



European Union

المنتدى
للتوافق
المدني
הפורום
להסכמה
אזרחית
The Citizens Accord Forum between
Jews & Arabs in Israel

עיריית תל-אביב-יפו
מנהל החינוך, התרבות והספורט



מרכז קהילתי יהודי-ערבי
المركز المجتمعي العربي-اليهودي
The Arab-Jewish Community Center

דגל
העל
אחד
מזדوج



אניברסיטת חיפה



מרכז ישראלי
למחקר ולחינוך
הערבי-היהודי

Jews and Arabs in Israel 2005 -

The First Jaffa Convention

יהודים וערבים בישראל 2005

כנס יפו - مؤتمر יافا

יהוד וערב في اسرائيل 2005

Jews and Arabs in Israel 2005 - The First Jaffa Convention

Summary

In June 2005, the first Jaffa Convention took place in Jerusalem, Haifa and Jaffa. A joint initiative of the Citizens' Accord Forum, the Du-Et Jewish-Arab newspaper and the Jewish-Arab Center at Haifa University, the event brought together hundreds of Jews and Arabs, including Israel's leading politicians, academics, media figures and leaders of civil society organizations.

The convention was launched with a special session of the Knesset's Constitution Law & Justice Committee in Jerusalem to discuss the role of Jews and Arabs in the emerging constitution.

The convention coincided with the publication of Prof. Sammy Smooha's Index of Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel, published by Haifa University and the Citizens' Accord Forum, which was presented for the first time at the convention in both Haifa and Jaffa.

Harsh words were voiced at the convention, but one felt a spirit of optimism that reflected the Index poll data and commitment of public figures to rectify the current situation existing between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens.

Two practical initiatives were born from the Jaffa Convention:

1. A special session of the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee and Knesset Members to be held in the Arab town of Sakhnin, and
2. The establishment of an Experts Committee for consolidating a road map to finance the activities.

The Knesset – Jerusalem

Special Session of the Knesset's Constitution, Law & Justice Committee



The Role of Jews and Arabs in the Emerging Constitution

Rabbi Michael Melchior – Deputy Minister for Diaspora Affairs, Co-Chair of the Knesset Caucus for Jewish-Arab Relations:

This discussion should be held at all levels of society as well as in the Knesset. Original community models for co-existence in a Jewish and democratic state must be developed.

MK Issam Makhoul – Co-Chair of the Knesset Caucus for Jewish-Arab Relations:

Israel has a Jewish majority and an active Arab minority, who wishes to participate but is excluded. I believe that one can build a constitution for a healthy, normal and developing society, but I am also fearful for its image.

MK Michael Eitan – Chairman, Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee:

A constitution is the foundation for the existence of a strong state, in which citizens and government know where they stand, and which gives significance to the notion of "citizenship".

Arab citizens say they want a constitution of "a state for all of its citizens". Let us sit and talk about this. Arab citizens show a lack of willingness to attend these meetings, since they have not yet consolidated their views.

MK Tzipi Livni – Minister of Justice:

It is important that we have taken up this challenge. There has to be a consensus that the national expression of the Palestinian people will be elsewhere, and equal civil rights will be granted in Israel. True, for years we talked about equality, but we did not implement this in budgets and infrastructure. I want to say to the Arab public and its leaders: Do not hesitate. By participating, you can determine the content [of the future constitution].

Professor Ruth Gavison, Hebrew University:

It is legitimate for Israeli Arabs to not want the Law of Return – but not legitimate to present the Law of Return as racism. In many countries around the world, there is a law that gives priority to nationals, on returning to their country.

Dr. Yusuf Jabarin, Mosawa:

Israeli law gives priority to the Jewish public and this naturally disturbs the Arab public. Israel can be Jewish and democratic without special status for the Jewish Agency or the Jewish National Fund, with a different national anthem, acceptable to the Arab public, and with more attention given to Arabic. The question of fair representation and equal allocation of budgets must be solved legally.

Professor Arik Karmun, Israel Democracy Institute:

The Arab-Jewish debate about a constitution will end in disagreement and we have to reach a painful compromise with the Arab minority and with other minorities.

Mr. Ibrahim Abu Shindi – Co-Director of the Citizens' Accord Forum:

I suggest that the Committee holds public discussions in Arab towns and villages, with politicians and academics who can relate to what is being said. It is important for the Arab public to feel that the discussions relate to them, and we at The Citizens' Accord Forum would be happy to organize this.

MK Michael Eitan – Chairman, Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee:

If the Forum will deal with the administrative organization, I will take up this challenge.

