

The Jewish Nation-State Bill and the Palestinian Minority

This past autumn witnessed a great amount of turmoil in Israel and Palestine, from tensions at Al-Aqsa to a rise in violent hate crimes and state-sanctioned violence. It is within this context that the bill, “Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People” was proposed, causing a great amount of controversy. This bill, approved by the Israeli Cabinet on November 23rd, seeks to codify Israel as a Jewish state for Jewish people. To that end, it would institutionalize Jewish law as the foundation for state legislation and remove Arabic from the list of official languages.

To the Arab minority of Israel, including Druze and Bedouins, this bill appears to be the inevitable codification of what has been increasingly apparent – Israel is no longer a democratic state with equality for all of its citizens. It has moved from its original political ideology of “Jewish and democratic” to merely “Jewish”. Such a legislative action would essentially make all Arab citizens, 20% of the Israeli population, second class citizens and continuously make it easier for racist bills and laws to survive in both the Knesset and the judicial system.

In defense of the bill, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that all citizens would enjoy equal rights, yet, “there are national rights only for the Jewish people - a flag, anthem, the right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel and other national symbols.” ([The Guardian](#), November 23, 2014) In essence, Arab individuals would still be granted individual rights under the law, including the right to vote which the law protects, but would be denied collective rights. The state would be absolved of any responsibility to preserve Arab culture and heritage, such as funding for Christian and Muslim organizations and institutions. Such rights would be reserved for Jews alone. Finally, the passing of this bill into law would also effectively end any hope of the Right of Return for Palestinian Refugees.

The bill was approved by the Cabinet by a majority of 14-7, meaning it will now appear before the Knesset, although it is unclear when that will happen. Regardless of the success of this bill, the Palestinian minority within Israel faces discriminatory practices and systems every day. Nonetheless, this bill would be a dangerous step towards Israel’s clear nature as a racist state and would officially legislate the second-class nature of the Arab population as one of the Basic Laws of Israel.

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Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees

Main Sources:

“Israeli Cabinet Approves Bill Defining Nation-State of Jewish People,” [The Guardian](#), November 23, 2014.

“Israel's Jewish Nation-State Bill: a Primer,” [Haaretz](#), November 25, 2014.

“One Nation, Divided Under Law,” [Foreign Policy](#), December 5, 2014.