

September 2007

A summary of The Sikkuy Conference reviewing three years of monitoring the Or Commission's institutional recommendations



Raanan Dinur, Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office, addressing the Sikkuy Conference

Closing Gaps – Indexes for Implementation

Tuesday, June 5, 2007

Golden Crown Hotel, Nazareth

1. Introduction

The conference, which summed up three years of monitoring the Or Commission's recommendations, provided a rare encounter between the central government, local government and civic society, and is part of Sikkuy's open and public effort to monitor government policy pertaining to the allocation of equal resources to the Arab population.

The conference was a continuation of the Nazareth conference held in September 2006, when Sikkuy brought together top government officials, led by the director-general of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Mr. Raanan Dinur, with Arab mayors. At the same conference, a month after the war, the PMO's director-general presented the government plan to rehabilitate and develop the North, and made a commitment to ensure equal allocation for Arabs in the Galilee. This declaration was unique and historic in terms of government policy because, for the first time, equality was the guideline of the declared policy.

Already at that time, Mr. Dinur promised, in response to a request from attorney Ali Haider, the co-executive director of Sikkuy, to return and report to the same forum of mayors, leaders and representatives of the Arab public on the progress in implementing the plan. The attendance at the conference was impressive – about 200 government officials, ambassadors, mayors, intellectuals, journalists, members of NGOs and other organizations, friends of Sikkuy, and many dignitaries, who took an active part in the conference and contributed much to the serious discourse.

2. Objectives of the conference:

- Ensuring the continued implementation of the Or Commission's recommendations for erasing the “stain of discrimination” against Arab citizens.
- Presenting the *Equality Index* and encouraging its use as a tool for monitoring the narrowing of disparities.
- Ensuring the fair distribution of state resources allocated in the wake of the war.
- Presenting the government's policy for equal allocation for Arab citizens and the narrowing of disparities.
- Making the special resource allocations more accessible to Arab local municipal authorities and the Arab public.
- Fostering an unmediated connection between senior officials in government ministries and leaders of Arab municipalities.
- Presenting the demands and needs of the Arab local authorities, identifying ways to respond to them and expediting the handling of these needs and demands.

3. Conference proceedings

Attorney Ali Haider, co-executive director of Sikkuy, opened the conference by welcoming all of the participants and thanking the European Union, the Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands and the Marc Rich Foundation for their support for the Or Watch and the Equality Index. He then explained that the Or Commission's recommendations were too general and lacked explicit directives for action. Therefore, Sikkuy initiated a program to actively monitor the extent of implementation of the commission's systemic recommendations. During the past three years, the NGO has worked via project managers to monitor the Or Commission's recommendations for promoting equality, while also conducting activity vis-à-vis the various government ministries.

Social Welfare Minister Isaac Herzog also greeted the audience and emphasized the importance of fully implementing the Or Commission's recommendations. Minister Herzog praised Sikkuy and the Equality Index as a real tool for closing gaps.

The conference was divided into three sessions:

- During the first session, the director-general of the PMO (which is in fact the top executive agency charting government policy) presented actual data on the government's allocations for the Galilee in 2007. He presented the government's plan for the Arab population for the next three years and emphasized the importance of the economic aspect as a central lever for achieving the government's goals in the context of the Arab public and the closing of gaps. Shawki Khatib, the chairman of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, responded to the director-general's remarks, saying that while there is some initial action here, it is necessary to fulfill the promises and for the prime minister to lead a comprehensive program to close the gaps. Only then, he said, would there be a chance for us to see a different future, a better future.
- During the second session, Sikkuy's Equality Index of Arab and Jewish citizens was presented as a precise and reliable tool for measuring the disparities between the two populations and monitoring government policies for closing gaps. The Mossawa Center presented data on disparities, making reference to the government's commitments and the Equality Index. And Ronit Heyd from Shatil presented a model for involvement of civil society – its place and role in narrowing socio-economic gaps.
- During the third session, models of cooperation between neighboring Jewish and Arab municipal authorities were presented.

