

## **CIVIC ACTION AT HOME AND ABROAD**

Some thoughts following participation in the  
United Nations Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations  
in Durban, South Africa, August-September 2001.

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### INTRODUCTION

As the writing of this review nears completion, there is talk of a new world war brewing. I urge that we not seize this “opportunity” to lay aside the questions and suggestions in this document. Even should such a war come to pass, afterward we shall still find ourselves face-to-face with one another here, and facing ourselves in the mirror as well. We would therefore do well to continue to question and to act locally, even now.

**In this discussion paper, I offer my personal impressions of the recent Durban conference and of what took place in the weeks leading up to it. Along with some scrutiny of how various organizations proceeded in their preparations for Durban, I offer some suggestions as to the direction we might take at this juncture, in terms of a new frame of reference for the actions and agendas of civic organizations striving for change in Israel.**

The Ford Foundation proposed, to a number of organizations whose work it supports, that they send a representative to the NGO Forum at the UN Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa scheduled for the summer of 2001. The foundation also offered a small stipend for a follow-up project after the Forum. Our organization is active in the quest for equality and civil rights in Israel, and we at Sikkuy saw this invitation as an opportunity to learn about the work of other organizations around the world, particularly about the interracial activities in South Africa. We decided to attend. Only in retrospect did we see that, more than an opportunity to learn, the Durban conference was to be an arena for overt political action. The realization began to dawn even before we left Israel, in light of the tensions surrounding the wording of the various draft documents prepared in advance of the NGO Forum.

Unlike political movements and parliamentary political parties, civic organizations are generally excused from the burden of real political representation of the public, as they are not chosen by an electorate and hence do not demonstrably represent a constituency. What a civic organization usually represents is one or more trends or pressure groups. It would seem that, broadly speaking, Jewish-Palestinian groups and Jewish groups in Israel viewed the Durban conference mainly as a professional opportunity, whereas the Palestinian organizations in Israel saw it as a real political opportunity to place their collective issue on the world's agenda.\*

The Palestinian organizations indeed undertook the responsibility of representing their collective in the international arena via the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations that was an adjunct to the main conference. They set up a preparations committee led by Ittijah (the Union of Arab Community Based Associations in Israel) and Adalah (The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights), which included representatives from the Association of Forty, Al Ahali Center, The Galilee Society, and others. This activity was underway by the end of 2000, with participation in regional preparations committees in advance of the conference and assumption of an active role in the Arab caucus of NGOs.

Meanwhile, in the domestic Israeli arena, Adalah for almost a year had been in charge of action on a very broad front to deal with the Or Commission [investigating the events of October 2000] – taking testimony in real time, inviting written statements of opinion by qualified experts, and attending the hearings. All this activity, along with the multifaceted activities of other Palestinian organizations this past year, would seem first of all to be the product of an internal maturation process on the part of Palestinian nationalism in Israel. I shall not examine this aspect in depth here. I will, however, address phenomena and processes involving relations between the Palestinian organizations and Jewish organizations.

## TWO DISAGREEMENTS THAT PRECEDED OUR DEPARTURE FOR THE CONFERENCE

(1) Among the Palestinian organizations, the following question presented itself:

**Do the organizations that created and ran the preparations committee represent**

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\* Readers may be used to thinking of the term “Palestinians” as referring to Palestinians living outside the borders of Israel, with Palestinian Arabs who are Israeli citizens referred to simply as “Arabs.” In this discussion paper, I’ve decided to refer to Palestinians who are citizens of Israel as “Palestinians,” too. My subject here is civic organizations in Israel and citizens of Israel – Jewish and Palestinian.

**all Palestinian citizens of Israel?** There was resentment among some Palestinian civic organizations because the preparations had not been open to all. This disagreement was described in Ha'aretz only briefly, but in the Arabic press it provoked tremendous controversy.

There is indeed a problem here, in that the preparations committee undertook to represent Palestinian citizens of Israel in general, but wasn't chosen through any political process, and its members weren't named by a representative body such as, e.g., the Monitoring Committee. On the other hand, perhaps that was an advantage. Quite possibly, the successful leadership of the process, via a tremendous investment of effort, talent, and perseverance, could not have come about if the committee had been preoccupied with tedious internal political wrangling. Be that as it may, the Palestinian delegation from Israel didn't see itself as a body of civic organizations struggling against discrimination and racism in their own country, but as representing a collective that is fighting for its existence as a collective.

