

THE ARAB PUBLIC AND ISRAEL'S 'CORONAVIRUS STORY': SHOWCASING PARTNERSHIP AND PREVENTING MEDIA STEREOTYPES

THE IDEA IN BRIEF

This proposal is an initiative for immediate public relations efforts to enhance mainstream media coverage of Arab society as an integral part of Israel's "Coronavirus story". The strategic end of this enterprise is to normalize the Arab public's image through more complex and nuanced coverage that would (i) prevent generalized stereotypes and subsequent intensification of intergroup tensions, (ii) more accurately reflect the efforts and challenges within Arab society to implement and cope with prevention measures; (iii) portray the Jewish-Arab partnerships and cooperation integral to the well-being of all Israeli citizens during the crisis.

THE NEED

Research from recent years shows that while Arabs constitute about 20% of the population, only 3% of the interviewees in Israeli media were Arabs, and only 10% of these interviews were "expert interviews" – interviews held only based on the speakers' proficiencies, regardless of them being Arabs. Moreover, most such coverage focuses on Arab society in the context of crime and national security issues, repeatedly framing Arab public negatively.

During the Coronavirus crisis only 1.8% of related coverage has included Arab society and even less showcasing Arab experts. Unfortunately, a one-dimensional story of Arab society as 'undisciplined' and 'non-compliant' has already emerged in tandem with the outbreak in Ultra-Orthodox communities (despite little data supporting the claim). As testing increases in Arab society and more cases of the virus are found, we fear that this negative story will take over, deepening stereotypes against Arab citizens, and overshadowing the immense efforts of Arab leadership, doctors and citizens of implementing an emergency response in Israel's most disadvantaged and densely populated communities.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The media's importance is even more significant now during the Coronavirus crisis, when people are isolated in their homes and searching for formal and reliable information which they cannot find on social media. As a result, the demand for traditional media has reached its peak.

The current crisis presents a unique and immediate opportunity to showcase Arab citizens as an integral and constructive part of Israeli national concerns. First, the virus does not distinguish between an Arab and a Jew. Second, the high number of Arab doctors and medical staff on the front lines of the crisis present a poignant opportunity to showcase Jews and Arabs working side by side as equals saving Israeli lives. Third, Arab civil society and political leadership worked swiftly to address gaps in coordination with the central government and support communities having difficulty implementing the emergency response and enforcing guidelines, including pushing through government welfare packages for the Israeli public as a whole.



Based on conversations with numerous leading editors, journalists and commentators, there is broad agreement that more accurate and varied exposure of Arab society is needed during these times. According to them the current lack of exposure does not derive from a lack of interest, but from the lack of positive stories they receive from and regarding the Arab society. This emanates, among other reasons, from the deficiency in Arab journalists and Arab PR working with Hebrew mainstream media; and a lack of access and awareness within Hebrew media circles to Arab experts with proficiencies relevant to the crisis (physicians, scientists, economists, etc.).

Creating a mechanism for connecting mainstream Hebrew media to relevant stories and experts currently working on the national effort to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus stands to change perceptions of Arab society in public discourse, acknowledge the life-saving efforts of thousands of Arab citizens, and strengthen Jewish-Arab relations as a result.

THE PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

The initiative for promoting Arab presence in the media during the Coronavirus crisis will fulfill its mission by exposing the Jewish press to the coping of the Arab society with the crisis. The initiative will engage two public relations professionals to immediately connect mainstream media to a wider range of stories about Arab society during the crisis and promote Arab commentators and interviewees.

Incubated at Maoz, the PR professionals will have access to the entire Maoz network to quickly identify stories and experts and have unparalleled access to media professionals across all platforms – from the newscast to Lifestyle shows.

We turn to you for a grant of 50k NIS to fund these operations, and to support our endeavor toward making the Arab public a part of the Israeli story.