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## The Jewish majority benefits at the expense of the Arab minority

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Recently the country was all excited about the visit to Israel of OECD representatives and about the willingness of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is composed of 31 developed countries, to add Israel to its ranks. But what aroused particular interest was the mobilization of the prestigious organization to expose the increasingly large gaps between the Jewish and Arab populations in Israel, and its recommendation to the government to take immediate action to close these gaps, so that the country will be able to meet the criteria for joining the organization.

OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría revealed what about 20 percent of the population knows and experiences personally on a daily basis – that in Israel there is a policy of systematic and ongoing discrimination against the Arab citizens, which is reflected in all areas of life. The Equality Index of Jewish and Arab citizens in Israel, which was published in Israel about two months ago (in Hebrew), by Sikkuy -The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality, exposed the reasons for these gaps and foresaw the conclusions of the OECD report. The gaps between Jews and Arabs in the areas of education, employment, housing, social welfare and health are only increasing, and the governments are not doing enough to change the situation.

If that is not sufficient, we should recall the report of the Or Commission of Inquiry, which examined the clashes between the security forces and Israeli citizens in October 2000. The report was the most comprehensive one about the state of the Arab population in Israel since 1948, and it determined that the demonstrations that led to the clashes are a result of deep-seated factors that created an "explosive situation" among the Arab public. The Or Commission added that Israeli governments had failed by not dealing thoroughly and comprehensively with the serious problems from which the Arab minority suffers.

The committee also determined that this is an important and sensitive issue that requires personal intervention, attention and leadership on the part of the

prime minister, emphasizing that the main objective of the government's activity must be the attainment of genuine equality for Arab citizens. The commission also recommended that the government initiate, develop and operate programs to close the gaps, while placing an emphasis on the areas of the budget relating to education, housing, industrial development, employment and services.

Although a decade has passed since the events of October 2000, the government has not yet done enough in order to close the gaps. Since then the situation has only deteriorated steadily - both the socioeconomic situation of the Arab population and the hostile attitude of the establishment and the Jewish majority towards this population. Even in places where legislation was passed, government decisions were made or rulings were handed down by the High Court of Justice, there is a huge abyss separating the declarations on the one hand and the implementation and the results in the field on the other.

For example, the government decided that by August 2004 at least one Arab would be serving on each of the 105 boards of directors of government corporations, and if this objective was not met, appointments would be frozen until the appointment of an Arab. But as of now, in more than 50 boards of directors no Arabs have been appointed, in spite of the fact that there are worthy and suitable candidates. In addition, only 6.7 percent of Civil Service employees are Arabs, in violation of the law mandating that 10 percent of civil servants must be Arabs.

In academe and in high-tech industry the situation is even worse. Of the 4,576 lecturers employed in the universities only 64 are Arab (1.4 percent). In addition, 43 percent of female academicians do not find employment in the profession they studied, and at present there are over 10,000 educated Arab women who cannot find suitable employment opportunities. Similarly, the representation of Arabs in high-tech industry is marginal: 300 Arabs as compared to 74,000 Jews, in spite of the fact that various projects in Nazareth and other places prove that Arab academics have all the abilities required for success in the field.

Regarding the incidence of poverty we are also witness to huge gaps between the two populations. While 16.5 percent of Jews live below the poverty line, among Arabs 54 percent are living in poverty. The situation among the children is even worse: 62 percent of Arab children are living below the poverty line, as compared to 23.5 percent of Jewish children.

Bringing Israel into the OECD is meant to present the country with standards for a desirable standard of living, and places a mirror in front of all of us that reflects the image of the country. For the time being the picture is quite difficult and serious: It displays two communities living under the same political regime – which grants privileges to the majority group at the expense of the minority group. That is undemocratic and inefficient.

The country must act to repair the injustices of the past and to bring about a real change in the status and the rights of the Arab population. The government failed to implement the recommendations of the Or Commission – and it should not fail to implement those of the OECD as well.

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