Despite the committee's success, and perhaps more especially in the wake of that success, the question lingers as to just how validly constituted the delegation was, and how representative of Palestinian citizens of Israel overall. Meanwhile, it seems to me that the Palestinian delegation from Israel to Durban does indeed represent a significant stream, one of the foremost among Palestinian citizens of Israel today. The question as to whether this stream is or is not a partner for dialogue with us, the Jews, will be addressed later on in this discussion.

(2) The second argument revolved around **the inclusion of Palestinian-Jewish organizations, and Jewish organizations, in preparations for the conference.** The main preparations consisted of drafting texts for proposals. After the initial positioning of the preparations committee as the political representative overall of the Palestinian collective in Israel, it was naturally inappropriate to include Jews whose activities represent interests of a Jewish-Zionist nature.

As things stood, would it have been possible to identify a shared agenda for Jews and Palestinians that would have been germane to the subject of the conference – the struggle against racism and its manifestations? I think not,

because from the moment that the Palestinian organizations undertook to represent a collective, they chose not to function as an ordinary civic organization but rather as the actual representative of a national group. In this sense they functioned more like representatives of a state than as organizational activists. This seems to have been the choice of many other organizations at the conference: those representing the Dalit, the Tamil, the Roma (Gypsies), etc., and with the same goal – to bring collective concerns before the world and create international pressure that would advance their interests back home.

Thus, from the standpoint of the preparations committee, if Jews were seeking a joint paper with the preparations committee, their only choice would have been to sign the platform of the Palestinian organizations, and do without input of their own, as representing any stream of the Jewish collective in Israel. When I first looked into this (much later on, in July), it was absolutely clear that the Palestinian delegation from Israel was a national delegation with a Palestinian agenda, and that there was no room for me, as a Jew and a Zionist, to arrive at a jointly-worded statement even in a civic mode, unless I wanted to sign off on the wording as it was. Since the organization I represent is Palestinian-Jewish, there was no possibility of formulating a platform broad enough to include both these components together.

After my first inquiry, there was an attempt to arrive at a joint declaration by Palestinian organizations not represented in the preparations committee, together with joint Palestinian-Jewish organizations and Jewish organizations. This effort was decried as a patronizing attempt by Jews to blur the achievements of the committee and stifle the progress of independent Palestinian organizations. No joint text was agreed on. The attempt, and the argument it aroused at the time, now permit us to commence a much more basic discussion of the relations between civic organizations, indeed of the political relations between the Jewish public and the Arab public.

I shall not provide a detailed description of the history of the Durban conference itself, which was widely covered in the press. My own impressions of the conference appear interleaved in the material below when that seems helpful for the discussion.

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**Reorienting the basis for relations between Jews and Palestinians in Israel**

At the Durban conference, the Palestinian group from Israel located the relations between Palestinians and Jews very emphatically on the plane of the relations between ruler and ruled, and not on the plane of a conflict. If the relationship of two parties to a conflict could in any way suggest a comparable stature in the balance of power, or even that the Jews, too, are victims in this historic encounter, then this choice by the Palestinian civic organizations from Israel at the conference emphasizes a different kind of relationship – that of ruler and ruled-over. With this orientation, if a conflict exists, it arises only out of the situation of ruler and ruled, and not out of a struggle over a single strip of land, or a struggle over control for water sources in the region, etc.

For Jews working toward civic equality, to acknowledge that the relations between Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel are mainly those of ruler and ruled is likely to cast an entirely different light both on their organizational and personal behavior in their relations with Palestinians, and on the substance of the desired model for which they are struggling. The substance of the Palestinian cry and, in at least equal measure, the manner in which they went about voicing it, poses no simple challenge to Jews active in this field. More on this below.

