

October 19, 2006

Let's see you be an Arab for a week

It would be interesting to see how you react to an employer or landlord who rejects you for no reason, to fans who curse you, to "talkback" writers.

A response to Hanoach Weber.

Joubran Joubran

"The Arabs receive preferential treatment" declares Hanoach Weber in an article published here [on Ynet]. His arguments reflect a clear combination of his frustration over what he identifies as an erosion of the Jewish character of the state and his views and attitude toward the Arab minority. He chooses to latch onto a few cases that are taken out of context, and this is mistaken and misleading. His view is distorted and ignores the trampling of the rights of the state's Arab citizens in all fields of life.

The State of Israel defines itself as Jewish and democratic. However, in everyday life, in political and social reality, there is excessive use of the ethnic character at the expense of the civic one. Equality is a seminal value in any democratic regime. Accordingly, Israel is obligated to equality between all of its citizens, Jews and Arabs alike. The Or Commission, which was established after the events of October 2000, determined unequivocally that the state has failed to institute equality between Jews and Arabs, and that it must make it a top priority to mend this situation and erase the stain of discrimination. The disparities between Jewish and Arab citizens should be eliminated – as a right and not as an act of charity.

The discrimination against Arab citizens is systematic, continuous and expressed in large socio-economic disparities, in gaps in higher education, in the level of municipal services, in the non-integration of Arabs in mid-range and top positions in the labor market and in the lack of suitable representation in government institutions and centers of power in the state. This discrimination exists in both an overt and concealed way: Overt discrimination is expressed in the Law of Return and the Law of Jewish National Institutions, as well as in the articles of the State Education Law and Broadcasting Authority Law that stipulate the goals of these laws. Discrimination that is ostensibly hidden can be identified mainly by its results: exploiting military service to award benefits, while the Arab population does not serve according to law and by decision of the government itself. Another example is the definition of certain regions as national priority zones, while excluding Arab communities from this category.

Massive land expropriations, no construction of new Arab communities and restrictions on the existing ones have created a sense of ongoing historical injustice. Arab communities have never been a target for development. On the contrary, they are perceived as communities whose numbers and expanse should be reduced. It is different in the settlements (in the West Bank) of red-roofed villas that proliferate and enjoy government support, and are built with large sums of the public's money, while the very fact of their existence on occupied and expropriated land is in violation of international law and every human value.

I would recommend to Mr. Weber and to all those who think like him, to trade places for a week with an Arab who "receives preferential treatment." I would like to know how he would react to an employer who does not hire him because he is an Arab; to an apartment owner who does not want to rent the apartment to him; to someone whose home is split by the separation fence and whose land is expropriated "for the public good;" to a soccer player who encounters racist taunts at every stadium; or to any ordinary citizen who is forced to read the racist responses to his own article. I promise him that he will also receive the whole benefit package of "bonuses and perks," including low income, inferior education, a high mortality rate, occupied land and an oppressed identity.

Dr. Jubran Jubran is an attorney and co-directs the Or Commission Watch project at Sikkuy – The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel.