

האגודה לזכויות האזרח בישראל
جمعية حقوق المواطن في اسرائيل
The Association for Civil Rights in Israel



רופאים לזכויות אדם - ישראל (ע"ד)
أطباء لحقوق الإنسان - إسرائيل
Physicians For Human Rights - Israel



הוועד הציבורי נגד
צ'ינוייה
בישראל



במקום מתמגמג למען זכות חסנו (ע"ד)
مخبطون من أجل حقوق التخطيط
Planners for Planning Rights BIMKOM

November 26, 2009

To
Michael Eitan, Minister
The Knesset
Jerusalem

Ze'ev Elkin, MK
The Knesset
Jerusalem

Dear Sirs,

Re: **Conference on December 1, 2009 on donations to civil society from foreign countries**

We, the organizations listed at the top of this letter, are writing to you as sponsors of the conference by *NGO Monitor* and the "Institute for Zionist Strategies" that is going to take place at the Knesset on December 1, 2009.

As you surely know, those of us who were invited to the conference decided not to attend. Since we do not usually turn down such invitations, we would like to explain.

First of all, we believe it is indeed very important to maintain transparency in the public administration of various bodies, including registered associations (*Amutot*). We practice this principle ourselves. It is well known that the undersigned organizations have for years publicized their goals, their activities, their supporters and more. All of the information on these matters is open to the public on the organizations' websites, with the registrar of nonprofit organizations and in our public statements. We consider living up to a high standard of transparency to be part of our public role, and that is indeed how we have been acting for a long time. We are particularly careful to follow the letter and the spirit of the law on these matters.

But the materials distributed for the conference on December 1 give us the blunt impression that under the banner of "transparency," there are some who wish to further different goals: that the conference you have undertaken to lead is meant first of all to delegitimize human rights and social change organizations in Israel, whose world view is not consistent with the organizers'. Unfortunately, delegitimization is part of a broader phenomenon to which we have been exposed recently, reflected in a series of comments, bills, reports and conferences, in which senior elected officials as well as civil servants have taken part.

This delegitimization does not threaten only human rights organizations in Israel. We wish to stress that those who are trying to intimidate the human rights organizations in Israel are first and foremost seriously violating the rules of democracy; presently, that violation is aimed at those whose opinions may not be convenient to some of us, but it negatively affects and will affect in the future the whole spectrum of opinions and positions. Those who wish to silence the voices they do not like are spitting into the well from which we all drink.

Civil society criticism of the government and activities to realize universal human rights are legitimate activities in a democratic system. Moreover, expressing criticism and allowing the

expression of a range of voices and opinions in the country is not only "legitimate;" it is **essential** in a true democracy. The attempt to violate citizens' freedom of speech, freedom of action and freedom of organization, contradicts the most basic values of democracy.

We would like to stress that the main victims of the attempts to delegitimize the organizations are the most disempowered communities, whose most basic human rights have been violated or are at risk -- whether they are refugees, labor migrants or Palestinians in the occupied territories; or whether they are new immigrants, disempowered socioeconomic groups or different groups in Israel: Arabs, Ethiopians, GLBTs, women, single parents, patients and others. Human rights organizations serve as a voice to these groups and work with them to promote their rights when they cannot do so alone.

Furthermore, contrary to the misleading picture portrayed by the report presented to the conference, foreign countries contribute to a vast range of organizations and activities in Israel (universities, medical causes, research and others); in fact, unfortunately, the percent of donations that go to human rights and social change organizations is a fraction of those contributions. It is also worth mentioning that the government of Israel itself is probably the leading recipient of funding in Israel from foreign countries. Therefore, **the assault on the funding exclusively of human rights organizations can only be understood as an assault with a political agenda, whose goal is not transparency but silencing.** In any case, and in complete contradiction to what the report claims, support for organizations that promote agendas of defending human rights is both legitimate and desirable. It is support for the goal of bolstering Israeli democracy and promoting human rights for which the government of Israel is responsible, and which are universal, legitimate and overt rights.

Therefore, since it is clear that the subject of this conference is not transparency but the delegitimization of human rights and social change organizations whose agenda is different than that of the organizers, we do not intend to attend the conference. We are not "suspect organizations;" we are a central part of the civil society infrastructure necessary for the existence of substantive democracy. We have been acting as such for many years and shall continue doing so: to promote the values, the vision and the goals for which we exist.

We call on you to renounce the attempts to delegitimize the human rights and social change organizations in Israel; to support the existence of a pluralistic society, where human rights and social change organizations have an essential role in the realization of democracy and human rights; and to strengthen the status of the rights organizations, including the civil society organizations, who have an important role in a democratic state as critics of the government and representatives of the most disempowered communities.

Sincerely,

Hagai Elad, Director	Jessica Montell, Director	Roi Maor, General Manager	Ishai Menuchin, Director
Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)	B'Tselem	Yesh Din	Public Committee Against Torture Israel
Hassan Jabareen, Director	Yudith Oppenheimer, Director	Dalia Dromi, Director	Sari Bashi, Director
Adallah	Ir Amim	Bimkom	Gisha
Ran Yaron, Director of OPT Department	Dalia Kerstein, Director	Mikhael Manekin, Director	
Physicians for Human Rights - Israel	Hamoked – Center for the Defense of the Individual	Breaking the Silence	