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Marching Towards Reconciliation

Finding Common Ground Between Arabs and Jews in Israel

Preface

"Marching towards Reconciliation" arose from the movement "Marching Together for a Common Future" in the summer of 2016, following the polarization between the two peoples, the increasing tension in the streets, in the social media and even in the Israeli government. This polarization has increased in the light of the political stagnation and the feeling of hopelessness towards the chance of finding a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The motivation behind this project was the mutual feeling on both sides that civil society has the potential to work independently and to affect the relationships between Arabs and Jews, even where there is no support from other sources, especially in the present situation. The movement of "Marching Together..." was founded in 2014 as an apolitical, civilian movement of volunteers, devoted to enhancing the life Arabs and Jews share in common in Israel.

The movement today includes hundreds of activists from around the country, meeting together in jointly initiated activities

Marching Towards Reconciliation: Goals

- Creating a broad base of Arabs and Jews in Israel
- Strengthening this common social fabric and decreasing the conflict between the two peoples
- Minimizing the fears and hostility between Arabs and Jews in Israel
- Strengthening the shared economy

The Process

When "Marching Together" was founded, a treaty was created through an identity card characterizing its principal features. Since then, the movement has focused on enhancing the encounters and social connections during meetings devoted to discussion of basic issues and dilemmas. The large group consists of 150 citizens of various occupations, Arabs and Jews, old and young.

It has been invited to meetings sponsored by "The Israeli Institute of Group Analysis", which has a lot of experience leading discussions on controversial subjects. During these meetings participants have expressed their pain regarding conflictual issues, and also suggested possible solutions and ideas for improving the situation. Between meetings, participants have continued to respond to issues raised both orally and in writing. The process is not an easy one, but it has had a powerful and moving effect on its participants, and the materials gathered from these encounters constitute the basis of this document.

This draft has been gone over in depth, by dozens of our members and supporters in broad forum discussions. When it is approved by the movement council, it will become a platform for the movement's future activity, serving as an ideological basis for individuals and groups to identify with in the pursuit of common goals.

The "Marching Towards Reconciliation" Charter

What is "reconciliation" and what are its components?

The meaning of 'reconciliation' is: making peace/ ending a conflict in good spirits. Its components are: listening to the other; recognizing the other; the knowledge of and the understanding of the other; his language, his culture and his surroundings; a personal acquaintance with the other; recognizing needs and feelings of the other; mutual respect; mutual empathy; closeness; partnership.

Why "Marching Towards Reconciliation"?

The final reconciliation between Arabs and Jews in Israel is not possible yet, considering the absence of an agreement regarding the conflict, but partial reconciliation has been achieved in some communities and between neighbors in different places. Reconciliation depends on various forces in our region, including the Israeli and the Palestinian governments and the nations of the world. Thus, it is not about reaching a final outcome, but rather about activities that enhance the present situation and improve relationships in hopes of full reconciliation. Despite external dependence on various forces, we believe that civil activity within Israel can have a decisive influence on the outcome; thus citizens should take responsibility and act for their future.

The charter "Marching Towards Reconciliation" consists of 3 chapters. The first relates to the past and acknowledges narratives; the second deals with the present, with mutual agreement on aspects of the current situation; the third focuses on the future, on chosen directions of action that enhance reconciliation and ways to materialize it in practice.

The Past / Acknowledging Narratives

- 1. Our common origin:** traditionally, we are all the sons of Abraham, decedents of the same family.
- 2. Our common homeland:** the two peoples have historical rights and a religious connection to this piece of land.
- 3. Region and faith:** all of us, Jews, Muslims and Christians, are connected to religions that believe in one God and have parts of our traditions in common.
- 4. Language:** Hebrew and Arabic are similar, they share a common origin being sister languages.
- 5. Mutual recognition of pain and suffering:** We, the Jews, citizens of Israel, acknowledge the continuous suffering of many Israeli Arabs, stemming from the 1948 war, before and after, including the fact that many became refugees here and abroad. We realize that Israel's path to independence exacted a heavy price from the Arab inhabitants. We share the pain of our Arab brothers over these past events.