#### THE ANTICIPATED IMPLICATIONS FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS AND BETWEEN JEWISH AND PALESTINIAN ACTIVISTS IN ISRAEL

##### **“Internationalizing” the struggle for equality**

On its face, it would seem that the main thing impelling the Palestinian organizations in Israel to go to Durban was the events of October 2000. Underlying this act is mainly the realization that Palestinian citizens of Israel constitute a national minority that must defend itself, for real, from the state in which it lives. This poses the question of whether raising the subject of Palestinian citizens of Israel at the Durban conference was intended solely to achieve equality within the existing paradigm, or whether it was meant to nullify the legitimacy of the state on account of its actions, and thereby prepare the ground for international recognition of a different kind of state structure. What was in fact done – defining Israel as an apartheid state and as a racist state committing genocide – has to be read as a nullification of its legitimacy.

If the intention of the Palestinian organizations was a struggle for equality within Israel, the way they went about it at Durban was otherwise, because internationalizing the struggle in that manner is tantamount to denunciation and delegitimization of the state. That was perhaps one of the problems in the quest for a joint statement to include Jewish organizations, joint Jewish-Palestinian organizations and Palestinian organizations from Israel. It is difficult and perhaps impossible to persuade Jewish organizations, and Jews from joint organizations, to support a process that leads to the nullification of the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Furthermore, whatever the nuances of perspective, something purporting to represent the interests of Jews in Israel cannot come to terms with such a process. Thus, even those entities defined as joint organizations (like Sikkuy) cannot sign a declaration of this nature, because even if all the Palestinian partners involved sign it, the Jewish partners will not.

**Where do the Jews fit in to this picture? Only as partners in the Palestinian's struggle, or have they their own agenda for civic equality?**

The claims against the state as discriminatory on the basis of race rest on reports by Sikkuy, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, B'Tselem, Kav L'Oved and others. And indeed, the Jews from Sikkuy, ACRI and B'Tselem can issue warnings and reports; they can sharply criticize and confront the state concerning its discriminatory attitude to Arabs. They can also publish and disseminate Arabic and English translations of these materials, thereby "washing the dirty laundry in public." But with respect to getting this laundry clean, meaning the struggle itself for total civic equality – this remains within the confines of the state. There is a big difference between the dissemination of information and the conduct of the struggle for change.

True, Jewish organizations and Jewish activists have worked in the international arena before in order to force Israel to change its ways (concerning, e.g., women's issues). In this instance, when the criticism was aimed at the existential basis for the state and its Jewish character, Jewish and joint organizations did not take an active or a leading role at the conference.

It would appear that here lies the fine line for Jews active in this field: While information can be openly distributed, internationalization of the struggle for

complete civic equality in Israel is intended, not solely to achieve that outcome, but also to lead to a change in regime (based on the South African example). This is what deters its endorsement by Jews who are otherwise prepared to go far for the sake of absolute civic equality.

Another thing deterring Jews from mounting a struggle in the international arena may lie in their basic sense of belonging. Jews who are active in the field of civil and human rights are often acting in accordance with a broad humanitarian and political outlook, and alongside their affiliation with the Jewish collective, they are also connected with other fields of identity – humanitarian values, universalist values, etc. Some even speak of being uneasy with their affiliation to the Jewish collective in Israel; they may aspire to “dilute” it via activism among and in partnership with Palestinians, and over the years some develop a certain degree of alienation from the Jewish collective.

Through ongoing contact with Palestinians, some Jewish activists have difficulty with the burden of blame, to the point where they cut themselves off and become non-Zionist. This separation from the “bad” side of the story enables them to live with Palestinians and with their own conscience. They then feel that they’re not part of the problem, but part of the solution. Those activists who accept their affiliation with the Jewish collective, with the group that benefits from the Jewish character of the state, and who even believe that Jews have a right to a national home in Israel – in other words, those who identify themselves as Zionist – undertake to live in a perpetual state of dissonance.

Internationalizing the struggle itself (as opposed to merely publicizing the information), as was the case with South Africa, was evidently a line that Jewish organizations avoided crossing at the Durban conference. What appears to have stopped them is the simple pull of affiliation. The difference between raising the issue of women’s rights at the UN conference in Beijing, for instance, and raising the issue of Palestinian citizens of Israel at Durban is in the basic definition of the State of Israel. Equality for women can be a part of the Jewish state, whereas absolute equality for Palestinians raises questions that speak to the core of the definition of the state as Jewish. Perhaps this is why only the Palestinian organizations were active in this arena, and not the Jewish organizations.

