



סיקוי / سيكوي Sikkuy

September 7, 2011

העמותה לקידום שוויון אזרחי الجمعية لدعم المساواة المدنية
The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel

Newsletter No. 3/11



HOW DO ISRAEL'S ARAB CITIZENS FIT INTO THE SOCIAL PROTEST MOVEMENT?

Dear Sikkuy Friends,

I'm very excited to let you know that Ali and Ron will be travelling to North America in

October/November to speak at a number of very important venues and to meet with our friends and supporters.

They will be in

Baltimore, Boston, New York, Ottawa, Washington D.C. and Toronto.

Please note that they will speak at events open to our friends in Baltimore, Boston, New York and Toronto. We will soon send you a listing of those events and post them on our website.

In addition, Ron and Ali will be happy to meet with any of our friends in the cities mentioned above or to consider a visit to another city for this trip or the spring 2012 journey. So please

Dear Sikkuy Friends,

We are sure you are all aware of the unprecedented, mass, non-violent social protest movement sweeping Israel that started with the Tel Aviv "tent city" about a month ago. As a result of the protests all over Israel, the Prime Minister set up a committee of experts led by senior economist, Professor Manuel Trajtenberg, to draft solutions to the country's socioeconomic problems.

You may be less aware that when the committee was composed, not a single Arab citizen of Israel was appointed. After an appeal to Israel's Supreme Court, an Arab woman was indeed included in the committee.

When the committee started its public hearings, we in Sikkuy thought it vital that we become part of the process.

We decided to speak out about the barriers to social justice for the Arab citizens and make recommendations on the steps to be taken so that the committee will advance specific solutions to the unique issues and problems facing the Arab citizens.

Last week, our board member and academic expert Dr. Mary Totry and Ron Gerlitz appeared before the committee, whose proceedings were webcast live and viewed by tens of thousands of Israelis here and abroad. It is important to point out that Sikkuy was chosen to testify out of thousands of requests by citizens and NGOs to appear.

This afforded us the opportunity to speak forthrightly on the issue of equality for the Arab citizens and to state unequivocally that it is vital that the Arab citizens and their needs be considered as a unique sub-set of the social issues being considered by the committee.

let me know if you would like to arrange a meeting.

As we approach the end of 2011, this is a good time to remind all of our friends that NOW is the best time to make your first, second or even third donation to Sikkuy for 2011.

Please be in touch with me and I'll show you how easy it is.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Carl Perkal
Director of Resource
Development
Sikkuy
carl@sikkuy.org.il

We made clear that without special attention to these specific needs, many of the solutions that will be advanced for Jews will not benefit the Arab citizens and may even damage their socio-economic status.

Professor Trajtenberg warmly praised our appearance and confirmed that the committee's recommendations should take into account the unique nature of the socio-economic challenges facing the Arab citizens. We hope that the committee will translate our words into their actions.

We attach below an English article with an overview of our testimony and hope you can take some time to read it and consider its importance to our work.

In addition, in recent weeks, Sikkuy staff and board members were active in speaking at the various tent encampments throughout Israel in order to raise awareness among the general Jewish public about the unique aspects of the socio-economic challenges facing Israel's more than 1.2 million Arab citizens. We thank them for their voluntary efforts.

Allow us to also thank Mary Totry, as a volunteer board member, for her dedication and commitment to our work and for her willingness to take time out from her very busy schedule to appear before the committee with Ron. This is just one of many examples of how Sikkuy's board members are so committed and active on behalf of our organization and its goals.

The full Hebrew transcript of the testimony and photos from the hearing can be accessed at: http://www.sikkuy.org.il/docs/trachtenberg_committee_sikkuy.pdf

We look forward to your comments and questions.

Sincerely,

Ron Gerlitz and Ali Haider
Co-Executive Directors
Sikkuy

+972

Independent reporting and commentary
from Israel & the Palestinian territories

Tuesday, August 30 2011 | [Dahlia Scheindlin](#)

Arab social justice needs heard by the gov't-what about J14?

The leaders of a civil society organization working for equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel spoke on Tuesday before the Trachtenberg committee - the government-appointed panel charged with recommending steps to improve economic and social justice in Israel.

The committee's invitation to Ron Gerlitz and Dr. Mary Totry of [Sikkuy](#), the Association for Civil Advancement in Israel, might be partly a response to claims that the committee does not sufficiently represent Arabs in Israel.

