



The Mossawa Center:
The Advocacy Center for the Arab
Citizens of Israel
5 Saint Luke's Street, P.O. Box 4471,
Haifa 31043, Israel
www.mossawacenter.org
Phone: +972-4-8555901
Fax: +972-4-8552772
mosawa@rannet.com

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Kenda Stewart
Email: kenda.mossawa@gmail.com
Office: +972-4-855-5901

Mossawa Center Releases Legal Document to Protect the Rights of the Arab Minority in Israel

HAIFA, ISRAEL, 4 DECEMBER 2006 – The Mossawa Center, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens of Israel, released a legal paper that calls to protect the legal status of the Arab minority in any proposal for an Israeli constitution. The paper was debated and discussed by leading lawyers and law experts at the Mossawa Center's conference on the Legal Status of the Arab Minority in Israel held in Nazareth on December 1.

For the last several years the Knesset's Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee has discussed proposals to create a formal constitution for the state of Israel. This debate excluded the demands and the needs of the Arab community and its institutions, while it ensures full protection of the Jewish majority's rights. Mossawa Center legal expert, Dr. Yousef Jabareen, took part in the constitution debate, and developed a paper that proposes constitutional protection of the minority rights of Arab citizens.

The document examines the current legal status of the Arab community in Israel and proposes full equality, participation and partnership between the Arab minority and Jewish majority based on due respect for both parties' needs, historical rights, and human rights demands.

The document outlines the following stipulations, whose inclusion into the constitution would provide Arab citizens with full and equal rights that constitute distinct national, cultural, linguistic, and religious rights as citizens of the state of Israel. The document stipulates:

- The Arab minority be recognized as a “national minority” and an “indigenous population” whose distinct collective identity should be protected through historic, linguistic, religious, and cultural rights.
- Arab-Palestinians in Israel must be guaranteed full equality of rights on the civil-individual and national-collective basis.
- Arabic be granted equal status to Hebrew in all areas of the public sector including governmental documents, educational materials, naming of road signs and buildings, recognition of cultural icons, etc.
- The Arab-Palestinian minority be granted the right to self-government of the Arabic educational, culture and religious institutions, similar to the current status of the Hebrew culture, Orthodox education system, and Christian and Jewish religious institutions.

- The Arab-Palestinian minority be assured full democratic participation and representation in the governmental administration, decision-making bodies and the judiciary systems.
- Special allocation of the financial and public resources is ensured on a collective basis to address the extended discrimination and socioeconomic gaps that has been created during years of discrimination in allocating public resources.
- Appropriate expression of the Arab community in the State's system of symbols be granted, opening a door for due expression of the presence of Arab citizens of Israel and their place in the state.
- Equality and fairness in immigration and citizenship should be guaranteed to all citizens.
- The State must recognize the historic rights of the Arab-Palestinian minority to its homeland. The state must respect the rights of 25% of Arab citizens that became internal refugees in their country after 1948. The status of this population should be arranged through processes of reconciliation and negotiation, as well as guaranteeing the ownership of Arab citizens in the Negev over their lands.
- The State recognize the Arab-Palestinian minority's special relationship to the Arab region and protect the rights of the Arab citizens to develop their culture, familial, and religious relationships with other Palestinians and other Arabs in the region.

Copies of the paper were distributed in Hebrew with summaries provided in Arabic. A full translation of the paper to Arabic and English is forthcoming.

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