**Jews have not yet understood their interest in equality**

Someone who is willing to accept the regime in Israel in a general way, but wants to change the way it operates (to change its practices), must aspire to conduct the struggle itself within the state and not outside it. Thus it is surprising that the party that has still not entered the struggle for civic equality is the Jewish public as a whole. The Jewish public has not yet understood its own interest in absolute and total civic equality as the linchpin for preserving the existence of the state in its current form, hence it doesn't see itself as having a role in the struggle to achieve that complete equality. Along with the internal maturation process mentioned earlier, perhaps in the end it is this fact, too – after more than a half a century of waiting – that has impelled despairing Palestinian citizens of Israel to seek support outside the state. It may also be that the retreat from potential support (“You want me? You know where to find me!” **SHULI?? verify flavor of that**) on the part of the left-leaning Jewish public, which has become commonplace since October 2000, is contributing to this despair.

In my negotiations with Palestinian organizations before the Durban conference, there was a sense that I was somehow “requesting a postponement” of their struggle until Jewish organizations and activists for civic equality are finally able to arouse the Jewish public to take action to that end. One of the significant insights in the aftermath of Durban is that some of the Palestinian organizations in Israel are no longer waiting, evidently, for the Jewish public to wake up. Judging by these activists' political behavior in Israel and abroad, they are honing in on the following issue: a redefinition of the regime of this state. This is a part of the journey that will see few Jews and few Jewish organizations joining the Palestinians unless there is, first, a thorough clarification process amongst themselves and with the Palestinians.

#### TOWARD A CIVIL SOCIETY IN ISRAEL – TOGETHER, OR SEPARATELY?

##### **The Jews in Israel: Independent and sovereign citizens, or agents of the state?**

One of the values of a civil society is the ability to separate itself from the state, to identify and further civic interests which are not those of the government, even when these interests may conflict with those of the government. On this point, from a behavioral standpoint, there was a vast chasm



of difference between the various civic organizations from Israel. It has already been stated that while the Palestinian organizations in Israel were aware of the international opportunity to raise their issues, the Jews active in civic organizations were not alert to the possibility of seeing the Durban conference as an arena for actual and overt struggle. The reason may perhaps lie partly in the feeling of Jews, even those Jews active in human rights, that for foreign affairs we have a state, while the job of an activist is to address internal affairs only.

Furthermore, many activist Jews apparently have yet to sufficiently separate civic organizations from the state itself. Many continue to assume a complete identity between themselves personally and the state, and the organization in which they're working is merely supposed to finish what the state hasn't gotten around to doing or can't complete; but all are thought to be acting generally in the same direction, from the same inclination – for the strength and future of the State of Israel.

Thus, for example, both before and after the conference, many Jewish friends נדו לי ??? about what I was going to suffer (or had suffered) from the attacks by Arabs on the state. I had to announce to one and all (in an article in Ma'ariv on 26 October 2001) that I can not and do not intend to defend the state with respect to this matter – but my declaration was in vain. Yes, it's hard for Jewish human rights and civil rights activists to separate themselves from the state and its aims, and harder still for other Jews to do so. This also makes it harder for them to nurture a real civil society. Palestinian citizens have no such problem, unfortunately, in separating themselves from the state, since in fact they were never really connected with it and with its aims. For Palestinians, this aspect of the matter of a civil society is understood, **particularly since their struggle is essentially a nationalistic one.**

### **What the Palestinians did: Dangerous isolationism – or healthy self-help?**

The salient characteristic of the actions taken by the Palestinian organizations from Israel before the Durban conference was that they acted on their own throughout, and let nothing interfere with that. Given the new nationalistic maturity, is this “isolationism” on the part of the Palestinian

organizations in Israel no more than an expression of despair (as described above), or may it not also constitute a constructive step?

These organizations differentiate themselves from Jewish organizations and intentionally separate their work from the context of the collective interests and aims of Jews. The justification for this is a history of dependence, to the point of atrophy, by the Palestinians on the Jews and on the Jewish agenda in matters of human and civil rights. For the Palestinians, despite far-reaching political goodwill on the part of their Jewish partners, partnership with Jews thus far has been like a bear-hug: an embrace of strangulation. This view holds that the Jews come to the partnership burdened with their affiliation to the Jewish collective and the collective Jewish interest as they conceive of it. They bring this baggage to their partnership with the Palestinians, and in various ways impose it on their Palestinian comrades.