We, Arab citizens of Israel, acknowledge the great suffering of the Jewish people in both the near and distant past, by the hand of different nations, including the extermination of millions during the Holocaust in the Second World War. We regret the suffering and victimhood of Israeli Jews, brought about through violent battles and struggles before and after Israel was founded. We share the pain of our Jewish Israeli brothers regarding these past events.

- 6. Past injustices:** It is clear to us, both Jews and Arabs that many mistakes have been made in the past by both sides concerning the relationships of the two peoples. These mistakes caused difficulties, harm and suffering. We acknowledge these mistakes, regret them and wish to direct our efforts towards the future, to improve the situation and create a shared society, better and more tolerant.
- 7. Acknowledgement of the other's heritage:** We Jews and Arabs support the acknowledgement of the past and of the heritage of the other, including pain and suffering, and believe this recognition is vital in order for genuine reconciliation and for building of a shared society to take place.

The Present / Consensus Regarding the Current Situation

- 1. The character of the State of Israel:** Israel is the national state of the Jewish people, a democratic country, for all its citizens (including Jews, Arabs, Druze, Circassians and others). Israel is the common homeland for its Jewish and Arab citizens.
- 2. Our place:** We all live here as neighbors and we have no intention of going away.
- 3. Neighbors:** Despite past sufferings inflicted on us by our neighbors in Israel or elsewhere, we, Jews and Arabs share a unique desire to lead neighborly, friendly and collaborative relations, as much as possible for us and for our children.

- 4. Appreciation:** We, Arabs and Jews appreciate the culture of our neighbors, both in the past and now. We are certain that there is room for various cultures in our region and that it is essential to know the other's culture.
- 5. Respect:** We, Jews and Arabs respect our brothers/neighbors as human beings and as citizens, like us. We respect their being different as well as similar to us.
- 6. The value of equality:** Equality and civil rights are central values in our program and desired targets for us. Materializing these values would be a major accomplishment for our movement. Achieving equality and civil rights, including communal/civil service required of all parts of society would diminish discrepancies in civil rights.
- 7. The situation of inequality:** We, the Arab and Jewish citizens of Israel, acknowledge the gaps existing in the country between Arabs and Jews. Even though some gaps have decreased, it is clear to us that there is still inequality of allocation of resources in different areas, such as land, education, society and the economy. The power to change this lies mainly in the hands of the government, and we all support the goal of reaching equality. We will act, as civil society, to change the public awareness towards reaching this goal.
- 8. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict:** We, Jews and Arabs in Israel, are bothered by the lack of progress towards solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are aware of the fact that without solving this conflict, a full reconciliation among us all Israeli citizens will not be achieved; that the continuing political stagnation might lead to more endless bloodshed. We view the solution of the two states, one for the Jewish people and the other for the Palestinians, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, living peacefully one by the other, as the only solution.
- 9. Radicalization and polarization of the public:** We are deeply concerned about the radicalization and the polarization recently between Arabs and Jews in Israel. There are various reasons for this, but their expressions, some harsh and violent, damage the present, fragile social texture and even threaten to destroy it. We, Arabs and Jews in Israel find it essential to act against these tendencies and to set different actions in motion that will strengthen the partnership and the closeness among us always and now, in particular. We are aware of the fact that the relationships of Arabs and Jews are different in various areas. There are places where there are daily contacts, collaboration and friendships among the two peoples, but in most areas there is separation between us. Often our relationships are characterized by ignorance, prejudice, alienation and mutual fears. Our goals are to diminish ignorance, enhance mutual recognition and encourage feelings of belonging, thus decreasing alienation, hostility and fear.
- 10. Inspiration for the future:** Despite our past and present history, and without ignoring it, we wish to look for "the common good", to the future, to identify common interests. All of us, Jews and Arabs, harbor hope and the will to improve the current situation regarding the Arab-Jewish relationships in Israel. Moreover, we have a commitment to seek change as much as possible.

The Future / Consensus Regarding Chosen Action and Directions

The Vision:

Israel will be a society for Jews and Arabs alike, with equality for both peoples, as stated in our Declaration of Independence. Past injustices will be minimized through educational, social, economical and political activities, which will foster cultural identities while strengthening a sense of belonging on all sides to the State of Israel.

