



## Study Trip

### *Media Coverage*

- **“Israeli Arab leaders slam community's boycott of visiting Jewish donors,”** *Haaretz*, by Yoav Stern and Anshel Pfeffer, January 8, 2008
- **“Israeli Arab group: Boycott Jewish aid,”** *The Jerusalem Post*, by Haviv Rettig, January 8, 2008
- **“Anti-Defamation League slams Arab group's call to boycott Jewish aid,”** *The Jerusalem Post*, by Itamar Sharon, January 9, 2008
- **“An inclusive vision,”** *Haaretz*, by Ami Nahshon, January 11, 2008
- **“Coexistence money for confrontation,”** *JTA*, by Dina Kraft, January 18, 2008

## Israeli Arab leaders slam community's boycott of visiting Jewish donors

By Yoav Stern and Anshel Pfeffer

January 8, 2008

Israeli Arab leaders have condemned a partially successful Arab boycott of Jewish philanthropists who are visiting the country to learn more about the problems facing Israeli Arabs.

The task force, comprised of members of 70 Jewish organizations from North America and Europe, was set up two years ago to advance projects and strengthen local Israeli Arab leadership.

It hopes to increase Jewish philanthropists' awareness of majority-minority relations in Israel and help them understand the problems faced by Israeli Arabs, who constitute 20 percent of the Israeli population, said task force director Jessica Balaban.



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Israel

*Representatives of the American and European donors on Monday in Umm al-Fahm.*

But the group has been spurned by some of the Israeli Arabs to whom it is trying to reach out.

Ameer Makhoul, who heads Ittijah, an umbrella organization for Arab non-governmental organizations in Israel, asked Arab officials to cancel planned meetings with the group because Diaspora Jewry advocates the idea of Israel as a Jewish state, he said.

He also asked for help from Islamic Movement head Sheikh Ra'ad Salah, who pushed for the cancellation of the delegation's planned visit to an Islamic Movement pharmacy in Umm al-Fahm. In addition, other groups are also reconsidering planned meetings with the delegates, but most of the participants ignored the call to boycott the mission.

"Meeting with them means legitimizing and accepting their agenda and the framework of the State of Israel as a Jewish state," said Makhoul. "This is a multipurpose and diverse group that is trying to dictate our future."

But not all Israeli Arabs agree with Makhoul's rejection of the delegation's efforts. The delegates still have meetings and workshops scheduled to take place in the Galilee and the heavily Arab Triangle region, and are due to tour the Negev tomorrow to learn more about the Bedouin and their problems.

Shweiki Khatib, chairman of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, met with the delegates Sunday.

"We have met and will continue to meet with Jewish figures in the past, present and future," said Khatib. "We have our red lines, but we are obligated to say what we think and explain our situation to whoever wants to hear."

Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu, director general of the Abraham Fund, which aims to improve coexistence between Jews and Arabs, said the boycott was self-destructive.

"If there is discrimination and inequality and a situation that needs to be fixed, then the establishment is volunteering to take real action," he said. "To oppose that is simply shooting oneself in the foot."

## **Israeli Arab group: Boycott Jewish aid**

By Haviv Rettig

January 8, 2008

An Israeli Arab anti-Zionist group is calling for the boycott of Jewish agencies looking to contribute to Israeli Arab communities in Israel.

The agencies, united under the rubric of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues, are in Israel on a three-day trip to study needs and opportunities for philanthropy in Israeli Arab communities in the Galilee and among Negev Beduins. The task force includes some of the largest organizations of the Jewish world, including the Conference of Presidents, the Joint Distribution Committee, the New Israel Fund, the UJA Federation of New York, the Anti-Defamation League and others.

According to the Arab organization Ittijah, their call for a boycott of the funders' trip has already garnered results, with one clinic in Umm al-Fahm allegedly cancelling the funders' visit on Monday, and organizations in Sakhnin planning to do so on Tuesday. "We didn't ask for this money," said Ittijah general director Ameer Makhoul. "These funds come from American Jews who are committed to Israel, who see it as a Jewish state for Jews. This isn't philanthropy, it's political."