The Jews responded to this trend to separate action before the Durban conference with practical attempts to find a common denominator with other Palestinian organizations who were willing, an effort that in the end went nowhere. The other possibility – that a group of Jewish activists in civil and human rights in Israel might have tried to arrive at a common code of some sort, or written a declaration of their own as Jews – didn't even come up. My attempts to promote this option before the conference were opposed, mainly on the grounds that the agenda for the struggle for equality and for the promotion of human and civil rights has to be a joint Jewish-Palestinian agenda, that there cannot be two separate agendas. I return to this in the section on recommendations, below.

In the event, then, a strong, organized, well-prepared group of Palestinians arrived in Durban, full of enthusiasm. With them were a few Jews and Palestinians representing joint organizations and Jewish organizations from Israel: These delegates were interested in the Palestinians' agenda ? **not clear** and in what was going on around them, but felt largely detached from the proceedings. It's hard to disguise the embarrassment I felt, personally, alongside the activist determination of the Palestinian delegation from Israel. That doesn't mean that, in hindsight, I would have joined them – but at least the Jews participating in the conference could have organized themselves ahead of time and sorted out their personal-organizational-political feelings and positions. They

especially could have positioned themselves somewhere in the scene as they anticipated finding it in Durban. Not doing so was in itself a weakness, and generated a further sense of weakness at the forum itself. There's nothing wrong with feeling embarrassed, but this feeling of weakness is liable to have an impact on Jewish activism after Durban, in the dialogue with the Palestinian organizations and, more crucially, in the internal dialogue among Jews.

The arena in which struggle for equality is taking place does not have to belong to the Palestinians alone. Jews in Israel have a clear, life-and-death interest in civic equality for themselves and the Palestinians. The fact that few Jews realize this to be a Jewish interest should spur those few to find some way into the hearts and minds of all the others. A weakness of position and of expression on the part of Jews in the struggle for human and civil rights now stands alongside the enhanced strength and confidence of the Palestinians; this weakness is not good for the Jews, and it's not good for the Palestinians. Not only does it appear at present that shoulder-to-shoulder activism would not be productive; right now, it is not even possible. Even among the Palestinian organizations that were interested in arriving at a joint text, there's no mindset for any real joint action with Jews. To some extent, at this point, the Jews are viewed instrumentally as a target population for persuasion of a focused nature concerning specific issues, but are not seen as comrades in the struggle or as partners in a shared civil society.

By opting for absolutely separate action, the Palestinian organizations of the preparations committee sent a message of active disregard and indifference toward the Jewish and joint organizations. The latter are to be viewed with suspicion because behind the facade of their support is the old bear hug – the embrace that smothers. This fundamental suspicion is leading the Palestinians to perceive a patronizing superiority in the actions of any Jew who dares to express a position about matters Palestinian – sometimes without bothering to examine what he says, merely on the basis of his being a Jew. After so many years of Jewish paternalism and oppression in various forms, the Palestinian activists, having been burned in the past, are now extremely cautious.

**Working separately, but not cut off entirely**

There would appear to be a lot of value, constructive value, in separate action – meaning that each organization (Jewish or Palestinian) works with its own constituency and with the state. This new alignment first of all strips away the misleading veils of “coexistence” from most of the existing activities; it means farewell to old patterns and habits that were blocking all progress in the relationship between Jews and Palestinians in Israel. The future lies in building a relationship of equals between Jews and Palestinians, on a foundation of citizenship that includes both national entities. A change in the basis of the relationships is what is wanted here, not complete separation.

Severing the relationship between the two groups completely is liable to be destructive, since in one way or another they share a common future. Continuing separation may serve to perpetuate a hostility every bit as dangerous as the type that comes from relating on an unequal basis, which has been our lot up till now. While separation has its constructive aspects and although there is now an urgent necessity for it, there is also a downside. Some damage may be anticipated as an outgrowth of the unilateral, almost secret *modus operandi* adopted by the organizations that constituted the preparations committee for Durban over the last year. Down the road, the Jewish public in Israel will be a target population for attitudinal change concerning the future civil society of Israel. With their current approach, the Palestinian organizations are going to lose the Jewish public, and are even liable to assist certain sectors of the Jewish public to recast the question of civic equality as a threat to the Jews.

