKs proportionally). Out of more than 50,000 employees in governmental offices, just 4,000 are Arab.

According to the last official governmental targets, by 2007 there should be 11% Arab workers in the economy. For example, of more than 70,000 employees in the high tech companies, only 300 Arabs are working in this field. Also only 1.5% of researchers in Israel are Arab researchers and less than 1% of the technical teams of the research and development

institutions are Arab employees. Gaps in investment in education created differences in skills between Jews and Arabs in Israel. While the Israeli economy needs highly skilled, qualified and trained human resources, lack of accessibility to higher education and proper educational training creates high percentages of unskilled Arab labor that work for short periods in the low infrastructure industry in Israel. The average per capita income among the Arab population is approximately \$7,700 a year, while the national average per capita income in Israel is \$19,000. Additionally, Arab women constitute half of the total number of Arab students at universities in Israel, yet only 18 % of these women are integrated into the Israeli workforce.

### Israel's 'unrecognized' villages

Approximately half of the Bedouin citizens of Israel live in 45 'unrecognized' villages. The unrecognized villages are ineligible for municipal services such as connections to the electrical grid, water mains or waste disposal services. Education and health standards in these villages are poor with little or no access to any of these services. There are no municipal authorities in these unrecognized villages who can approve construction permits. The building of houses in the villages is therefore unlicensed and subject to demolition by the Israeli authorities. Unrecognized villages are not marked on commercial maps, which further isolates them from economic development. According to data published by the Regional Council for Unrecognized Villages, in the year 2009 alone, over 51 Bedouin homes have been demolished.

### Peace, conflict transformation and solidarity

Considering the lack of consolidated leadership on the Israeli side, which has control of both nuclear weapons and the lives of millions of Palestinians, it is important for the international community to demonstrate solidarity and share responsibility to end the regional conflict and act to protect human rights. Nationalist and extreme right efforts to impose their worldview, with disregard to the rights of Palestinians and minority groups, greatly complicates the Middle East conflict with resulting tensions and confrontations between Jewish and Arab citizens of the State. The extreme right-wing leadership in the current Israeli government is in fact moving to increase and continue discrimination and incitement against the Arab minority. In the Israeli legal and political reality there is no constitutional or entrenched protection for minority rights and even basic civil rights are not secured, in contravention to international human rights norms. The right to be 'equal,' for example, is not guaranteed in the basic Israeli laws and this has led to a legal vacuum which permits violations of human rights such as in the case of the Citizenship Law 2003, where even family life is undermined.

Civil society and civilians all over the world share responsibility to support regional efforts to end the conflict with peace and justice, such as the Arab League Peace Initiative 2002. Regional reconciliation is needed to protect the lives and rights of all people living in this region; the Arab

Palestinian community must be at the core of efforts of peace building.

In 2009 the Mossawa Center produced a 'Watch List' of 14 points for the international community that includes developments in domestic legislation, further home demolitions and racial incitement. The aim is for the international community to be better able to monitor developments from Israel's new Netanyahu - Lieberman government and relations between majority and minority inside Israel over the next 2-3 years.

The Israeli basic laws already violate Arab citizen's rights by defining the character of the State. While Israel regards itself as a democratic state, as well as a Jewish State, it continues to give preference to its Jewish citizenry on all levels while discriminating against the already disadvantaged Arab citizens. It is important that the international community prevent any further deterioration of the legal and political status of Arabs in Israel, declare a public and clear message against racial incitement and prevent the participation of discriminatory leaders from attaining international recognition.

For further information about the Mossawa Center or research and position papers on the issues raised above, visit [www.mossawacenter.org](http://www.mossawacenter.org)

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# PURPOSE STATEMENT *of* SABEEL

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on Friends of Sabeel groups in your area please contact our international representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.