According to Makhoul, "Israel doesn't need to be a state of the Jews, also according to the 1947 UN [partition] decision."

Asked to elaborate, Makhoul added, "Self-determination doesn't mean Israel for Israelis. I was born in the Galilee, so I feel at home in Haifa. I'm not loyal to any state in the world. I'm loyal to my homeland, whether Israel rules it or a Palestinian state is established here."

Makhoul said that an Umm al-Fahm clinic called off the visit, and Sakhnin will see a "partial cancellation."

Jessica Balaban, director of the task force, denied the group's call was having an effect. "One clinic in Umm al-Fahm cancelled because it's still under construction. Otherwise, there have been no cancellations at all."

The task force was established in April 2006, and unites some 70 Jewish federations, organizations, foundations and private philanthropists, mostly from North America, in an effort to help the social, education and economic situation of Israeli Arabs. Ittijah calls itself the "Union of Arab Community Based Organizations," and describes itself as a "union of Palestinian NGOs in Israel."

## **Anti-Defamation League slams Arab group's call to boycott Jewish aid**

By Itamar Sharon

January 9, 2008

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) on Wednesday strongly criticized a call by an Israeli Arab anti-Zionist group to boycott Jewish agencies looking to contribute to Israeli Arab communities in Israel.

"We believe reaching full equality for the Arab citizens of Israel is vital on a practical and moral level. When Israeli Arab groups such as Ittijah reject these concepts it reinforces barriers to achieving the goal of equality," the ADL said in a statement.

Ittijah general director Ameer Makhoul said on Tuesday the funds "come from American Jews who are committed to Israel, who see it as a Jewish state for Jews. This isn't philanthropy, it's political."

*Haviv Rettig contributed to this report.*

## **An inclusive vision**

By Ami Nahshon

January 11, 2008

We stood in the fields of a kibbutz in the Triangle region east of Hadera, a delegation of 60 American, British and Canadian Jewish philanthropists, who had traveled to Israel this week in order to study the challenges of building an inclusive and just society for Jewish and Arab Israelis, and to determine how we can help.

A member described to us how his kibbutz was established in the state's early days to create a "security wedge" between clusters of Arab villages to the north and south. As we learned how the kibbutz had been constructed on both purchased and confiscated Arab lands, it became clear to all of us that the clock could not be turned back, and we understood why our host had a sense of obligation to work toward forward-looking solutions that benefit both the Jewish and Arab communities of the region.

As recently as 10 years ago, few Diaspora Jews - focused as we were on the survival and building-up of the Jewish state - understood the importance of strengthening Jewish-Arab cooperation, of narrowing the socioeconomic chasm that divides these communities and of building a sustainable framework for majority-minority relations in Israel.

While American and world Jewry have been deeply engaged for decades in building a national home for the Jewish people, we have failed to take into account that both our ideological focus and our philanthropic investments have left 20 percent of Israel's citizens - its indigenous Palestinian-Arab minority - far behind.

Just as developing the Negev and the Galilee, building hospitals and universities, and absorbing waves of Jewish immigrants were Jewish priorities for Israel during the past half-century, so, too, must be the creation of a just and inclusive society for the era ahead.

This is the conclusion already reached by more than 200 Israeli NGOs now working in the field of coexistence and equality, and it is finally beginning to take root as well among growing numbers of Jewish Diaspora leaders and donors. The change was symbolized by the presence of these 60 individuals this week, and by the 70 major American Jewish nonprofit organizations, from across the political and religious spectrum, that have formed a powerful new coalition to tackle these issues and form a movement for action.

Joining with a growing number of Israeli philanthropists and opinion leaders, Jewish and Arab, we are determined to advance our vision of an inclusive, cooperative, respectful Israeli society, all of whose citizens enjoy equal opportunity and feel equally at home. Some of us were therefore surprised to learn that a few outspoken members of the Arab community had, out of political considerations, called for a boycott of meetings with this diaspora delegation, as reported in Haaretz ("Israeli Arab Leaders Slam Community's Boycott of Visiting Jewish Donors," Jan. 8, 2008).