It’s inconceivable that there can be any essential change in the situation in the state of Israel without a change taking place on the Jewish side as well. Thus, the move toward separation by the Palestinians, as a constructive act to meet their own needs, must be accompanied by “politically correct” explanations, simultaneously, in a way that doesn’t burn all the bridges to the future. Jewish human and civil rights activists, who are perceived as part of the relationship of ruler and ruled, and who for some of the Palestinians may even represent the essence of that relationship – are also the most significant force for promoting the change that must come about among the Jewish public. It would be a mistake to turn them into a punching bag for the Palestinians during a period when they’re just building up their strength. The basis of the relationship must undergo an immediate change in the direction of equality, and in this effort it takes two – at

least – to tango. While responsibility for having created the problem is not symmetrical, responsibility for changing the situation is now incumbent on both partners in the same degree. The assumption of equality in shouldering this responsibility should prefigure the equality that will govern the relationship in future.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The fact is that, in Israel today, one may count on the fingers of one hand the organizations that are jointly Jewish and Palestinian on the level of ownership and control – with a joint board, co-chairmen, and co-directors on the management level. In the discussions that preceded the Durban conference, it was suggested that there is not one civil society in Israel, but two – a Jewish one and a Palestinian one. There is an evident internal contradiction here since, by definition, a given state is supposed to have only one civil society, which is to constitute the arena for action other than governmental.

The impulse to delineate two civil societies may originate in the fact that the State of Israel belongs, by definition and in actuality, to one group within the society of citizens – and thus the same may be said of Israeli civil society, a reflection of a state that belongs to one group, the Jews. Hence it may be only natural to think that there should be a civil society for the citizens who are left outside the framework of belonging to the state. Under these circumstances, any such framework would be independent of the state framework, not itself a state.

Thus the central question is whether the state, and accordingly also the civil society in Israel, can encompass two nationalities – or whether it will have to separate into two discrete civil societies? The answer to this question will largely dictate the nature of the quest for equality and will determine what citizenship is going to look like in Israel in the future. The modus operandi of the Palestinian organizations that went to Durban reflect a choice in favor of the second option: They were acting as a separate civil society, inspired by a quintessentially national affinity, but not in the framework of a state.

So long as action was conducted on a joint basis, the commonality was inflated to the point where it turned into an objective in and of itself. This style was an adequate response to one of the central motivations for Jewish activism aiming at equality: the ethical motivation. The shared struggle, and the social commonality that comes with it, gave Jews a sense of real equality within the organizational framework and provided them with (at least on the surface) a relationship of the desired model, even generating the energy and hope that are so necessary to fuel the struggle. For the Palestinians, in contrast, these relations were often and possibly always **a version of שיעתוק של** the relationship between ruler and ruled that exists in the Israeli reality overall. This insight did not come into being at the Durban conference, but the awareness of it was greatly reinforced there.

For the Palestinians, separation is an outcome of an inner need and is meant to help formulate an independent path and clarify an authentic agenda that is not skewed in the direction of the Jewish agenda. For Jews, however, separation is a challenge to the very ground on which they stand. Acknowledgment of this need of the Palestinians to work alone and independently, challenges the Jewish activists in this field or, more precisely, their motivations for engaging in the work and the style in which they do so. And it means that they will have to develop an independent approach of their own – as Jews, as members of the ruling majority, as part of the problem – to the desired situation and to the struggle for it among their own constituency. We're not talking here about their constructing their own group identity as against that of the Palestinians, but rather about defining their interest in civic equality and deciding where it lies within the internal Jewish discourse.

