

A call to battle

Ron Gerlitz, December 10, 2010

The call by dozens of municipal rabbis, who are civil servants, to prevent the [rental or sale of apartments](#) to Arabs is a racist manifesto and an incitement to a criminal act. Any other interpretation and any consideration for the signers of the manifesto is a dangerous move.

The call to prevent renting homes to non-Jews is blatantly racist, and is aimed directly at the Arab citizens. It's an attempt to strengthen a move designed to restrict the right of Arab citizens to live in Israeli cities; it's a continuation of the campaign against Israel's Arab citizens, which is supported by quite a number of ministers in the present government, and is now being assisted by dozens of senior civil servants – all of them also influential religious leaders and public figures. This is primarily an attempt to make a transition from expressing racist views to a call for a racist, organized and wide-scale action against the Arabs. It's not a passive sliding down a slippery slope, but an active attack, a real act of trailblazing. This is a call on the public to behave illegally. In other words, incitement to a criminal act.

In the same context, we should recall that the Arab citizens are suffering from a severe housing shortage, the product of the government policy that has included massive confiscation of Arab lands until the mid-1970s and a restriction of the municipal boundaries of Arab communities to this day. From the founding of the state until now, the Jewish and the Arab populations have grown at the same rate (a nine fold increase), but over 700 new communities have been built for Jewish citizens, and not a single one for Arabs (with the exception of several communities built for the Bedouin in the Negev in order to evacuate them from the areas in which they were living). This is serious discrimination on the part of the establishment, and as a result the Arab citizens have been left with an acute housing shortage and a very limited ability to guarantee what every person wants for himself and his children – a roof over his head.

Added to that is the call to prevent the rental of homes to Arabs, which means closing their option of living in Israel's cities. In addition to the insult involved, implementation of this demand will further limit the housing options of Arab citizens and will in effect leave many of them without a decent place to live. As a Jew, I cannot understand how the hands of Jewish signatories didn't tremble when they signed the document prohibiting the rental of an apartment to people because of their origin. Didn't it remind them of anything in our own terrible history?

It is essential to mention that an attack against Arab citizens is an attack against a minority that lives in the State of Israel, and an attack against a minority is an attack against democracy, because there is no democracy without uncompromising protection of the rights of the minority. An attack against democracy is a direct attack against every Israeli citizen who understands that our fragile democracy is our most important asset.

Therefore, we must say that today dozens of civil servants have issued a battle cry against the State of Israel and against our most vital interests – maintaining a society based on social justice, equality and democracy, in which every citizen, Arab or Jew, feels like a wanted member of the family.

In every country and every society there are extremist factions which act against the minority. Even during these bad times it is important to state that on this issue we are not worse than others, and that similar calls are heard from racists all over the world. But here we are talking about senior civil servants who are employed by the State of Israel.

Every government minister and every mayor who doesn't begin to act today to dismiss the rabbis is granting legitimacy to their manifesto. Silence will be agreement. They should not only be dismissed, they should also be tried for inciting the public to an illegal racist act. This week we learned that a small number of small fires can turn into a huge conflagration that spirals out of control. Each one of you, ministers and mayors, will be personally and directly responsible for the grave outcome of the deterioration of relations between Arabs and Jews. We will not exonerate you of responsibility.

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B"H

Iyar Tashsa

Da'as Torah

We wish to make manifest our opinion – the opinion of Torah (da'as Torah) -- that it is forbidden to sell land or a house in the Land of Israel to a gentile, even one who does not worship idols or an Ishmaelite (Arab), even where there is a great loss or emergency, for it is the opinion of all the early authorities that it is forbidden to sell land in the Land of Israel to a gentile who did not accept upon himself the seven Noahide commandments.

Signed

Nissim Karelitz, Aharon Yehuda Leib Steinman,
Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz, Chaim Kanievsky,
Zalman Nachman Goldberg and many other rabbis