

Executive Summary

The Nature of Citizenship in Israel

This report marks Sikkuy's tenth anniversary. The ongoing effort to monitor the state of civic equality between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel was the first among Sikkuy's variety of current initiatives.

Sikkuy is implementing civic empowerment programs that promote professionalism in local Arab government. It is working among the Jewish public to establish regional civic action groups that advocate for civic equality between Jewish and Arab citizens.

This report is the first to examine the actions, in this realm, of the government headed by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The data presented in this report shows clearly that, from the perspective of promoting equality between Jews and Arabs, this government promises much and delivers little.

“The Four Billion Shekel Plan”¹

– a road to continued and intensified discrimination

Do 1.2 million Arab citizens of Israel (18.5% of the population) enjoy equal access with Jewish citizens to state resources? Is the pie now more equitably divided?

A highly touted “four billion shekel” development plan to boost Arab communities out of neglect and into parity largely turns out to be classic bureaucratic sleight-of-hand.

Housing for Arab communities: 2002 housing development budget is 40% lower than in 2000.

Family health clinics: Down from NIS 9.2 million for Arab communities in 1999, to NIS 8.6 million in 2000 and only NIS 2.5 million per year from 2001-2005.

Culture: Only 4% of 2002 funding for cultural programs goes to Arab communities.

Sport: Only 6.2% of government sports funding goes to Arab citizens in 2002.

Employment: 9.8% of students in vocational training courses are Arabs – half of their proportion (18.5%) in the overall population.

Road systems: Arab towns have higher road accident rates and more fatalities than Jewish towns. The State Comptroller's Report for 2002 attributes this to sub-standard road systems in Arab communities. In 2002, budgets for ground transportation construction in and around Arab localities decreased by 11% in contrast to a country-wide budget increase of 28.4%.

Industrial development: 66% drop in allocations compared with 2000.

Building for the future: For a daunting combination of reasons (history, prejudice, mutual suspicion, mismanagement), master plans have been approved for only 12 out of 82 Arab municipalities – an almost insurmountable impediment to development efforts.

¹ At current exchange rates, NIS 4 billion = \$800 million (NIS 5 = approx. \$1)

The Five-Year Plan for Advancing Arab Education in Israel

An analysis shows the current Five-Year Plan to advance education in the Arab school system to be:

- ♦ well-intentioned but cosmetic; a narrowly conceived, hastily planned attempt to boost matriculation scores without a thorough reform of the system.
- ♦ lacking in meaningful participation by Arab stakeholder constituencies (Arab educators and academics, parents, teachers, principals).

In 2001-02, actual allocations fell short – by NIS 21 million – of amounts budgeted in the plan, and 40% of this funding is really for special education programs that should be budgeted separately.

Hatred, Rejection and Racism Toward Arab Citizens from Israeli Politicians and the Israeli Establishment

This report warns of more frequent, more blatant and more public expressions of hatred, rejection and racism – from the Knesset plenum to an elementary school party for second-graders. Officialdom is urged to stop turning a blind eye and begin a concerted campaign to reverse this alarming trend – which threatens the shared future of all citizens of Israel, Jewish and Arab, who aspire to a truly just and equitable society.

Looking Ahead

Over the last decade, research into the situation of the Arab citizens of Israel has grown tremendously. This research shows clearly that in Israel there is full citizenship for Jews and “citizenship lite” for Arabs. Sikkuy has now been working for a decade to draw attention to this situation and to change it. One recent success was in convincing the state comptroller to examine the severely restricted access of Arab citizens to state resources, particularly infrastructure.

An additional field of action is burgeoning in the democratic world: civic action. The core of strength in civic action is the power of citizens’ own recognition that they are responsible for their destiny. Cognizant of this, citizens are themselves working on behalf of their interests, as is Sikkuy – as an organization of Jewish and Arab citizens who understand that equality between the two groups, equality in and at the hands of the state and its institutions, is the key to our future life here.

Beyond reporting about the problems, Sikkuy will also formulate position papers and alternative proposals for the government. Meanwhile, we still have an obligation to inform the public about our findings in a clear and straightforward way that citizens will find readily accessible. For Sikkuy and others working in this field, there is still a long hard road ahead in the struggle for full civic equality.