4. Lessons from the conference

The government of Israel has failed to institute equality between the Arab and Jewish citizens in the state; despite the recommendations of the Or Commission, the stain of discrimination has yet to be erased. After three years of monitoring and pressure by Sikkuy on government entities, there is real progress. For the first time, the government is speaking in terms of equal allocation and the closing of gaps. However, programs and promises are not enough. There is a need for collaboration between the central government, local government and civic society to spearhead a comprehensive program of the highest priority, involving Arab society and its representatives and providing a response to their true needs.

5. Follow-up

This conference reinforced our relationship with the government as a serious and meticulous organization that monitors the implementation of policy. The co-directors of Sikkuy's Equality Policy Department (Rachela Yanay, Dr. Joubran Joubran) will soon be submitting policy papers to the government ministries with operative goals and recommendations for closing gaps. In addition, the Equality Policy Department is now preparing a plan to map the obstacles in government ministries that impede equal allocation. This project will be conducted in conjunction with an academic institution and with officials from the PMO.

Following the conference, working sessions will be held between senior government officials and senior representatives from among the Arab mayors. The first meeting is slated to take place in late 2007. At this meeting, the government's activity during 2007 will be reviewed and guidelines will be proposed for 2008. Nonetheless, it is very important to continue the monitoring of government activity by civic society and the Arab public. It should be emphasized that not all avenues of the government support equality in practice. Therefore, we still have a long and difficult road ahead of us until we succeed in reaching every government official and every government plan, and convince these officials to adopt a policy of equality.

6. Media coverage

The conference received broad media coverage in Hebrew and Arabic, in both print and electronic media: Channel 1, Israel Television in Arabic, HOT in Arabic and Hebrew, Israel Radio in Arabic, Radio All for Peace, Army Radio, Reshet Bet, Haaretz, Nrg, Ynet, al-Itihad, Kul al-Arab, Panorama, Hadith a-Nas, al-Badr, Radio A-Shams, and other media outlets. The intensive media interest in the conference represents an opportunity for Sikkuy and its mission to reach the public agenda. It should be noted that in recent years Sikkuy has also been very active in generating growing awareness among world Jewry about the issue of discrimination in Israel.

SAMPLE MEDIA COVERAGE AS PUBLISHED



About NIS 300 million transferred to Arab sector in the North

As part of a government allocation of approximately NIS 1 billion for the sector, approved by the government as part of the program for strengthening Haifa and the North following the war. Most of the funds have been channeled to education. Chairman of the Monitoring Committee Shawki Khatib: 'There is action, but we will only have a chance to see a different future when the Or Commission's recommendations are fully implemented'.

Sharon Rofe Ophir
June 5, 2007

The director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, Raanan Dinur, presented today (Tuesday) the budgets the various government ministries have transferred to date for the Arab sector in northern Israel – a sum of about NIS 300 million.

The funds were transferred in the framework of a program for developing and strengthening Haifa and the North. The program stipulates that the Arab sector will receive about NIS 1 billion for planning and development. The government promises that the full allocation will be transferred by the end of the current year. "True, there is action, but only when the recommendations of the Or Commission are fully implemented will there be a chance for us to see a different future," said the chairman of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, Shawki Khatib.

Nine months after the decision was approved to draft a national plan for strengthening Haifa and the North (totaling NIS 3 billion), and about six months after the plan was launched, Dinur appeared today in Nazareth at a conference of the Sikkuy organization with data on the budgets transferred since the beginning of the year.

The Ministry of Education leads with the highest rate of implementation, having allocated NIS 171.5 million in the framework of the program. So far, the ministry has utilized about 91% of the budget. The Ministry of Social Welfare was allocated NIS 13.17 million and has implemented 66% of the budget so far. Some NIS 26.47 million were earmarked for the Ministry of Tourism and 50% of the budget was implemented. NIS 52.18 million was allocated to the Ministry of Housing, which implemented 33% of the budget.



Because of the war: Arabs of Israel to receive compensation

The director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, Raanan Dinur, promises that the government will transfer to Arab localities the rest of the budget promised to the Arab sector in the North following the Second Lebanon War – about NIS 600 million

June 5, 2007
Irit Magal

The government will transfer to the Arab sector in Israel the remainder of the budget promised to it following the war last summer. The director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, Raanan Dinur, says this entails about NIS 600 million, after about a half of the sum was already transferred. Some of the allocations earmarked for the Arab sector are being delayed due to problems related to tenders.

