

14 September 2007

Campaign against Civic Service Launched

The Association for Arab Youth – "Baladna" and the "Coalition of Youth against Civic Service" launched a campaign this week against civic Service, in response to the Israeli government's proposal to introduce a Voluntary National Service for young Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. The campaign was launched with the distribution of part of a series of posters and flyers to the public carrying the slogan: "National Service – Your Way to the Army".

The Coalition of Youth against Civic Service is a group of political, social and national organizations in Israel that have come together to take a stand against the Israeli government's proposal for the civic/national service project for young Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. According to Nadem Nashef, the director of Baladna, "We will use various methods to achieve our goal of rejecting civic/national service; these methods include media, legal means and education, formal and non-formal".

The Coalition has released an announcement regarding its future plans, which include a national conference to be held on the 27th of October, the production of three short films, organizing a mobile cultural tent for young people, and distributing a series of posters and flyers via email, the press, websites, etc., in attempt to reach as many young people as possible.

The Israeli government's attempt to integrate young Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel into civic/national/military service and the Community Police is a threat to our identity and therefore the existence of our Arab Palestinian culture. It is also a demonstration of the Israeli government's discrimination against us and an attempt to further marginalize our society.

In August 2006, the Minister of Education, Yuli Tamir, stated the Israeli government's intention to introduce voluntary national service for young Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. In December 2006 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert appointed a former officer and the chief psychologist of the Israeli army as the head of a new unit within his office, with the aim of initiating the recruitment of young Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel into civic service. Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel are currently in no way obliged to perform national or military service. Tamir's proposal would bring Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel one step closer towards having to undertake the compulsory military service which Jewish Israeli citizens must undertake.

Through this proposal, young Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel are being asked to take part in the development of a society in which it is discriminated against. Until the state fully recognizes the Arab Palestinian minority in its population as equal citizens, which it currently does not, and ends its systematic discrimination, it is absurd that they should be asked to participate in this service.

The idea of asking young Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel to participate in the occupation and oppression of their Palestinian people in the occupied territories is totally preposterous.

Last year, the Coalition released a petition against civic service. Through this petition, which was signed by national associations, Arab political parties and thousands of young people across the region, the Coalition clarified its reasons for objecting to Israeli civic service and also set out its ideas and goals for the future.

To form an effective work plan the Coalition worked intensively with The Committee against Civic Service and Forms of Enlistment, a branch of The High Follow-Up Committee for the Arabs in Israel.

The Campaign against Civic Service, funded by The Welfare Association and led by Baladna – Association for Arab Youth, encourages and fosters values of social voluntarism and of giving back to society, for it is our role as part of society to develop a sense of a Palestinian national identity. The Coalition aims at raising awareness among Palestinian youth in Israel regarding the dangers and threats of national or civic service to Palestinian young people's national identity and civil rights. The Coalition's campaign is built to appeal to today's modern youth; thus, it includes different forms of art, music and media, all of which speak out against the false claims of the Israeli government.

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