While the call to boycott fell on deaf ears among the vast majority of Arab public and civil society leaders, it taught all of us an important lesson: that the lines of conflict in Israel are not between the Arab and Jewish communities, but rather between those Jews and Arabs who embrace a vision of an inclusive and just society, and those who seem intent on pursuing an agenda of separatism and alienation. Our visit convinced us that it is our duty, as diaspora leaders, to embrace and support those who share this inclusive vision, and not to allow ourselves to be distracted by the separatist voices at the political fringes of both communities.

During our three intense days in Israel, we conferred with more than 100 Arab and Jewish leaders who are committed to partnership and change. From Sakhnin in the Galilee to the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev, we met people ranging from grass-roots community organizers to government ministers and members of Knesset.

We learned about a faltering educational system reflected in declining academic achievement, seen most acutely within the Arab schools; widening socioeconomic gaps, shortages of social services, and few programs for Arab youth at risk; and employment practices that limit opportunities for Arab college graduates to participate in the knowledge economy. We heard as well about crushing pressure on Arab municipalities to provide for the basic infrastructure needs of their communities; festering and unaddressed issues of land allocation and planning, most acutely felt within the Negev Bedouin communities; and long-standing exclusion of Israeli Arabs from meaningful participation in the state's political processes.

We also learned that, while government is a critical part of both the problem and the solutions, civil society and philanthropists have a meaningful role to play in advancing the vision of an inclusive society of coexistence. By drawing on international experience in majority-minority relations, by demonstrating viable models for addressing critical issues, by using our influence to advocate for government action, and by providing support and resources to Arab and Jewish NGOs alike, we believe that we can make a difference, and be a stimulus for lasting change.

From a deep and fundamental commitment to a Jewish democratic Israel and its welfare, we have embarked on an irrevocable path to address what we believe is the central domestic challenge facing the State of Israel for the foreseeable future. We were gratified to find that senior leaders within the government, the Jewish Agency and other central institutions are increasingly responsive to the inclusion and equality agenda, and are beginning to translate words into deeds.

We invite Israelis - Jewish and Arab - and friends of Israel abroad to join us in this critical undertaking.

*Ami Nahshon is the New York-based president of The Abraham Fund Initiatives, an Israeli NGO working for a shared and inclusive society for all of Israel's citizens.*



### **Coexistence money for confrontation?**

**Dina Kraft**

As Israel's Arab leaders take increasingly critical stands against Israeli policies and the country's Jewish character, Jewish charities that fund Arab coexistence programs are finding themselves in a confrontation.

Published: 01/18/2008

TEL AVIV (JTA) -- As leaders of Israel's Arab minority take increasingly critical stands against Israeli policies and the country's Jewish character, Jewish charities that fund Arab coexistence programs are finding themselves in somewhat awkward positions.

On one hand, they remain committed to the cause of civic equality, but on the other hand they are being confronted with Arab rejection of Israel as a Jewish state.

This month, when the Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab issues organized a trip for members -- who represent 70 North American Jewish organizations, foundations, federations and philanthropists -- to showcase the difficulties facing Arab Israelis, the leader of the Ittijah umbrella group of Arab Israeli NGOs, Ameer Makhoul, called on Arab Israelis to boycott the visit because of ideological differences with the Jews.

While the call to boycott went largely unheeded and was condemned by some prominent Arab Israeli leaders, it underscored the growing sense of unease between increasingly confrontational Arab Israeli groups and the Jewish funders that support them.

Tensions in Israel between the Jewish establishment and the Arab sector have been rising since the riots of October 2000, when Israeli police opened fire on Arab Israeli protesters, killing 13, as they demonstrated in solidarity with Palestinians who had just launched the second intifada.

More recently, signs of rising friction included documents published by Arab Israeli leaders calling for an end to Israel as a Jewish state and the recent announcements by Arab leaders that they will not take part in upcoming celebrations for Israel's 60th anniversary.

Arab community leaders also are waging a campaign against government plans to increase the number of Arab volunteers for Israel's civil service -- an initiative the government says would increase Arab-Jewish integration. And ahead of the recent Israeli-Palestinian Annapolis peace conference, Arab Israeli leaders successfully lobbied the Palestinian Authority not to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

"There is a strain," said Sammy Smooha, a Haifa University sociologist who researches the Arab community in Israel.