Dinur said that the current government is working to implement the recommendations of the Or Commission, which was established in the wake of the October 2000 riots. He said that if Olmert had been the prime minister four years ago, the recommendations would already have been implemented today.

'The Arab public has lost faith in the government's declarations'

Attorney Ali Haider, the co-executive director of the Sikkuy organization, which works to promote full equality between the Arab-Palestinian citizens and the Jewish citizens of Israel, said: 'The previous governments of Israel did not implement the recommendations of the Or Commission, despite making a commitment to do so. I would like to believe that the current government will do this, as Raanan Dinur promised. The Arab public has already lost faith in these and other government declarations.'

June 4, 2007

The government discriminates against Arab communities

By Joubran Joubran and Rachela Yanay

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.

The writers are directors of the Government Relations and Policy Change project at Sikkuy.

7. Summary of the conference proceedings

A. Greetings

Attorney Ali Haider, co-executive director of Sikkuy, opened the conference with greetings and continued:

"In October 2000, 13 Arab citizens were killed by policemen. In September 2004, the government of Israel adopted the findings of the state commission of inquiry headed by Judge Or and made a commitment to 'erase the stain of discrimination' against Arab citizens. The recommendations of the Or Commission were at three levels: to continue the investigation and find the people responsible for the killing of 13 Arab citizens (and although 7 years have passed, indictments have yet to be filed against those who killed); personal recommendations against senior officials; and systemic recommendations.

Instead of implementing the recommendations of the Or Commission, unfortunately, the government appointed a committee comprised largely of members – like Avigdor Lieberman and Effi Eitam – who have very racist views, and do not believe in co-existence and equality between Jews and Arabs. Therefore, Sikkuy initiated a program to monitor the implementation of the systemic recommendations of the Or Commission and, for three years, we

worked within government ministers, submitted policy papers and lobbied the government to implement them.

While engaged in this work, the need arose to develop a quantitative index that could systematically present a comprehensive comparison of Arab and Jewish citizens in central fields of life. For over a year, we worked on developing the Equality Index, which is a precise and reliable tool for assessing disparities and monitoring the narrowing of these gaps. We are convinced that the true test of equality is the test of actions and results. Therefore, we have invited senior government officials here to discuss progress on the ground, future plans and the implementation of previous commitments.”

Social Welfare Minister **Isaac Herzog**:

"As someone who has closely followed this subject for a great many years, and was involved in establishing the Or Commission and truly agrees with all of its recommendations, I think there is a real obligation to implement them.

And as someone who was once on the executive board of Sikkuy, I think the organization is doing extraordinary work, and that it is providing us with a tool. The Equality Index is a real tool that enables us to look at a full reflection of ourselves and our attitude toward the non-Jewish sector in Israel, and it gives us the ability to provide the groundwork for staff work aimed at reducing and eliminating disparities. According to Sikkuy's Equality Index, the government's per capita expenditure on social welfare among Jews is NIS

378, compared to NIS 246 in the non-Jewish sector. The monthly income in more than half of Arab families is not sufficient to provide for them. Two-thirds of Arab children are under the poverty line before transfer payments and direct taxes. The percentage of poor Arab children is 2.2 times higher than the percentage of poor Jewish children: 65% versus 30%. And after transfer payments, the percentage of Arab families under the poverty line is three times higher than the percentage of Jewish families.

We need to find real tools – fishing poles and not fish – to make additional, independent sources of income available to the families. Therefore, the key lies in two things: first, raising the level of wages and promoting the employment of men in fields that are more lucrative; and second, opening significant paths for the employment of women. That is, providing an additional range of income for families in the non-Jewish sector.

Alex Meir, representative of the European Union, greeted the audience and spoke about the importance of the Or Watch project, which brings together civic society, the local authorities and the government to confront the problem of inequality in a real and serious way.

