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"Yes, the racist extreme right is afraid. They would like the Arabs to go back to being manual laborers"

At Sikkuy-The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality they insist on looking at the political situation from a less popular angle

Ron Gerlitz: "Soon we will once again be confronting the question as to how Jews and Arabs can live together more successfully"

Ron Gerlitz, the Co-Executive Director of Sikkuy, a former high-tech worker with a BA in mathematics and an MA in public policy from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, married + 3, lives in Srigim

Ron Gerlitz, in these days of violence and extreme fear, you allow yourself to talk about economic and employment equality between Jews and Arabs?

Maybe now it seems strange to talk about these things, but the day after will come and these issues will return to the public discourse, and then we will once again confront the question of how Jews and Arabs can live together more successfully in this country.

But how is it possible? People are being stabbed and shot in the streets by terrorists who are being incited.

I don't justify any type of violent act, but it's important to note that Israel's Arab citizens rarely resort to violence. Since the establishment of the state they have participated in very few attacks against Jews. In the past two weeks there have been two serious and rare incidents of violence by Arab citizens, and of course they are unacceptable.

And still, I want to discuss the alienation and anger of Israel's Arab citizens after years of discrimination and exclusion. I believe that the Israeli government doesn't want to change the status quo on the Temple Mount, but I understand why the Arabs are finding it difficult to believe Israel after everything they've been through.

What have they been through?

A racist discourse by politicians and a wave of legislation against them in the Knesset, which began with the swearing in of the second Netanyahu government in 2009. Avigdor

Lieberman [Yisrael Beitenu] managed to start a public discourse about revoking Arab citizenship, and some of Israel's Arab citizens see his statements as genuine threats. Their feelings are reinforced when Deputy Interior Minister Yaron Mazuz says in the Knesset that Arabs "should be grateful to have identity cards." There's a feeling that racism in Israel is receiving support from some of the leaders.

Will talking about equality help? Is this the time to talk about it?

We have to talk about it both when there's calm and during turbulent times. We have no other way to live a shared life. If we don't find a way to do so and to live like that in the public space and in our places of work, it will be even worse. I'm convinced that on the day after we'll return to that - and the sooner we do it, and the smaller the damage and the fewer the casualties, the greater the chances of rehabilitating the relationship.

What's all the anger about? After all, the government isn't interested in changing the status quo on the Temple Mount.

True, but members of the extreme right, some of whom serve in the cabinet, do want to change it.

It seems to us, as it probably does to many others, that the situation is escalating rather than improving.

Despite the difficult situation, there's still no indication of future escalation. There are two forces in the field: Those who are interested in escalation and those who are interested in an agreement. I believe with all my heart that the forces that desire a better and more equal relationship have significant capabilities, even at present. The current situation accentuates the national conflict between Jews and Arabs which is dominant in the discourse. That's the nature of a national conflict, even when it seems to be dormant. The negative energies simmer and in recent weeks they erupted. What is being strongly emphasized is the Jews' and Arabs' polarized view of the situation.

In recent weeks there has been an increasing phenomenon of replacing Arab workers or limiting them in terms of the hours and the places where they can work, for example in educational institutions and local councils. Whether that stems from understandable fear or simply from racism – it creates a problem.

It's a disgraceful step by several local council heads, which stems from understandable fear, but it has caused them to act in a manner that's hysterical, not educational and blatantly illegal. Among the Jews there are some who are calling to expel and dismiss Arab workers or to harm them physically, and they're doing so after members of the extreme right, including in the Knesset, granted legitimacy to such statements.

I'm happy that on the other hand there were local council heads who opposed the step. While in Jerusalem some of the ministers are inciting against Arab citizens, in areas where Jews and Arabs live together, the local leaderships of both communities understand that it's crucial to maintain a good relationship. Last week Arab and Jewish council heads, even

some from Likud, convened in order to declare that they are interested in restoring calm and cooperating, and that makes me very hopeful.

The defense establishment is saying that a significant component in the incitement to lone attacks is coming from Facebook.

On Facebook there's incitement and expressions of joy regarding deaths, both in Arabic and in Hebrew. That's terrible and it's happening on both sides. Before we dismiss Arab workers who do that, we should recall that thousands of Jewish workers are going wild on Facebook with death wishes to the Arabs – and they weren't dismissed. That's why I'm opposed to dismissing Arabs even in cases of incitement against Jews.