{ **Note:** The Committee will re-convene on 12th September 2005, to continue this debate in the town of Sakhnin. }

The Arab-Jewish Community Center – Jaffa

First Session:



Who is Funding Civil Society in Israel? Funding or Dictating?

Speakers: Mr. Ramiro Cibrian-Uzal (Head of the EU Delegation to Israel), MK Mohammad Barakeh, Mr. Eliezer Ya'ari (New Israel Fund), Mr. Ameer Makhoul (Ittijah), Mr. Ilan Halperin (UJA Federation of New York), Mr. Amnon Be'eri (Abraham Fund Initiatives), Mr. Udi Cohen (Citizens' Accord Forum).

Moderator: Ms. Rachelle Shilo (Citizens' Accord Forum).

Mr. Ramiro Cibrian-Uzal – Head of the EU Delegation to Israel:

The European Union is the biggest donor in the world and a friend of Israel and the Palestinian people. It is not anti-Israeli. It is true that our investments in Israel do not correspond to those given to the Palestinians, but there is also no correspondence between the two sides. Support channels available to Israeli organizations are: Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, Partnership for Peace and the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. I have no doubt that Israel is a democratic state but there is room for improvement.

MK Mohammed Barakeh:

I was greatly opposed to the involvement of international bodies in the Israeli entity in the past, but I admit I was mistaken. The intervention of international funding bodies against the background of failure of government is very important. In choosing projects to finance, difference in income between the populations should also be considered. A steering committee has to be established, that will set priorities for the advancement of the Arab population.

Mr. Ameer Makhoul - Ittijah (Representative of Union of Arab Associations in Israel):

Two civil societies operate in Israel - Arab and Jewish. Due to the collapse of the Oslo Process there is no joint action. Arab associations do not accept donations from certain bodies, due to their political agenda.

In former years, we did not apply enough to the Arab population to fund activities. Today we are working to rectify this situation. There is no cooperation between Jewish and Arab society and therefore we are putting pressure on the funding bodies to provide more aid to Arab society. Political parties, movements and not civil society organizations need to lead the change in Israeli society. We are very dependent on international funding, and the funding bodies need to be more attentive to our priorities. When the funding that reaches us is project-directed, this very much limits the scope of our activities.

Mr. Eliezer Ya'ari - Director of the New Israel Fund:

The main financier of a civil society is the government. However, in the last generation the government has handed the social services over to private associations. It lacks real ability to supervise funding allocations, and thus aggravates Israel's injustices in distribution. Attaining funding has become extremely difficult and there are no logical rules for the equal distribution of funds.

The NIF agenda is clear: to strengthen democracy. The money it distributes derives from many contributions. Organizations, and sometimes donors, want direct transfer of funds. However, in projects requiring a long-term vision, professional knowledge, the building of capabilities from scratch and patience for a process of many years, the NIF's way is the right way.

NGOs invest enormous amounts of energy trying to encourage business companies to make donations – and the latter make cynical use of civil society - receiving publicity and public relations disproportionate to their contribution.

Mr. Ilan Halperin - The UJA Federation of New York:

The Jewish community is undergoing a complicated process of recognizing the fact that taking care of the needs of the State of Israel includes also non-Jewish populations.

Mr. Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeano – Director of Israel Operations, The Abraham Fund Initiatives:

The Abraham Fund Initiatives invest in promoting cooperation, co-existence and equality between Jews and Arabs in Israel. We do not accept the adage that “money talks”. According to our approach, the organization has to locate the problem, come up with a solution, draw up a plan of action and show it to potential donors. This method proves itself and reinforces both the organizations and the donors.

Mr. Udi Cohen – Co-Director, The Citizens' Accord Forum:

We suggest establishing a joint think tank for the social organizations that will plan the necessary action for the long term involving a bold partnership between the organizations and the financiers and governmental support.

Second Session:



The Politics of Discrimination – A Co-existence of Cooperation or of Misery & Discrimination?

Speakers: Mr. Oscar Abu-Razek (Interior Ministry), Adv. Ali Haider, Mr. Jabir Assaklah (Shatil), Adv. Marwan Dalaal (Adalah), Prof. Sammy Smoocha (University of Haifa), Mr. Jabber Abu-Kaf (Chair, Regional Council for Unrecognized Villages in the Negev)

Moderator: Dr. Sarah Ozacky-Lazar (Citizens' Accord Forum).

Mr. Oscar Abu Razek – Director General of the Interior Ministry:

The gap between the Jewish and Arab societies started with the military regime that ruled until 1965. Nowadays there is no deliberate discrimination, only helplessness and it is not directed at rectifying injustices. A maximum of 200,000 people enjoy the fruits of the Israeli economy - the directors of the economy, all of whom are to be found in the same Jewish human network. Legislation is needed to encourage professional and economic integration of new Arab workers, and temporary legislation is needed, until the assimilation of equality is achieved.