Detailed Future Directions of Action:

1. Education / Getting to know the other at a young age, in childhood and youth

- Operating twin schools, Arabs and Jewish, including common classes and involving parents at school.
- Integrating teachers and educators from both sectors in schools through the municipalities.
- Building mixed kindergartens in neighboring communities.
- Looking into the option of building common schools in the future based on accumulative experiences.
- Teaching the other language at schools and establishing Hebrew and Arabic courses in informal educational programs.
- Teaching the history of the other at schools and in informal educational programs.
- Teaching the art, the folklore and the traditions of the other in the educational system.
- Enhancing common sport activities from a young age: group and extreme sports, races etc.
- Initiating common social projects for young neighbors in archeology, environment, welfare etc.

2. Adult education: personal acquaintances and learning about the other's culture

- Creating common enrichment activities through Arabic/Hebrew language courses in community centers, colleges, etc.
- Offering lectures and courses on history, religion, tradition, music.
- Initiating leisure hikes, trips and visits that include reciprocity: getting to know the scenery in each society, the every-day routine, commercial venues, and enjoying private hosting.
- Creating activities for learning about the past, the heritage and the pain of the other, including the Jewish Holocaust, terror attacks, the Palestinian "Nakba", being refugees. Encouraging discussions on these subjects.
- Building mixed colleges for common study in various subject areas.

- Initiating common trips and hikes for Jews and Arabs in certain areas or based on topics of interest.
- Creating common leisure activities for neighboring communities: holidays, art, photography etc.
- Holding large assemblies, performances, cultural festivals in Arab villages. These will introduce the Arab communities to Jews who have refrained from visiting them.
- Planting new forests and gardens that will serve for future time spent together.
- Initiating wide spread common circles of discussions that will enable a continuous and free dialogue between Jews and Arabs.
- Focusing on women's special ability for social interaction through encouragement of women's activities.
- Increasing social involvement in colleges and universities.

3. Deepening and widening of civil/communal services in the Arab sector

- Removing the obstacles found in current leadership, expanding the civil services involving the municipalities.
- Developing new routes for civil services and expanding the benefits for mixed populations.
- Building mixed preparatory programs for a year of service after graduating high school.

4. Creating features and new icons for a communal society

- Adopting a new song for the communal society in Israel that will reflect its values.
- Setting a day that will celebrate reconciliation and shared life in common.
- Forming a mixed dance group and creating a dance to have in common.
- Creating mixed musical bands to compose new Israeli music.
- Building a mixed theatre group that will deal with common social issues.
- Diminishing the use of the terms ' Arab minority' and 'Arab sector' in favor of 'Arab society'. Words create meaning.
- Building recreational sport parks for adults and children in suitable areas between neighboring settlements.

5. Positioning the subject of Jews/Arabs relationships in The Israeli public awareness

- Creating "response teams" that will express our views publicly on current affairs; producing petitions on such matters.
- Establishing an active strategy for public media exposure
- Creating a position of "common society promoter" in municipalities where it is possible.
- Initiating special sport events, art and cultural activities such as horse riding and marches.

Appendix: our views concerning essential nationwide activity

- Completing outline plans for the different needs
- Building of employment centers in Arab settlements and in shared industrial parks.
- Equalization of education, health and social budgets in the Arab sector based on comparable budgets in the Jewish sector, including affirmative action until gaps are closed.
- Encouraging the cultivation of identity, culture and heritage in Arab society, along with fostering a sense of civil belonging to the state of Israel.

Conclusion

The paper of "Marching Towards Reconciliation" documents the outcome of an unusual process, led by wide circles of Arab and Jewish Israeli citizens in 2016. During the process a new and an inspiring dialogue was born, an on-going discussion developed, which has given rise to great hopes for the future. The sometimes painful exploration carried out in meetings led to a closeness among the participants, which gave birth to new ideas and suggestions for the future, accompanied by a genuine will to materialize them. The end result is this document, which constitutes the initial and comprehensive platform of its members, who aspire to find common ground in relating to the past, present and future relationships of Jews and Arabs in the State of Israel.

We predict that many Israelis will be able to identify with much of this document's content. "Marching Towards Reconciliation" is a platform for bringing people on both sides together, for challenging them into action through the various suggestions offered, in hopes of a better future for us, and for our children.