But – and this is a very big but it's important to say: Expressions of joy at the death of Jews on the part of Arab citizens is ugly, disgusting, insensitive behavior, and certainly doesn't advance a shared way of life. I as a manager would call those Arabs in for a serious reprimand, and would also reprimand Jews who incite.

What scenarios do you see for the coming months?

Escalation is a possible scenario, and if we get there we'll know that it began in the summer of 2014 (Operation Protective Edge in Gaza) or in October 2015 (the present wave of violence). It's possible that the violence will increase and it's possible that we'll continue to see attempts to alienate Arab citizens from the state and to limit their rights. But there's another possibility. It's possible to create a better relationship and a shared public space between Arabs and Jews, a space where there's also a place and a presence in society for the Arabs' language, culture and history.

Do you really believe in that? Is anyone doing anything to give it a chance?

The problem is that those in the leadership aren't taking into account the danger of this explosive relationship. The Israeli government is not doing everything possible to prevent deterioration and escalation, out of a lack of understanding of the potential eruption between Jews and Arabs. But I certainly believe, and I'm not the only one. Many people understand that there's no way to have a normal life here without cooperation. They also discuss it in grocery stores and in the Knesset, in government ministries and among the political leadership.

Among the Arab leadership not everyone wants to promote cooperation either.

In Arab society too there are extremists who oppose the integration of Arabs into Israeli society, and their reactions are also harmful and are fueling the escalation.

It was hard to elicit a condemnation of the murder of the Henkins [a couple who were murdered in their car in front of their children in a shooting attack in Samaria] or the murder in the Old City from Arab MKs, and the same is true of this entire wave of violence.

That's not true. Arab MKs unequivocally condemned harming civilians. Our repeated demand for a declaration of loyalty from Arabs is unreasonable. However, it's clear that the voices of incitement in Arab society are definitely causing damage.

Why unreasonable?

There's something unfair about our constantly demanding of Arab citizens to condemn attacks. We have reached a situation where if an Arab politician fails to condemn the attacks whenever we ask him to do so and in the precise words we would like, then that's it, we immediately brand him as an inciter. That's terrible and mainly damages our interests in building a normal relationship with the Arab citizens. Apparently there are public figures who want to tell the Palestinians what is permitted and what is not.

Without a condemnation of violence is there any future to our relations?

If we can achieve a shared and equal situation between Jews and Arabs, we'll also see the mutual influence between the societies, which is likely to lead to a change in Arab society. There are Arab citizens who aren't interested in achieving change or being influenced by Jewish society. In the extremist racist right-wing [Jewish] community there is also a desire to preserve Jewish hegemony and to prevent equal rights. The extremist margins on both sides are interested in a struggle rather than in fostering good relations.

The claim is that the Arabs MKs also contributed to the escalation.

The claim that the Arab MKs are inciting to violence against Jews is not true. Absolutely not. They condemned the violence. They repeatedly said that the struggle must be non-violent. It's true that some of them didn't call for calm, but the differences between those who called for calm and those who didn't attest to a political rift within Arab society. But in no way was there a call for violence on the part of the Arab leadership in Israel, and the media coverage of them is not even close to the reality.

What do you mean?

The way in which the leading Hebrew media related this week to the head of the Joint List, Ayman Odeh, clearly demonstrates that they lost their sense of balance. According to the Israeli media, in recent days all the Arabs look the same and the inciters on the social networks are heating up the atmosphere and inciting Jews against Arab citizens, and Arabs against Jews. It's a serious problem that due to the escalation even leading media personalities see the Arabs as being all the same.

Who for example?

Razi Barkai, a highly regarded journalist, implied on a popular Radio broadcast that Odeh is inciting against Jews, and a serious journalist like Shlomi Eldar wrote that Odeh is aligning himself with Sheikh Raed Salah [head of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement]. I saw that and I wanted to faint. That means that there's a total lack of understanding of Arab society. Odeh did everything possible to prevent an escalation of the

situation. Recently he has demonstrated extraordinary and responsible leadership, far more than that of some of the cabinet ministers, and in terms of ideology he's light years away from Salah.

Odeh continued this week to lead an uncompromising struggle for the civil rights of Arab citizens and belief in cooperation between Arabs and Jews, and also fought for the national rights of the Palestinians in the territories. He has a rare ability to combine these issues. He vehemently opposed the ascent of Arab MKs to the Temple Mount, in order to prevent the conflagration, and this week did a great deal in order to prevent a situation in which all of us would have suffered even more, but in the media they said that he is inciting.

