

## Meet Member of Knesset Haneen Zoabi



Haneen Zoabi is a member of the Israeli Knesset and the first woman to have been elected to the Knesset on an Arab political party list. She bravely advocates for equal citizenship rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel and also calls for an end to the Occupation. Haneen is a member of the Palestinian- minority in Israel, and was born in Nazareth.

At an early age, Haneen expressed an interest in politics. But it was her experience as an Arab woman living inside of Israel that drove her to run for political office. Haneen says that Arab women in Israel suffer from inequality on two levels: first as Palestinians enduring national and social discrimination, and secondly as women struggling for equality within society.

Haneen received a Bachelors of Arts in philosophy and psychology from the University of Haifa, and earned a Masters of Arts in communications from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She was the first Palestinian citizen of Israel to graduate in media studies, and later established the first media classes in Arab schools. She also worked as a mathematics teacher and as a school inspector for the Israeli Ministry of Education. In 2003, she co-founded the I'lam – Media Center for Arab Palestinians in Israel; she was its general director until she resigned before the 2009 election to focus on her political career.

Haneen joined the National Democratic Assembly (NDA or “Balad”) party in 1995, shortly after it was established. The NDA maintains a one-third quota for women candidates and advocates for the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Haneen emphasizes the need to recognize Palestinians as equal citizens in Israel. “I am not an immigrant”, she stresses, “This is my homeland. We are the indigenous people. I have a vision of our rights as indigenous people. We didn’t migrate to Israel; it is Israel that migrated to us.” She says this reality is not recognized in her country, noting for example that Palestinian students cannot study their history in schools—not even in Arab schools.

Further, Haneen has been active in speaking out against the some 30 laws in Israel that legally discriminate against Palestinians. Explaining the impact of the discriminatory Citizenship Law, Haneen notes that, “For example, I cannot marry a Palestinian from Ramallah or Gaza, or from Lebanon or Syria and have a family here, because Israel wants to preserve a Jewish majority.”

Palestinian women in Israel and the 1967 Occupied Territories have a unique struggle, and Haneen advocates for feminists in Israel to support them. “We can’t call ourselves feminists if we occupy other women, demolish their homes, force them to live under a blockade, support settlement expansion, and then come home and talk about women’s rights.” Supporting women struggling for peace and justice must start with challenging discrimination against Palestinians. Zoabi is widely recognized to be the most active Knesset member in both investigations and agenda proposals pertaining to women’s rights issues.

Haneen is working within and outside of the political system to change the status quo—and ultimately bring justice and equality to all people in the region.

For more information about Haneen’s positions on women’s rights, and equality for all citizens of Israel see:

[“Who are you calling a Feminist?”](#) *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 March 2011

- “Real feminism must acknowledge the discrimination against Arab women in this country, and real feminism must know to identify with and struggle alongside them, on the national, civil and social levels.”

[“Zoabi: If Balad is banned, Arabs won’t vote”](#) *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 December 2012

- “They are not against Haneen as a person, they are against the model of a Palestinian who doesn’t agree with dictates from Israel and who has his own definition of democracy which is based on humanistic values. They are against those who say that Israel is not a democracy. What’s challenging for them is that I’m suggesting a truly democratic platform.”

[“Palestinians in Israel have used the contradiction between Zionism and democracy to reconstruct their national project”](#) *Mondoweiss*, 12 December 2012

- “The demand for a ‘state of all its citizens’ has put the Palestinians in Israel at the heart of the direct confrontation with the political rubric of ‘the Jewish state’ that epitomises the Zionist enterprise. The ‘state of all its citizens’ project has forced the ‘Jewish state’ to admit the primacy that it grants to Jewish-Zionist values over democratic values, and to recognise the impossibility of coexistence between the two.”