

NETANYAHU ESTABLISHES THE PRINCIPLE OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN ISRAELI POLICY

By Amos Gvirtz

There are many reasons for opposing Netanyahu's plan to annex settlements and the occupied Jordan Valley. I would like to focus on the implications of one of its important aspects: the intention to annex territories without granting citizenship to Palestinian residents, placing the discrimination between Jews and non-Jews on legal ground and providing ideological and legal justification for similar discrimination against Jews in other parts of the world.

Conversely, it can be claimed that Israel already discriminates against its Palestinian citizens. That is true. However, there are almost no apartheid-style discriminatory laws on Israel's statute book. Two important laws that sanction discrimination come to my mind in this context: the Law of Return that recognizes the Jewish right of return to Israel while failing to address the Palestinians' right of return, is a clear example of a discriminatory law; and the new Nation-State Law, spawned by the Israeli right, that enshrines Jewish supremacy over the country's Palestinian citizens and is part of a trend of openly discriminatory legislation. Human rights organizations have hitherto directed their efforts toward preventing the use of seemingly neutral legislation for discriminatory ends (such as the Planning and Building Law and land laws) against the country's unwanted minority. But our struggle will now begin to target discriminatory laws in the same way that civil rights activists fought against the apartheid laws in South Africa and the racist laws in the southern states of the US.

It can be claimed that annexation will not bring about a significant change in the situation on the ground in the occupied territories. There is some truth in this observation, but whereas until now it could be argued that given that the occupation is temporary a negotiated political settlement between the

parties could bring about a change, whereas annexation without granting citizenship will anchor in law the continued and systematic discrimination against the Palestinian population.

The leaders of the Israeli right-wing, like everyone else, are always outraged by anti-Semitic attacks against Jewish minorities in various parts of the world. Objection to anti-Semitism is based on universal values that reject the notion that people can be harmed because of their affiliations and not because of their deeds. Anti-Semitism is, after all, a form of racism: people are targeted not because of their actions but because of their ethnic or religious affiliation. And here the same government that condemns every manifestation of anti-Semitism is motivated by the identical principle that motivates anti-Semitism: it targets people whose only crime is that they were born Palestinian and not Jewish!

But the discrimination practised in Israel is infinitely more serious. Whereas most anti-Semitic incidents against Jews in the world are perpetrated by individuals and racist organizations and are not anchored in official policy, Palestinians in Israel and in the occupied territories are targeted both by individuals and organizations belonging to the extreme right, and more egregiously by the government itself.

Israel's government exploits anti-Semitic attacks against Jews for its own political ends. The campaign against anti-Semitism is exploited so as to perpetuate the guilt feelings of the Christian world towards the Jews and silence criticism of Israel's nationalistic-racist actions against the Palestinians in Israel and in the occupied territories. Amazingly, this strategy is successful! No government has yet dared to call out the hypocrisy of the Israeli government.

Whoever genuinely opposes anti-Semitism must in all honesty protest against the systematic discrimination and harm perpetrated by the Israeli government against its Palestinian citizens and the Palestinian population in the occupied territories.