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Criticism of absence of Arab representative on the search committee for the president of Haifa University

In a letter sent by civil society organizations and lecturers to the search committee they wrote that this totally ignores the high percentage of Arab students and lecturers at the university

Civil society organizations and academics at the University of Haifa are protesting the absence of an Arab representative on the search committee for a new president to replace the incumbent Amos Shapira.

The following is the text of the letter sent to the chairman of the University of Haifa executive committee, Ami Ayalon, who heads the nine-member search committee: "In the University of Haifa about 30 percent of BA students, about 20 percent of MA students and about 14 percent of doctoral students are Arabs. Nevertheless, the committee does not include a single Arab member… The public significance of the absence of Arab members on the committee is to ignore the high percentage of Arab students at the university, and no less serious, the Arab faculty members.

"In addition, according to the instructions of the attorney general, the committee must be composed such that there is a balance among all the considerations involved in setting policy in a particular field. In this context, a public committee should include and reflect a variety of opinions of different sectors and of the academic institution, and fulfill the obligation of fair representation, especially when important economic or other interests lie in the balance." There is even "a possibility that the court will invalidate a policy that was decided in accordance with the recommendations of a committee whose composition was not balanced."

The letter was written on behalf of Sikkuy-The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality, Dirasat - The Arab Center for Law and Policy, which is supported by the European Union as part of the Partnership for Peace program, and the Van Leer Center for Jewish-Arab Relations.

Ayalon rejected the request, replying that the committee was formed according to the regulations in the university constitution, and that the committee includes nine members who were chosen "with judgment and thought on the part of both the members of the executive committee and the

members of the Senate." He added, "I definitely identify with the message expressed in your letter. According to the university constitution the committee numbers nine members, and when all the slots are filled it is impossible now to add additional members as per your request. I hope that in future when such a committee is formed this issue will be receive careful consideration."

MK Yousef Jabareen (Joint Arab List) also sent a letter to Ayalon asking that two Arab members be added to the committee and that the university regulations be changed to guarantee fair representation for the Arab population.

There has also been activity by faculty members and researchers at the university. One of them, Prof. Asad Ghanem, of the School of Political Sciences, explained that "this struggle is part of a broader fight against ignoring the Arab public in Haifa." He said that "the university reflects an extreme viewpoint in its denial of the social situation. The significance of the discrimination here is far greater than in other places, due to the high percentage of Arab students and the location of the university. The discrimination doesn't end here, it is also reflected in the meager presence of Arabic in the institution, in the discrimination in academic appointments, and in the administrative staff, where there are virtually no Arab employees. All we asked is that they appoint one or two Arabs. Aren't there any Arabs who could make a good decision for the University of Haifa?"

In response to Haaretz, Ayalon said that the members of the presidential search committee were chosen in accordance with the university constitution and regulations, and the instructions of the Council for Higher Education and the Planning and Budgeting Committee.