As a consequence, he said, some Jewish groups that support Arab Israelis are being forced to explain their positions to concerned donors.

"There are discussions in the Jewish foundations, but they have not changed their policies yet because they believe that if you give money, you strengthen Israeli society's chances for coexistence," Smooha said. Whereas "if you discontinue funding, than you risk radicalization."

Jewish groups committed to supporting the Arab sector say Arab Israelis' struggle for civic equality is critical to Israel's long-term security. They say they cannot afford to disengage from Arab Israelis, who constitute roughly 20 percent of Israel's population.

For many, the precipitating event that brought the debate to the fore about whether or not Jewish groups should support Arab Israelis was the publication in 2006 by several prominent Arab Israeli leaders and academics of a document titled "The Future Vision of Palestinian Arabs in Israel."

That document described Israel as an undemocratic enterprise that systematically discriminates against its non-Jewish citizens, and it called for Arab cultural autonomy, Arab veto rights in some government decision-making, the elimination of Jewish character from Israel's anthem and flag, and modifications to immigration laws to eliminate favorable treatment of Jews.

Makhoul said his call to boycott this month's visit of the Jewish-Arab task force was part of that sentiment. He said it's hypocritical for Arab Israeli groups to enjoy support from U.S. Jewish groups when those same groups support a "Zionist agenda" in which Jews are the main power in Israel.

"We should be clear and honest and not make life easy for Israel, but instead challenge the Israeli system as it is," Makhoul told JTA.

While support from American Jews "looks positive, it is in fact a delegitimization of our struggle," he said. "Part of doing this is to struggle against this kind of interference."

Shawki Khateeb, chairman of the National Committee for the Heads of Local Arab Councils in Israel and a member of the steering committee that produced the Future Vision document, rejected the boycott.

"We have met and will continue to meet with Jewish figures," he said. "We have our red lines, but we are obligated to say what we think and explain our position to whoever wants to hear."

Rabbi Brian Lurie, president of the Alfred and Hanna Fromm Fund, a former executive vice president of UJA-Federation of New York and founder of the task force, said Makhoul does not represent mainstream Arab Israeli opinion and that he was encouraged by Arabs' rejection of the boycott.

"We were here having an educational experience. We had three days of pure study -- no political activity and no advocacy," Lurie said. "We were learning about issues of education, social services, health and leadership to better understand minority-majority relations."

Arab Israelis complain of facing discrimination in a range of areas, including housing, education, employment and land ownership. Many describe themselves as second-class citizens.

Although Jewish philanthropy for Arab projects in Israel once was considered the purview of the left wing, it now has gone mainstream, say the pioneers of Jewish support for Arab Israeli causes. They noted that the Jewish-Arab task force includes representatives of the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Jewish federations and family foundations, including the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

"More and more communities are buying in, and it seems they understand the importance" of supporting the Arab-Israeli community, said Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu, director of The Abraham Fund, one of those pioneers. "It now seems to be easier to convince people that Israel supporters should invest effort and funding on the agenda of integration and equality."

The Future Vision document, however, has complicated matters somewhat.

Jessica Balaban, who heads the task force's office in New York, said members have called her up to express concern about the document and other Arab Israeli calls for ending Jewish hegemony in Israel.

"We are aware of the documents -- we don't take them lightly -- but we remain focused on the area of civics," Balaban said.

Eliezer Ya'ari, the executive director in Israel of the New Israel Fund, said the Future Vision document gave pause to some donors to NIF, which, as the largest supporter of Arab-Israeli nonprofits and co-existence projects, funds some of the groups behind the document.

"Many of us were quite concerned and hurt by the kind of language used there, but there is altogether something interesting when you look at it from outside: Creating vision papers is a countermove to what Ittijah is doing," Ya'ari explained.

According to Ya'ari, the authors of the Future Vision document are saying, "Yes, we are Israeli, we accept it, we accept the State of Israel and now we would like to discuss what our future is going to be there."

The Future Vision document caused "anger and frustration," Ya'ari acknowledged, but he said only two or three donors dropped their support for NIF as a consequence.