You say that there's no indication of escalation, but Jews are afraid to travel to Jaffa or to walk around in Jerusalem.

The clear answer is that I don't know where it's going, but I insist that at the moment there's no clear indication of continued escalation over the long term. Those who will tip the balance are the rational voices in the public, on both sides, which have not been heard in recent years, and particularly in recent weeks. A shared life will be possible only if the public on both sides decides to work in that direction. The extremist voices are the minority, although they set the tone and have become stronger in recent weeks and years. In contrast to them there's a large group that believes in a different path, but they don't influence the situation. The question is whether they will give voice to their opinions and bring about a change.

Aren't there any arguments in Sikkuy? Fears?

All our projects are based on cooperation between Jews and Arabs, they're all conducted jointly by Jews and Arabs. Of course the conflict and the clear difference in identities between the Jewish and Arab communities in Israel exist within Sikkuy as well. In a certain sense we represent the Israeli-Arab conflict.

On what do you disagree?

Mainly on core issues in our work that are in dispute, such as how the state should be defined – as Jewish or democratic? Or what should be the diplomatic final status agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis? There are also disagreements about Zionism. One of the right's great successes was that it was able to delegitimize the Arabs' questions regarding the definition of the state as a Jewish state.

Is it legitimate, in your opinion?

Of course for the Arabs there's disagreement regarding the definition of a Jewish state, and of course they have the right to challenge it using democratic tools. That doesn't mean that it's my opinion, but I understand the other side. It's impossible to expect the Arab citizens to believe that the state should be Jewish, but we have to expect of them that they'll struggle using non-violent means.

In the Arab schools do they learn about a Jewish state or a state of all its citizens?

Former Education Minister Yuli Tamir wrote in her book that she once asked a teacher in an Arab school how he teaches that Israel is Jewish and democratic, and he replied: "I teach that the state is Jewish and educate towards its being democratic." That's the whole story. I can't say with certainty that all the Arab teachers are loyal to the Zionist ethos, but I think that that's reasonable and that the state should allow them a certain degree of flexibility. Today the state forbids them from teaching about the Nakba [the "catastrophe" – the Arab term for the 1948 War of Independence], so the students think that something is being hidden from them and immediately search for the information on the Internet and understand that the school system is deceiving them, and then the state loses their trust. That's exactly the opposite of what should be. Arab students should be taught the Arab narrative. Every sector has its own nuances in education.

Do you argue a lot in Sikkuy?

The differences in outlook don't affect the ongoing work, but of course the differences in identities and narratives are sometimes expressed, especially during the recent security escalation. During Operation Protective Edge some of Sikkuy's Arab employees had family members who were bombed in Gaza, and on the other hand there are employees whose children served in Gaza as soldiers. During that period it was hard to work in the organization.

If in your organization – in a place that believes in coexistence and a shared fate, a place that could perhaps be described as leftist – you're incapable of reaching an agreement, how do you expect the state to do so?

I wish there were no dispute between the sides, but it exists and the fact that we reflect it even within the organization actually contributes to the organization and gives us an excellent starting point for influencing the conflict inside Israel. We're citizens from both sides of the conflict, who are holding hands and working together in the shadow of the dispute. Incidentally, it's also fascinating.

What do you mean?

We agree on a much broader vision of advancing equality and a shared society between Jews and Arabs, which doesn't reflect the dispute. Our cooperative work in parallel to the differences of opinion proves that it possible to maintain such a complex partnership and to conduct a permanent dialogue. Even if there's an argument between Jews and Arabs, that doesn't mean that Arab students shouldn't receive the rights for which Jewish students are eligible. Every citizen deserves equality, and that's not the situation at present. We're in a situation of profound built-in discrimination against the Arabs in every sense.

Is there a chance of reaching agreements?

The dispute between the Arab and Jewish communities is very profound and we probably won't reach an agreement in the foreseeable future. The Jews are interested in a Jewish

state and most of the Arabs prefer to live in a state of all its citizens. In my opinion, we don't have the ability to formulate an agreement on this issue.

Nu, so what will happen in the end?

