



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX August 2023

English only

Human Rights Council
Fifty-fourth session
11 September–13 October 2023
Agenda item 6
Universal periodic review

**Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law
and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice
et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in
special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

COMMENDING ISRAEL FOR ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD AT THE ADOPTION OF ITS UPR REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the disproportionate, baseless criticism and the discriminatory treatment Israel receives at the United Nations, it stands tall for its unparalleled human rights record in the entire Middle East. As Israel stated in its national report, about a third of all the resolutions and special sessions at the Human Rights Council are dedicated to condemning Israel every year. Israel is subjected to a permanent, ongoing, and open-ended, Commission of Inquiry, which, despite being a non-judicial body, passes erroneous legal conclusions against Israel. Yet, all of this does not stop Israel from providing equal protection of law to all its citizens, Jews and Arabs alike.⁽¹⁾ In addition to ratifying numerous international human rights instruments, Israel's domestic law provides equal protection of law to everyone without distinction of race, religion, sex, political opinion, etc. These rights do not just appear on paper, Israel makes every effort to protect these rights in practice also.

II. RIGHTS OF ARAB CITIZENS OF ISRAEL

Israeli Arabs (often incorrectly referred to as “Palestinians” or “Palestinian citizens of Israel”) are full citizens who enjoy equal rights and equal protection under the law. They are represented in every walk of life, including politics, the workforce, and universities.⁽²⁾ Israel respects freedom of religion for all its citizens.⁽³⁾ One aspect of Israel's respect for freedom of religion is shown by allowing “Christian, Muslim, Druze, and Baha'i communities [to] have jurisdiction over their own members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial.”⁽⁴⁾ Additionally, Israel's “law protects the religious sites of non-Jewish groups.”⁽⁵⁾

Israel's Arab citizens have full and equal voting rights.⁽⁶⁾ Over 64% of Arab citizens of Israel voted in the 2020 election to the 23rd Knesset.⁽⁷⁾ As a result, Arab politicians held 15 out of 120 seats in the Knesset, making them the third most powerful coalition in the legislative branch.⁽⁸⁾ While the 25th Knesset will have only ten non-Jewish members, it is due to the “low voter turnout in the Arab sector and the split in the Arab lists, which resulted in Balad not clearing the electoral threshold.”⁽⁹⁾ However, the voter turnout from the Arab sector for the 25th Knesset (53.2 percent) was still better than the one recorded for the 24th Knesset (44.6 percent).⁽¹⁰⁾ Furthermore, unlike many Middle Eastern countries, every Israeli citizen, regardless of his or her religion, is eligible to be a candidate for the office of President.⁽¹¹⁾

Arabs have also served in senior cabinet positions.⁽¹²⁾ Additionally, Arab citizens have served as Israeli judges.⁽¹³⁾ In 2022, Khaled Kabub was sworn in as a justice of the Israeli Supreme Court.⁽¹⁴⁾ In civil service, Israel's law requires adequate representation of its Arab population.⁽¹⁵⁾

Israel also provides Arabs an exemption from otherwise mandatory military service. This policy is often misrepresented and wrongly criticized as being discriminatory toward the Arabs, when in fact it takes into consideration the Arab population's religious and political views and provides an extra benefit to them. Arabs are not prohibited from serving in the armed forces. In fact, many Arabs choose to serve in the military.

III. STEPS TAKEN BY ISRAEL TO IMPROVE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC STATUS OF ITS ARAB POPULATION

Despite the fact that Israeli Arabs enjoy full and equal protection of law, due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, their situation is often misrepresented at the international level. As a political weapon in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israel is often falsely accused of

discriminating against Arabs. Israel has also been falsely labeled as an apartheid state. However, instead of discriminating against Israeli Arabs, Israel takes extraordinary measures to improve their lives.

Despite the lack of recognition and in the face of contrary, false information disseminated by Israel's enemies, Israel's Arab citizens actually receive substantial benefits from the Israeli government. Israel continues to make considerable efforts and invests resources in raising the socioeconomic status of its Arab population.

In 2022, for example, Israel launched a seventy-million-dollar program to integrate both Arab men and women into the high-tech industry.⁽¹⁶⁾ The program seeks both to include the Arab community in the high-tech industry and promote technology in Arab communities.⁽¹⁷⁾ The program will accomplish its mission by developing entrepreneurship centers, technological accelerators (programs to give money to certain franchises of entrepreneurs), and Angels' clubs (a method of gaining investors for entrepreneurs and start-ups).⁽¹⁸⁾

On a much larger scale, in 2021, Israel planned to allocate over ten billion dollars for its Arab communities for their education, economic development, health, and crime-fighting.⁽¹⁹⁾ This program includes giving money for "housing, local government, the environment and improving digital communication."⁽²⁰⁾ As part of this funding, the government is also addressing the needs of "ageing infrastructure" in Arab communities.⁽²¹⁾ It is also assisting Israeli-Arab women with entering the job market and improving their health.⁽²²⁾

In addition to providing funds for improving Arab communities, the Israeli government is also working with others to benefit Jewish-Arab education. The Ministry of Education and local governments are working with Hand in Hand, a system of Jewish-Arab schools where friendship and cooperation are being promoted.⁽²³⁾ These schools bring students, families, and communities together to promote equality between Jews and Arabs.⁽²⁴⁾ Also, Arab Christians, Arab Druze, and Arab Muslims have their own public-school systems.⁽²⁵⁾ In order to raise the education level of its Arab population, Israel has also opened centers in Arab localities to prepare students for high education institutions.

IV. CONCLUSION

The international community continues to disregard the existence of the rule of law in Israel. UN bodies continue to wrongly condemn Israel without having any basis in law or fact. They disregard Israeli law that provides full and equal rights to all citizens. They disregard the equal treatment Israel provides to its Arab population and other minorities. They unjustly disregard Israel's efforts to uplift the socioeconomic status of its Arab population. Instead, they falsely accuse Israel of discriminating against and violating civil and political rights of its Arab citizens.⁽²⁶⁾

The international community has a moral and legal responsibility not to single out one country for detrimental treatment, reject false information and false accusations against Israel, and recognize the efforts and progress Israel has made in uplifting its Arab population, despite the misinformation and criticism it receives.

We commend Israel for upholding the rule of law both domestically and in its international affairs. We also commend Israel for its efforts to uplift its Arab population, despite being falsely condemned for it.

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