Professor Sammy Smoocha University of Haifa:

The poll shows that discrimination is much deeper than we think. There are two kinds of discrimination against minorities: structural-institutional and social-personal. I ask whether forms of discrimination are embedded in the actual structure of the State of Israel, which is indeed Jewish and democratic, but also Zionist and therefore, perhaps, unable to completely eradicate discrimination. I wonder what is the minimum discrimination needed to ensure a Jewish Zionist state?

Mr. Jabber Abu-Kaf - Chair, The Regional Council for Unrecognized Villages in the Negev:

In everything relating to the issue of expropriation of Bedouin lands in the Negev our reaction to the discrimination was to organize. The state recognizes our organization as a means to authorize house demolitions. Why not in order to build? As long as it is not involved in all the planning procedures there will be no solution.

Adv. Marwan Dalaal – Adalah (The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel):

The State of Israel is cunning. It is very hard to find laws that expressly state that one group deserves at the expense of another, but reality and facts on the ground reveal deliberate discrimination. For example, regional planning has national priority. There must be a social-economic criterion such as percentage of unemployment, percentage of poverty etc., according to which the state directs resources. One of the problems is the attitude of Jewish society towards the representatives of the Arab minority.

Mr. Jabir Assaklah – Shatil:

The discrimination against the Arabs is perhaps the only stable thing in Israel since the founding of the State. Things change, ideologies develop and change but discrimination, which has existed since the beginning of the State, does not change. From the moment when Israel came into existence as a Jewish-Zionist state, it created a racist society that makes decisions and allocates resources in a racist and discriminatory manner.

There are two courses of action open for solving the problem of discrimination: the first course is the course of civil action. There are many Arab, Jewish and joint organizations that are doing wonders against racism.

The second course is focusing on specific professional matters concerning the day-to-day life of people, in order to meet the basic needs of a roof over one's head, water, electricity, education etc., elementary things that most of the Arab population lacks.

Adv. Ali Haider – Co-Director, Sikkuy (The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel):

In Sikkuy, partnership is total both in projects and in management.

We are divided on the kind of government in Israel - both the desired and the existing one - and divided on the question of the preferred solution in the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, but we agree among ourselves on the issue of citizenship and the need for equality. The role of the civil organizations is to establish a new civil debate, in which everyone, Jews and Arabs, can feel equal.

Third Session:



The Media in Israel – Does it Play a Role in Promoting Jewish-Arab Co-existence?

Speakers: Moti Shaklar (General Manager, Second Broadcasting Authority for Television & Radio), Shmulik Shem-Tov (Director of Hot News), Zoheir Andrawous (Editor of Kul-al-Arab), Salman Natour (Co-Editor of Du-Et), Jafar Farah (Director, Mossawa)

Moderator: Mr. Yaron Friedman, Citizens' Accord Forum.

Mr. Moti Shaklar – General Manager, Second Broadcasting Authority for Television & Radio:

According to our research, it seems that most groups comprising Israeli society are not represented on television. A foundation must be set up to encourage Arab cinema and to invest in schools, workshops and media centers for the Arab population and to assist in the development of artists and journalists. Wealthy Arabs must also shoulder the responsibility - opening schools, workshops and centers in media studies for the Arab population.

Mr. Zoheir Andrawous – Editor, Kul-al-Arab:

“Kul-al-Arab” is promoting a campaign among Israeli Arabs against paying the TV fee because it does not serve their interests. The Du-Et model should be used in both for the electronic media and the printed press.

Mr. Shmulik Shem-Tov – General Manager, HOT News:

There are too few Arab journalists representing the Arab population. Du-Et is not a good example because it is not financially independent.

Mr. Jafar Farah – Director, Mossawa (The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens of Israel):

The Jewish speakers display their ignorance of the Arab sector and therefore Israel is missing their potential. An Arab radio station should be established, or perhaps TV station in Jordan, that will broadcast local affairs. With regard to television broadcasts - pressure must be put on the regulator and on advertisers, to consider using alternative media outlets such as “The Voice of Peace” and “Du-Et” and to use international pressure.

Mr. Salman Natour – Co-Director of Du-Et:

Co-existence is opposed to the interests and agenda of the Israeli media, which is established in order to serve wealthy people. If they really want to achieve co-existence, they need to be very creative. The discussion should be in two languages, for Jews to get used to the sound of Arabic.