It's definitely possible to promote far better relations between Arabs and Jews, relations based on equality. We're at the edge of an abyss. Nobody guarantees that the Arab-Jewish conflict will be solved, but the Arab minority is a large and influential one, and we have a national interest in fostering a good relationship between the majority and the minority, not only for ethical reasons.

Where is discrimination against the Arabs most blatant?

In land allocation. Both the Jewish and the Arab populations have increased tenfold since 1948 – we from 600,000 to 6 million and they from 150,000 to 1.5 million. During this period 700 Jewish communities were built, whereas not a single community was built for the Arabs, with the exception of the towns for the Bedouin in the south when Israel wanted to clear areas in the Negev to build Israel Defense Forces bases. And that's even without mentioning the massive land expropriations from which the Arabs suffered in the 1970s.

What about budgets?

In almost every area of the budget that you examine you'll find discrimination against Arab citizens. In the school system there's discrimination of tens of percentage points between Jewish and Arab students, in the welfare budget we discovered that although Arab citizens constitute 20-25 percent of the population supported by the welfare services, they receive only 10 percent of the welfare budget. As a result their economic situation suffers, they receive fewer class hours, and therefore it isn't surprising that their achievements are lower, that their poverty is greater and that employment rates are low.

Why does that happen? The law? Politicians? The bureaucrats?

Due to an ongoing policy of inequality, and mainly due to barriers created by unequal allocation of resources. When it comes to issues of nationality, such as the right to immigrate and marriage, the law causes inequality, but the law doesn't cause material discrimination. The usual cause is the allocation systems, which don't enable them to compete for the resources and are full of barriers that prevent equal allocation – some deliberate and some not.

In other words, the bureaucracy is largely responsible.

In the past the officials were responsible for the discrimination, but since then the situation has changed and in recent years we are seeing ministries that are leading improvements in policy. A larger percentage of those in the government understand the interest in promoting equal budgeting for Arab citizens and reducing gaps.

What do you mean by unequal allocation?

One of the major barriers is related to the local councils. The government ministries sometimes allocate money in a system that requires the local councils to compete among themselves for the money as well as adding their own funds. I believe that Arab communities are not discriminated against because they are Arab, but due to their inability to submit high-quality proposals, simply because they have no money.

The well-to-do communities hire an outside adviser who helps them to submit a proposal and they invest in budgetary processes and resources. The Arab local councils, on the other hand, are weak and have no sources of funding. When the Arab councils have no economic sources, they are far less able to receive budgets from the government.

Of course they're poor – their residents don't pay any property tax.

That's a familiar argument, but it's simply incorrect. It's a false accusation. It's true that Arabs pay less property tax than the Jews, and of course I'm in favor of increasing collection. Incidentally, that's the case everywhere in the world where there's a national conflict. But a study we conducted demonstrated that even if the Arabs were to pay property tax like the Jews, only 10 percent of the income gap would be closed. Ninety percent of the gap is not at all related to low collection of the property tax.

So what is the source of the gap?

The fact that the local councils have almost no sources of property tax, and are barely able to cover their education budgets.

Are you referring to industrial, commercial and high-tech areas?

Yes, and not only them. Also government ministries, IDF bases and various infrastructure facilities. The government established all of these only in Jewish communities, and only Jews benefit from their property taxes. Even when government ministries are near an Arab city, as in Nazareth, the property tax from them is channeled to Upper Nazareth. There's a large industrial area adjacent to Kafr Qassem, but it belongs to Rosh Ha'ayin.

I'm sure you understand the attitude of many people in Israel: You're citizens of the state. Pay taxes like us and share in the debt burden, serve in the army or in National Service – and then we'll talk to you about rights.

I don't agree at all. There should be no connection between rights and obligations. Anyone who makes that claim doesn't want to increase Arab participation in obligations but to undermine their rights. Lieberman introduced the idea out of an understanding that the Arabs wouldn't do it by force. Anyone who doesn't pay property tax is a criminal and sanctions should be exercised against him, but we shouldn't undermine the budget that the government provides for his children's education.

And what about military service?

The expectation that Arabs will serve in the army is unrealistic, and that's why the government exempts them. There's a violent conflict, and we can't expect people whose families are in Gaza to join the army, and in any case Israel isn't interested in that.

So at least National Service.

That's a painful story. Presumably, Arabs shouldn't have a problem volunteering, but national conflicts have a negative influence on the dynamics between the nation state and the minority, which leads to a situation in which the minority considers such service an activity that is forced on it.

