

June 4, 2007

The government discriminates against Arab communities

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A foreigner arriving in Israel and hearing the declarations that politicians make toward the Arab population could think that it is the most pampered population in Israel. At almost every conference or event where government ministers or officials are invited to speak before an Arab audience, promises are tossed into the air, ostensibly for the benefit of the Arab population. Ultimately, the promises last until the next morning's newspaper, at best, and sometime not even this.

This is not only a matter of promises. The report of a state commission, the Or Commission, which was issued three years ago, clearly stated that the government is obliged to erase the stain of discrimination against the Arab population. The report will continue to stand as an indictment against generations of Israeli governments until a comprehensive program is implemented for eliminating discrimination and narrowing disparities.

Every clear-thinking person understands the damage caused by the promises, which are declared time and again without any practical intention of fulfilling them. An Arab mayor who seeks the fulfillment of these promises usually encounters a shrug of the shoulders, while the Arab population develops a sense of alienation and a lack of faith vis-à-vis government officials.

This enormous damage is primarily due to the fact that the Arab population is held hostage, dependent on the government's benevolence. If it so wishes – the government will provide; if it does not wish to – it will not provide. The budgetary allocation is not fixed or organized as part of a legislative arrangement that would enable the Arab citizenry to rightfully enjoy its portion of the state's resources, but rather on the basis of arrangements that depend on good will and usually are not implemented.

Thus, for example, instead of constructing industrial zones that would enable Arab communities to enjoy tax-generating assets, the government prefers to allocate balancing grants to Arab localities, and even these are relatively inferior in comparison to Jewish localities with the same characteristics. Or, instead of charting a master plan that would enable Arab communities to develop, the government prefers to turn a blind eye to unauthorized construction (for lack of any authorized alternative), while brandishing a sword of home demolition above the heads of the citizens.

Occasionally, assistance for specific projects is received via patchwork programs and as a result of supplicating the Ministry of Interior, but past experience has demonstrated time and again that this is insufficient to provide a real boost for the Arab population. In order to generate real change, the

government, led by the Prime Minister's Office, must compel the various government ministries to adopt a policy of narrowing disparities while setting long-term goals, engaging in multi-year investment and involving the Arab population in the planning.

After the Second Lebanon War, the director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, Raanan Dinur, promised that the government's budgets earmarked for the rehabilitation of the North would be divided in the following way: a third to Jewish communities, a third to Arab communities and the remaining third to joint infrastructure. Nearly a year has passed since this promise was made and the PMO is now slated to present the actual investment figures at a conference tomorrow in Nazareth, with representatives of the government and Arab local authorities in attendance.

Another promise that goes unfulfilled will no longer surprise any Arab citizen. On the other hand, if funds were indeed allocated and continue to be allotted according to the promised distribution, it would constitute a significant step toward equality and, most importantly, would lend credibility to government promises that it does indeed intend to address the needs of the Arab citizenry.

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