B. First session

Chairman: **Dr. Alon Liel**, former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, member of the board of directors of Sikkuy

Ramez Jeraisy, mayor of Nazareth

Raanan Dinur, director-general of the PMO

Shawki Khatib, chairman of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee and Committee of Arab Mayors

Shuli Dichter, co-executive director, Sikkuy

The host mayor, Mr. **Ramez Jeraisy** welcomed the participants and emphasized that the reality in Israel is built upon a foundation of discrimination, based on nationality. A plan is needed to address this, he said, and the Arab public must be a partner in charting it. This plan would define the disparities in the various fields and set timetables and budgets for implementation.

The director-general of the PMO, **Raanan Dinur**, began his address by citing the prime minister: "With your permission, I would like to start with a number of remarks the prime minister made at a conference we held on May 10 at the Israel Democracy Institute in Jerusalem: First of all, he said that in practice 'there is discrimination, whether with malice or not. In the test of results, there is discrimination.' The prime minister emphasized that he, of course, does not regard the Arabs of Israel as a strategic threat, not in any way. The prime minister noted that, in his view, 'the non-implementation of the Or Commission's recommendations is a missed opportunity and we need to do better during the coming years to implement them.' The prime minister would like to structure a process that would lead to a different place and he reiterated the commitment to equality in allocating resources."

Dinur then showed a presentation about the implementation of the plan to strengthen the North and the role of the minorities sector in the plan. "As I noted in the previous conference, the government approved a decision on August 20 to adopt a national plan for strengthening Haifa and the North at an overall scope of about NIS 3 billion. The plan, as stipulated in the government decision, will provide the Arab sector with resources in an equal way, so that a third of the plan will be devoted to the Arab sector, a third to the Jewish sector and a third to infrastructure. The share of the minorities sector in the plan is NIS 968 million. There is a sum of NIS 710 million that still exists or is in pre-allocation status, or in the category of infrastructure. In a bird's-eye view, I will give you some data on the various ministries.

"In the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Employment, the sector's share is NIS 133 million, while in terms of implementation (out of the total allocation to the sector), we are at 15.8% implementation. The Ministry of Education is at about 91% implementation of NIS 171 million. The Ministry of Construction and Housing is at 33% implementation, the Ministry of Social Welfare is at 66% implementation, and the Ministry of Interior is at 29% implementation. At

the Ministry of National Infrastructure, we are pursuing a very extensive plan of sewage lines at a scope of NIS 440 million. The plan is ready to be initiated; it has not been implemented yet. All in all, the plan for the North is progressing at the different ministries at various levels of intensity. I can say that in general the social ministries have higher percentages of implementation than the infrastructure ministries. The main reason for this derives from the fact that the infrastructure ministries are required to carry out a tender process. There is a large infrastructure budget in this plan and I think that during the coming months some of the processes will reach an advanced stage in the fields of infrastructure, so that there will also be higher levels of implementation in the infrastructure ministries."

In regard to the future, Dinur spoke about the three-year plan for 2008, 2009 and 2010, saying that the intention is not to build it only from the top down, but also in cooperation with the Arab minority in order to find the correct ways and

the right leverage for implementing it. The director-general of the PMO provided a short update on various topics, including:

- Schmidt report: This is a code name for treating at-risk children and teenagers. It should be noted that 28% of the children and teenagers in the Arab sector will receive care in the framework of this program for at-risk children and teenagers. The prime minister has pledged NIS 200 million in annual support for this program.
- Private equity: After the government identified the Arab public's weakness in obtaining equity capital, on one hand, and its weakness in industrial experience, on the other hand, it was decided to establish a \$20 million fund, which requires another \$20 million from private investors and together with the banks will reach \$80 million and \$160 million. It is hoped that this will improve the government's ability to

ensure more industrial entrepreneurship in all fields in the minorities sector.

- One state – one economy: The PMO regards the economic issue as a central catalyst for achieving governmental objectives in the context of the Arab public. One should view with great concern the minorities sector's share in the growth figures or in per capita income data. The contribution of the Arab sector to domestic product is only 7%, while its proportion of the population is 20%. There are a total of 2.6 million people employed in Israel and the Arab sector's share is 11%. It is very important to create models of equality in allocating resources. It is even more important to create models of equality in the distribution of wealth.

