



Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

PM Olmert to Israeli Arabs: "Equality is not just a slogan"

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(Communicated by the Prime Minister's Media Adviser)

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert today (Thursday), 10 May 2007, attended an [Israel Democracy Institute](#) seminar on the Israeli Arab community. The seminar focused on attempts to find ways to integrate the Arab sector into Israeli society especially regarding education, culture, land and employment. To this end, the Prime Minister participated in various working groups composed of both Jews and Arabs. This was the first event of its kind in which the Prime Minister of Israel met with the Arab public in the deep and sincere desire to both study the issues of concern to the Arab minority and find solutions.

Prime Minister Olmert, IDI President Dr. Aryeh Carmon and Arab Local Authorities Committee Chairman Shawki Khativ spoke with educators, economists, business people, and Jewish and Arab public officials and discussed ideas for a more egalitarian society.

Prime Minister Olmert said: "I recognize the complexity and sensitivity of the current situation and I decided that the time has come to deal with it. I will not try to hide the fact that in the State of Israel there is discrimination. However, not everything that occurs with the Arab population can be attributed to discrimination. There is also bureaucracy that must be overcome. Therefore, I announce that next year there will be a Prime Minister's conference on the minorities sector, the goal of which will be to expand dialogue among the Jewish and non-Jewish populations. I also promise that within one month we will publish the main issues of the conference.

We will also set goals by which we can judge ourselves. A Prime Minister's Office team will see to it that everyone in the Arab sector knows where to turn so that their matters can be dealt with. I have instructed PMO Director-General Ra'anun Dinur and Cabinet Secretary Yisrael Maimon to consider a formal and transparent procedure that will require the Government to take all sectors into account before any decision is taken.

We also decided today that a steering committee will - in cooperation with the IDI and Haifa University - monitor developments regarding the integration of the Arab population and will report to the PMO on an ongoing basis.

Lastly, the Government has made many decisions that will assist in reducing gaps among the Arab population, including increasing the number of non-Jews in the civil service, investing millions of shekels in encouraging employment in peripheral areas in both the north and south, constructing new classrooms and declaring all non-Jewish communities as 'A' industrial development areas. This year, we will finance the activities of a special Arab sector fund that will enable investments in 40 companies. All of the foregoing is being done in order to convert equality from a slogan into reality."

Prof. Majad al-Haj said: "This is an historic and important meeting the continued implementation of which will make it even more important."

Arab Local Councils Chairman Khatib said: "I appreciate the fact that the Prime Minister has devoted almost the entire day to listening to first-hand sources about the issues that concern us; it is not just the listening but the important message that the highest leadership in the country discussed issues related to the Arab population. We spoke - inter alia - about the importance of changing reality; the Arab population has had one clear message since the founding of the state - we want to be equals here. I am impressed that the Prime Minister did not just listen but will also see to it that things will be done."

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