Headed by Harvard-trained economist Professor [Manuel Trachtenberg](#), the panel was appointed by Prime Minister Netanyahu and has generated widespread criticism. One sort of criticism actually came from Professor Trachtenberg himself, who [reportedly drove a hard bargain](#) (Hebrew) before accepting the task, demanding that Netanyahu be prepared for deep changes to his economic approach, and expressing skepticism that the recommendations would be taken seriously - apparently concerned about being used as fig leaf.

The protesters too have expressed a range of feelings, from a certain appreciation for Mr. Trachtenberg - who some feel stands for a more socially-oriented economic policy than Netanyahu's neo-liberalism - to a reflexive revolutionary distrust of all things emanating from the government. J14 quickly appointed an [alternative committee of experts](#) and some have demanded that the protesters either [not speak with the government committee](#) (Hebrew), or [that Trachtenberg resign](#) so as not to be part of a "government fraud." [Noam Sheizaf expressed](#) somewhat similar concerns (Hebrew). Yet the protesters also seem to thirst for immediate influence on state policy; the Student Union for example, has said it will cooperate fully with the committee.

And another major critique was about the panel's [insufficient representation of Arabs](#) - Palestinian citizens of Israel - at the senior level. This ties into a deeper and increasingly heated argument over whether "Arab issues," have been sufficiently represented in the protests in general - it's a debate we've been having extensively here: [Joseph Dana thinks Palestinian citizens are either left out or exploited](#); [Noam and Mairav think](#) that the protests will get around to it incrementally and logically; [Dimi Reider observed early signs](#) that the movement could be an organic vehicle for getting Arab citizens' needs on the agenda, without self-conscious leftism.

To date, there have been small but mixed signs coming from the protesters themselves. There is a "1948" tent on Rothschild, arguing out its message on the street. The [alternative committee of experts they established has an Arab citizen among its leadership, Dr. Hala](#)

[Espaniolj](#). The initial list of demands J14 released included two items specifically about Arab citizens - blanket recognition for unrecognized Bedouin towns and the expansion of municipal borders for Arab towns to accommodate natural growth, Dimi reported. But a separate document prepared by a different grassroots group has no special demands related to Arabs - rumor has it that these might be adopted by the Student Union, although it's not clear. In a press conference last week, Daphni Leef - the symbolic leader of the original housing protesters - [presented a short list](#) described as the most urgent priorities, which had no such demands. I'd say that gives the protest a mixed grade of being truly inclusive of this population.

However, there may be a trickle-up effect into the government's thinking. The lack of a senior Arab figure in the committee's ranks sparked outrage. So did the paucity of women. As a result, a civil society organization called [Women Lawyers for Social Justice](#) petitioned the High Court of Justice and demanded that an Arab woman be added to the Trachtenberg committee. Within a matter of days, the [committee approved](#) the appointment and last week, [a Druze woman](#), Dr. Rabia Basis, was added to its housing committee.

Then late on Monday, Sikkuy was asked to appear before the committee the following morning. By contrast to the two line-items that appeared once so far in the protesters' demands, here is what Ron Gerlitz, the co-CEO of Sikkuy, and Dr. Mary Totry of the Steering Committee presented (translated from their prepared texts):

Ron Gerlitz

I want to thank you for inviting me to appear before you. I also hope that we will be able to influence your decisions...

The background to our activities is the situation of severe inequality in the distribution of state resources to Arab citizens, which is the result of a mostly intentional, long-term government policy...[In light of the unprecedented] call for social justice on the streets - even if not generally linked to the Jewish-Arab context - I presume that this honorable committee intends to recommend steps that will lead to a more equal distribution of state resources.

First I would like to claim that there will not be social justice in the State of Israel without advancing equality between Arabs and Jews. The reality of deep gaps between Arabs and Jews in Israel...threatens to break apart this state, no less...I understand that this committee is seeking universal solutions... not...answers for problems of one specific sector or another in Israel society. Universal policy steps are generally just...and the formation of a universal policy is a correct strategic goal.

But ...when you try to apply [universal solutions] in a situation of structural

and systemic inequality between Arabs and Jews in Israel, there is a deception. I would even say that it is disingenuous to call such universal solutions 'solutions' at all.

I ask to expose this deception, because if we don't agree on the problem of such a new universal policy, what awaits us is simply a well of danger. And I want to warn you that universal solutions, if they are not suited to Arab society, will not only fail to narrow the gaps between Jews and Arabs - they risk widening them...