Fourth Session:



The Politics of Establishing the Status of Arabs in Israel

Speakers: Rabbi Michael Melchior, Deputy Minister for Diaspora Affairs, Co-Chair of the Knesset Caucus for Jewish-Arab Relations, MK Issam Makhoul - Co-Chair, The Knesset Caucus for Jewish-Arab Relations, Ms. Israela Oron, Prof. Arnon Soffer (University of Haifa), Prof. Sammy Smooha (University of Haifa).

Moderator: Mr. Ibrahim Abu Shindi.

Rabbi Michael Melchior – Deputy Minister of Diaspora Affairs:

The conflict with the Arab world and the Palestinians directly affects the internal relations between Jews and Arabs within Israel. Full integration, complete equality and justice towards everyone form the basis of being a Jewish state. We have to start a real discussion about the issues of rights of the Arab collective.

MK Issam Makhoul – Co-Chair, The Knesset Caucus for Jewish-Arab Relations:

Discrimination against the Arab population is the problem both of the Arab population and of Israeli democracy. As to the question asked several times at the Convention about the loyalty of the Arabs to the State, according to the poll of Prof. Smooha most are loyal. Is the state willing to express loyalty towards its Arab Citizens'? Reality proves otherwise. The state regards its Arab Citizens' as a kind of demographic problem and this is problematic.

Prof. Arnon Soffer – Demographer & Chair, Geo-strategy at University of Haifa:

We have to talk about the demographic problem. Having a large number of children is a crime, both against them [the children] and against the world. Arabs in Israel must take part in the fundamental discussions. With regard to discrimination by the establishment – the solutions have to come from below, from the NGOs, from the professional associations and from the civil society organizers that all work primarily on the individual level. A possible solution is to halt all investments in the Tel Aviv area and to direct them towards the periphery. I am afraid that after the disengagement the hard attitude towards Israeli Arabs will worsen, due to frustration with the withdrawal.

Ms. Israela Oron – Former Advisor to the Prime Minister:

A discussion about the flag and anthem in regard to the Arabs' loyalty to Israel is being raised instead of a discussion about really crucial matters. There are many governmental plans and much good will, as well as many organizations dealing with this matter, and nevertheless almost nothing happens, due to cynicism and pessimism. Arabs in Israel have no fair representation in these decisions.

Prof. Sammy Smooha – University of Haifa:

The poll showed that there is no demographic threat for a Jewish state within the Green Line.

- Most Jews and Arabs agree to “two states for two peoples”.
- There is disagreement about Jerusalem.
- Most of the Jews and half the Arabs want political integration in the West.
- The Arabs are willing to accept a Jewish, democratic state but negate its Zionist goals. They want a civil state.
- More than 90% of the Arabs want full cultural autonomy, similar to the orthodox population in Israel. But 80% of the Jewish public expresses lack of faith in the Arab public.
- Most Jews and Arabs want to see some kind of national service by the Arabs for the State.
- Most Jews think that Israel should compensate the Arabs for the land expropriated from them, with money or alternative land.
- The greatest agreement between Arabs and Jews is about the Arabs in Israel receiving budgets according to their proportion of the population and governing their institutions in the country. For this, there is the agreement of two thirds of respondents on both sides.

The Closing Ceremony



Mr. Ophir Pines-Paz – Interior Minister:

I have been taking an active part in the willingness of Israeli society to bring about genuine co-existence between Jews and Arabs in Israel. I appointed an Arab director general of the Interior Ministry and I am taking great pains to narrow disparities in budgetary allocations to local authorities in distress, many of them Arab authorities. The true challenge is to work together within an egalitarian society in which all citizens feel that this is their state and their society.

Rabbi Michael Melchior – Deputy Minister of Diaspora Affairs:

Perhaps we will not get to accept each other's ethos but we can achieve respect for one another; maybe we will not agree on a state of all its peoples but we can agree on a state of all its communities with a clear definition of the role of the Arab minority in the State.

Mr. Ramiro Cibrian-Uzal – Head of the EU Delegation to Israel:

A window of opportunity has been opened to change the present situation. We must strive to move from the agenda of conflict to the agenda of cooperation. We offer you our knowledge, experience and commitment to continue supporting worldwide projects of cooperation, such as this Convention and the Du-Et newspaper.

MK Issam Makhoul – Co-Chair of The Knesset Caucus for Jewish-Arab Relations:

We believe Martin Luther King's words: There is no way to peace. Peace is the way. The two peoples in this country are not a problem or a burden but an advantage. We can leave the problems behind us, and march together towards a common future.

Dr. Faisal Azaiza – University of Haifa:

This convention constitutes a model for annual conventions. The Index and discussions around it will give us up-to-date information and will help us to press for a change in policy.