At the end of his remarks, Dinur noted the importance the prime minister attributes to equal allocation for the Arab population and his demand to

establish a mechanism to ensure that in every government decision the question will be raised regarding the share of the minorities sector. The director-general of the PMO also noted this sector's central role in the overall social program. He reiterated his promise to Sikkuy to return at the end of the year and report on the continued implementation of the plans.

The chairman of the session, **Dr. Alon Liel**: "I would like to say one thing to you Raanan – from your perspective, implementation is when the minister tells you that he spent the money. This doesn't interest the people. Implementation is when the disparity narrows. Implementation has to take place in the field, narrowing the gaps."

At the beginning of his remarks, the chairman of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, **Mr. Shawki Khatib**, expressed great disappointment in the government of Israel's attitude toward the Or Commission report. Instead of adopting the recommendations of the state commission of inquiry, it formed a political committee of inquiry with a broad mandate in order to dilute or kill the report.

In response to the remarks of Raanan Dinur, **Mr. Khatib** said that he accepts the formula of One State – One Economy on the condition that there will be governmental intervention to achieve the goals. Khatib demanded a culture of fulfilling agreements. After all, despite the promises, the lack of action on the ground only raises the level of disappointment. He continued: "Raanan, I have the feeling that I want to start believing you. So I expect that you, the honorable director-general, and the prime minister will lead a serious national plan in the entire array of recommendations by the Or Commission. I believe that there is a possibility and a chance that we will see a different future, in which Arabs will be equals among equals in all walks of life in the State of Israel."

Shuli Dichter, co-executive director of Sikkuy, concluded the session by thanking the director-general of the PMO, Raanan Dinur, for his integrity and

humility in coming to report on implementation, and for presenting a candid report even when it is not complimentary.

C. Session two

Chairman: **Aida Touma-Sliman**

Uri Gopher, coordinator of the Equality Index project at Sikkuy

Amin Fares, director of the Socio-Economic Unit at the Mossawa Center

Ronit Heyd, director of the Social and Economic Justice Initiative at Shatil

In the second session, the Equality Index was presented as a central tool for monitoring government activity. The Equality Index was developed by Sikkuy (and is available on Sikkuy's Web site) for examining the disparities between the Jewish and Arab population in the State of Israel. **Uri Gopher** presented

the concept behind the Equality Index, the process of developing it and its main results.

Amin Fares then presented Mossawa's data on disparities in reference to the government's commitments and the Equality Index. He argued that the situation is similar to the situation of three years ago, and is even getting worse. The investment the government promised to make in order to change this situation is not sufficient. Even when funds are allocated, the method of allocation is wrong, ineffective and inappropriate for the Arab population, and will not change the situation. A national plan for improving the situation must address the real needs of the Arab population. It must be formulated in conjunction with the Arab population and according to a clear set of priorities and timetable; otherwise, all of the promises will remain as lip service.

Ronit Heyd of Shatil spoke about the place and role of civic society in reducing gaps in the socio-economic field. She argued that in order to truly remedy the situation and narrow socio-economic disparities, there must be closer collaboration between civic society and the authorities, especially the local authorities. She presented strategies that civic society can employ to address socio-economic disparities as the state retreats from its socio-economic responsibilities for the citizenry. An initial strategy is to demand that the government take responsibility for fulfilling the rights of citizens. A second strategy poses an alternative to the government – that is, the formation of various social and civic organizations that develop tools to respond to the economic and social needs of the residents. A third strategy is to challenge the basic assumptions behind the existing socio-economic policy. In her view, these three strategies should be used together, in synergy, to avoid isolating solutions (such as employment solutions or employment empowerment) from the policies that accompany them.

D. Third session

Chairman: **Dr. Rassem Khamaisi**, University of Haifa

Naief Abu Sharkeia, director of the Jewish-Arab Mayor's Forum (JAMFI) project, Sikkuy

Hussam Abu Baker, representative of the Abraham Fund Initiatives

Ilan Sade, head of the Menashe regional council

Cooperation between Jewish and Arab authorities was the focus of the third session. Hussam Abu Baker presented the model of the Mirkam in the Galilee Initiative. Naief Abu Sharkeia presented Sikkuy's model for regional and municipal cooperation, and Ilan Sade, the head of the Menashe Regional Council, reported about the significant achievements of this project.

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