I will give [two] examples...[from the areas of housing and public transportation]

Housing: ...Regarding intervention and regulation of the rental market in order to lower rental prices; and releasing more lands from [the Israel Lands Authority] for residential construction.

The solution for rental markets in the Jewish community is totally different from what is needed to solve the housing crisis in the Arab community...If the state invests resources in lowering rental prices, it will almost definitely influence the rent in Jewish areas only, since there is hardly any rental market at all in Arab communities!

State resources thus will be given only, or mainly, to Jewish citizens. That's a universal policy that will lead to deepening inequality in housing between Arabs and Jews. The solution: we need a special housing policy to encourage home rental in Arab communities.

Regarding the sale of lands: I hear many calling on the state to sell more land for residential construction...But our new study shows that the sale of state lands inside Arab communities has failed time after time. Just 20% of the housing units available are actually marketed because the planning and marketing policies for lands are totally unsuitable for Arab communities and society. A universal policy advancing increased sale of state land will not help Arab communities...

We need a policy with a specific plan for successful sale of lands in Arab communities, and it will take just minimal resources to solve the problem; where these resources have been invested, there have been great successes. [Gerlitz referred the committee to a detailed document explaining the obstacles to land sales and policy recommendations].

Public Transportation: There is an enormous gap between the availability of public transportation in Arab and Jewish communities. Some Arab

communities completely lack of public transportation...This is a reality that cuts off Arab citizens from the social, educational and employment centers of Israel. A universal solution of raising the public transportation subsidy is wonderful for most of Israel's citizens, but is only a very partial solution for Arabs - since only the tiniest portion of them will benefit from it...

[The solution]: All policy...must invest funds in transportation lines (buses) to the Arab communities...This will also pay off...it is impossible to advance social and economic development for the Arab community - nor for the Israeli economy overall - without investing in public transportation for Arab communities.

Those were examples...I humbly think that it is your obligation to examine all solutions and all policy proposals before you, and determine to what extent they will narrow or deepen the inequalities between Arabs and Jews in Israel - this is mandatory. Otherwise you could reach a situation in which "you came to fix, and you will find yourselves broken." I've come here to raise the alarm and to ask you to consider it. Thank you.

Dr. Mary Totry:

The situation of education among Arabs in Israel is very difficult. There is deep structural discrimination in resource distribution against the Arab education system. The result is that Arab students study for fewer hours, in more crowded classrooms, with poorer teachers.

Here is some data: Arab students study 20% fewer hours than in the Jewish/Hebrew educational system. The rate of high school matriculation with grades that reach the standards demanded for acceptance to university is 50% higher among Jewish students than Arab students. There is a shortage of 8000 classes in Arab communities.

The result is that Arab students and citizens: have far lower scholastic achievements, have far less possibility of studying in university, and far fewer chances of integrating in the work force.

This is the result of intentional government policy that leaves us Arabs far behind Jewish society... In this reality, the system of equal opportunity does not lead to equality. Equal opportunity does not help Arab citizens who arrive at the competition for jobs and for a place in the Israeli economy with a disadvantage. A policy of equal opportunity stands to deepen the gaps further.

Therefore, in order to advance meaningful change in Israel...we need to

invest massive resources in Arab education, and to strive for scholastic achievement in Arab education identical to that of Hebrew education. [For solutions, Dr. Totry referred the committee to a policy document listing detailed steps to be taken in order to close the gaps in education, prepared by the Committee of the Heads of Arab Councils].

There will be no social justice in Israel and there will be no change in the economic system when 20% of the citizens of Israel are stuck with a disadvantage and weakened education system.

Gerlitz reported to me that the meeting was excellent and that the representatives listening attentively, stating at the end that they agree. The results, of course, remain to be seen.

I'd say that Mr. Trachtenberg just scored a big point, government-lackey or not. Let this turn into a challenge for the protesters to show equally detailed attention to, and depth of thinking about one of the most enduring inequalities in Israeli life. Then they will start proving to themselves and society that they are wrestling seriously with this biting social injustice in Israel - and thinking long-term about a more sustainable economic, social and political future.

Hopefully, Israel's Arab community would respond to a different approach from J14, by contrast with the current government, which has proven only its appalling commitment to passing legislation that excludes them.

With a little more hope, we might even imagine a genuine grassroots partnership of Jewish, Arab - and all other sectors - that has nothing to do with left or right, but simply a better Israel.