Aren't you letting them off too easy?

The government also made every possible mistake in discussions on the issue with the Arab leadership, for example when it offered those completing National Service a grant from the fund for discharged soldiers. That deterred many of them. If the government reaches an agreement with the leadership of Arab society regarding voluntary civilian service, separate from the army – that would help everyone. At the moment there's no agreement but only attempts to force them.

But you can't waive all the obligations and only demand full equal rights.

I'm talking from the point of view of values, but of interests as well. We have an economic and social interest in creating a better and more equal relationship between Arabs and Jews. After all, the non-Haredi Jewish population will decline in the coming years and the populations that increase will be the Arabs and the ultra-Orthodox. In order to prevent a shrinking of the job market we must ensure employment for the Arabs. Both the Bank of Israel and the Finance Ministry say that.

Governor of the Bank of Israel Karnit Flug said that if Arab women don't become more integrated into the job market, there will be a catastrophe here. In order to do that we have to both improve the Arab education system and encourage public transportation in the Arab communities, because how can you work when there's no public transportation to the workplace and back? We also have to build employment areas. True, there's a dispute regarding National Service, but is that a reason to allow the Israeli economy to collapse?

So what are you doing about all that?

We understand that equality has to come as the result of a change in government policy, that's why we're analyzing the policy, trying to understand why it isn't equal, and then working intensively with the government ministries. That's what we specialize in. We're pleased that due to our method of operation the ministries accept us as a reliable and professional organization. At the same time we're conducting projects to promote a shared public space between Jews and Arabs.

What are your sources of funding?

Our budget is about 5 million shekels annually, and we employ about 25 staff members – half of them Jews and half Arabs. The entire budget consists of donations and we don't receive any money from the government. About 20 percent of the donations come from Israeli philanthropists such as Mori Arkin and the Landa family, and from Isracard. We also receive grants from the United States government, the European Union and foundations in the United States most of which are Jewish, like the Jewish Federation. The New Israel Fund also donates to us and we're proud of that.

You said earlier that you also see positive processes, or did we imagine that?

There are negative trends, but there are definitely positive ones as well. There are government programs that are beginning to bring about a positive change and there's an improvement in the economic situation and processes of reducing gaps in some areas. The pace is agonizingly slow but the trend is positive. There are also positive data about Arab employment.

But they're employed in specific professions.

True. Mainly in service centers, pharmacology, health maintenance organizations and stores. In the past even that wasn't the case. These are processes that Arab society is undergoing. There are also some in senior positions here and there. The judge who sent [former president] Moshe Katzav to jail was an Arab, as was the chairman of the Central Elections Committee.

What about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu? How has he influenced this discourse?

Netanyahu gave Lieberman the greatest support when he ran in the election together with him. That was enough. Lieberman as deputy prime minister said "Umm al-Fahm to Palestine." That means that anyone who lives there won't be an Israeli citizen. (Habayit Hayehudi leader] Naftali Bennett supports the law that maintains that one can discriminate in employment against anyone who hasn't done army service or National Service, a situation that at present is illegal. And of course there was the unfortunate statement of the prime minister during the election.

"Arab voters are coming out in droves to the polls"

Yes, there's a large-scale attack here in the Knesset, the government and the social networks against the Arabs.

And now Netanyahu is claiming that the grand mufti of Jerusalem was responsible for the Final Solution.

It's very grave that in times of tension between Jews and Arabs the prime minister chooses to do something so explosive. The statement is untrue, unethical, inciting and very dangerous. In light of incitement of such dimensions, the claim in the Israeli media and by

Netanyahu himself that the Arab MKs are inciting against Jews suddenly seems hard to understand. It's crazy.

What's your explanation for the racism of part of the Israeli public?

I think it's a reaction on the part of the extremist and racist right to the strengthening of Arab society and its integration into an increasing number of circles in Israeli society. When during the war the director of a hospital dismisses the Arab who wrote on Facebook that IDF soldiers are war criminals – that's a reaction. If it were a sanitation worker it wouldn't have interested him. When it's a senior nurse it's interesting.

In other words, it's because of the progress of relations between the two nations and the integration of the Arabs into society?

The extremist and racist right is afraid, yes. They want the Arabs to go back to being manual laborers. The stronger Arab society becomes, and the more it succeeds in being a part of the economy and society in Israel, the more intense the counter-reaction of the extreme right. That's our greatest challenge. What complicates the situation even more is that in Arab society there's also a counter-reaction by extremists to the positive process.