On the road to real change in the status of relations between the national groups, the Jews, generally speaking, will be a decisive factor no less than will the Palestinians. There will have to be a fundamental change among the Jewish public in their approach to the implementation of Jewish national aspirations, and especially in the context of civil relations with the Palestinians in Israel. There are various ways to set this change in motion. We may reasonably assume that it will be difficult, after the fact, to decide which of the two national groups was the more instrumentally effective, but there can be no doubt that the Jews are an important target population for this change process. By persisting in the modus

operandi adopted before the Durban conference, not only are the Palestinians liable to lose the Jews public but they're liable to distance, within that Jewish public, their potential comrades in the struggle.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The consciousness of a civil society has two important aspects: complementing the actions of government (services, mainly), and countering the actions of government (advocacy, influence brought to bear to change policies). Both Jews and Palestinians in Israel are still in the early stages of formulating that consciousness. Hence, in terms of building a civil society, the task finds both parties in a similar place.

Generally speaking, it is profoundly in the interests of both sides that Jews and Palestinians alike should have civic robustness and an awareness of possessing it. However civil society may look in Israel in the future, the wellbeing of both sides requires strong civil organizations, aware of themselves and of their group interests and, at the same time, very aware of and familiar with the civil organizations of the other side in the conflict. Thus, it seems to me that:

- ♦ On the Palestinian side: Support for the trend to independence will help strengthen the Palestinian organizations as they develop a vigorous and autonomous civil consciousness, through internal action focusing on strengthening Palestinian society, which has suffered as a result of the traumas of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This strengthening will also help promote a fruitful dialogue and a change in the basis for relations with Jews. However, this action will be harmful if it is based on an active disregard of the Jews.
- ♦ On the Jewish side: Jewish organizations and activists in the field must receive a lot of support and reinforcement. Among the key elements to be encouraged: the conduct of a shared thinking process; the ongoing design of strategies for the struggle for internal change among Jews; the provision of mutual support; and the forging of ongoing ties with

available and interested resources and sources of knowledge. With that kind of support, a strengthened cadre of activists should be capable of leveraging the required change among Jews. The same reinforcement should also help them to conduct a courageous dialogue with the Palestinian organizations and activists, with a view to changing the basis of the relationship.

- ◆ Maintain some (not all) existing partnerships: Support and reinforcement should be given to existing partnerships between Jews and Palestinians, but only those with the potential to further the strengthening of both societies, Jewish and Palestinian. It is not worthwhile to support prior structures of “coexistence” that reinforced a relationship of control by the Jews over the Palestinians.
- ◆ Dialogue: Even in the current situation, when commonly the national agenda overwhelms the civic agenda on both sides, it is clear to everyone that Jews and Palestinians will be living here in the future. Separate and parallel action is crucial, but it will not bear fruit for both sides if it takes place in complete isolation or in a mode intended to be against the other side. Hence, along with the separate activities, both sides must invest in an ongoing dialogue, with a prior commitment only to the framework itself. The substance will be dictated by the changing realities and relations. Aside from strengthening each side in a somewhat different manner, mechanisms should be set up to enable continuing dialogue between key activists and leaders in the sphere of civil society. This dialogue should differ from its predecessors in two respects: The participants will know ahead of time that the goal of the dialogue is to change the reality through civic action; and the participants will be heads of organizations and activists who are working full-time, for whom implementation of the dialogue is something done on a daily basis.

Many activists in the field flinch at the notion of dialogue, in the wake of so many years of sterile dialogue which wasn't designed to do anything except maintain the status quo. For others, labeling the dialogue as “just a lot of talk” gave them a way out of the obligation to think in a structured and orderly way,



and an escape from feelings and content that are hard to digest, but are an integral part of real dialogue.

The goals of an ongoing dialogue are: to enable each side to reexamine itself all the time along the continuum of its own conceptual development and in the context of historic events that take place day by day; and to enrich the internal dialogue and promote fruitful pragmatic thinking, prerequisites for effecting changes in conceptual patterns among its own people.

The nature of this dialogue is that it need not produce immediately perceptible results. Both sides must be liberated from the tyranny of “bringing home something of substance” after every encounter. A structured thought process and an ongoing and productive confrontation with feelings, that elevates ??? the quality of the contact between the two sides, is an essential professional prerequisite for progress and achievement in the field. A very substantial investment should be made to support activists in human rights and civil rights so that they can continue to carry the load over many years, renew their strength, and grow.

Leaders of civic organizations need this dialogue, and so does the public as a whole. True, it’s never too late to begin a dialogue – but that’s no reason to tarry, either. Delay will hurt Palestinians and Jews alike.

Ma’anit, October 2001