Including MK Yair Lapid (Yesh Atid) and the "Zoabis"?

That was an unfortunate statement and I have a lot of complaints against him, but Lapid is not an extreme right-winger.

And the Zionist Union? Even there the party insulted Arabs.

They're certainly not racists, but the decision by party leader Isaac Herzog to support the disqualification of MK Haneen Zoabi from running for the Knesset was very bad.

Zoabi is a red flag for the MKs. Do you think that she's a legitimate leader who contributes to the Arab community?

I think that we can't achieve good relations between Arabs and Jews without recognizing the fact that both groups are fighting for legitimate rights, but that both have an interest in promoting a shared society. Zoabi is not advancing this discourse.

And what about the other Arab leaders? What's your opinion of the speech by MK Jamal Zahalka against MK Stav Shaffir (Labor Party) and the left – which is ostensibly worse than the right's attempt to stop the Arabs?

I don't accept Zahalka's distinction. You can say that Labor didn't support the Arabs enough, but the claim that all the Jews are against the Arabs is destructive and untrue. That's the worst way to create good relations between the two groups. It's like those who say "All the Arabs are against us."

In short, it's not only Jews who are undermining the process.

Of course, in Arab society there are also voices opposed to granting legitimacy to a homeland shared by Jews and Arabs, and that's very problematic. I'm trying to strengthen the term "shared homeland," because it grants legitimacy to the idea that the homeland belongs to the other nation too.

Recently Netanyahu met with the leaders of the Arab sector and also promised them budgets.

The prime minister is playing a double game and a dangerous one. On the one hand he enables government investment in Arab communities and citizens – which is positive. On the other hand, on Election Day he incited against Arab citizens and granted legitimacy to populist statements and to the unrestrained behavior of extremist forces that could exacerbate the relationship. He doesn't silence ministers who speak against the Arabs. When an MK from his party says to an Arab woman "Go to your grave," he remains silent and doesn't condemn; when the deputy interior minister casts doubt on their right to receive citizenship, he goes up to the dais after him and continues to attack them instead of condemning it like President Reuven Rivlin. His legitimizing of these forces could lead to an additional escalation of the relationship.

But still, they will receive 900 million shekels.

And that's very welcome. Incidentally, the actual sum is lower, because part of it will be dedicated to programs that were budgeted in the past. We estimate that it will be 200-400 million shekels. In any case, that reflects what I said, that there's a policy being introduced by officials who understand the need to invest in reducing the inequality, and the prime minister is providing justified support.

But all in all there's no alteration here of the discriminatory mechanisms.

We're now seeing steps that are aimed at a genuine and permanent correction of the discrimination, after urging that for years, and that's the best road to equality. Additional money really is dangerous if it's a one-time appropriation. There's a lot of despair among the Arabs. It's understandable after years of discrimination. They no longer believe that the government wants to make changes, and therefore it's making do with one-time allocations. Fortunately the [Finance Ministry] budget division is in a different place, it now sees the importance of advancing the socioeconomic situation of the Arab citizens in order to integrate them into the job market.

The Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemeth Lelsrael) is in the headlines this week, and apparently one of the main goals of maintaining it as an active organization is in order not to allow the Arabs to participate in the party.

I'm a Zionist Jew who thinks that there's no room for the intervention of the Zionist organizations in these issues. I'm vehemently opposed to the idea that the state allows such groups to administer important resources. It's unconscionable for the body that

administers the land to give me preference over Arabs. This discrimination must stop. It's a disaster that the physical development is carried out by systems that relate only to Jewish citizens.

What reactions do you get from the public?

I'm happy to say that most of the Jewish public supports equality for Arab citizens. In a survey we conducted, 40 percent of the public said that they support equality even if it's at the expense of resources given to Jews. We're very pleased that we have support among both Jews and Arabs.

But you received harsh reactions as well?

I receive harsh reactions only rarely, and they deal mainly with the fact that we don't demand anything from the Arabs in return for their rights. During the war last summer it was more difficult, but all in all our activity is much admired. More and more people realize that this is a shared interest, as well as being moral. The problem is that the extremists set the tone. I definitely believe that the moderate forces on both sides have the ability to take the relationship to a much more positive place. I totally believe in that, and it gives me the strength to get up every morning.