



New Israel Fund Report

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הקרן החדשה לישראל
New Israel Fund
الصندوق الجديد لإسرائيل

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

In the 40 years since its founding, the New Israel Fund (NIF) has provided over \$350 million to more than 900 trailblazing organizations, building the foundations of progressive civil society in Israel. NIF supports initiatives that defend Israel's democratic institutions, combat racism, promote equality, fight for basic freedoms and human rights, and broaden the scope of civic partnership, forging the type of broad-based alliances that are critical for the future of Israel's democracy and shared society.

NIF and its civil society partners are adjusting to the new reality of the novel coronavirus pandemic, with dramatic implications not just for organizations' activities and operations, but for Israel's democracy, state protections for vulnerable communities, and the country's treatment of Palestinians living under occupation. Under the leadership of Israel's largest ever government, a unity government formed by Benjamin Netanyahu and his former rival Benny Gantz of Blue and White, Israel is taking step to annex Jewish settlements in the West Bank. NIF and a broad spectrum of civil society partners are prioritizing and coordinating work to prevent any annexation of occupied territory, which would compromise the democratic nature of the State of Israel and potentially eliminate hope for a two-state solution.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Jewish and Palestinian Israelis are rallying in solidarity and a sense of shared responsibility to lift up the most vulnerable, support health providers and first-responders, call for the humane and equitable treatment of all residents, and defend Israel's democratic institutions. NIF and Shatil, its action arm, are playing a key role in cultivating and leveraging collaboration between Israel's social change organizations, amplifying the voices and actions of thousands of Israelis who share NIF's vision for a liberal, egalitarian, and shared society in Israel.

CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The legacy of the nationalist right's political dominance over the past decade has been mounting anti-democratic attitudes and policies; the COVID-19 crisis has empowered and emboldened the government to institute additional reactionary policies, making civil society organizations' work to protect the lives and rights of everyone living under Israeli control more vital than ever. NIF's flagship grantee, the *Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)*, along with others including *Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel*, *B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories*, *Human Rights Defenders Fund (HRDF)*, and *Physicians for Human Rights – Israel (PHRI)*, are working to stem the tide of anti-democratic legislation and protect Israeli residents' fundamental rights.

Recent Accomplishments

- **Overturing the “Expropriation Law”:** A High Court ruling on petitions filed (in part with direct NIF funding assistance) by *Adalah* and *ACRI*, *Yesh Din*, and *Peace Now* found that the “Law for the Regularization of Settlement in Judea and Samaria” – which retroactively approved illegal Jewish settlement construction on private Palestinian land – was unconstitutional.
- **Defending freedom of expression and combating discrimination in government funding:** The High Court accepted a petition filed by *ACRI* in 2016 arguing that incentives offered by the Ministry of Culture to cultural activities in the settlements are illegal and discriminatory.
- **Upholding freedom of protest:** After a convoy of cars demonstrating against anti-democratic government actions was prevented by police from entering Jerusalem, *ACRI* appealed to the head of the Israel Police and the policy was changed.
- **Demanding West Bank Palestinians' rights:** Following calls from *ACRI*, *Kav LaOved*, and *PHRI*, a new government legal memorandum stated that employers of Palestinian workers must provide them with housing and medical insurance.
- **Protecting the rights of asylum seekers and migrant workers:** Israel's High Court of Justice struck down the “Deposit Law,” which required refugees and asylum seekers to place 20 percent of their

earnings in a locked account that could be retrieved only if they leave Israel, and ordered the state to return the funds within 30 days.

- **Providing tools to civil society organization in their fight against annexation:** To increase the impact of diverse organizations' efforts to prevent West Bank annexation, NIF funded a study that examined the effectiveness of various messages for anti-annexation campaigns, which enhanced the efficacy of numerous anti-annexation campaigns.
- **Upholding transgender rights:** The Tel Aviv district court ruled in favor of transgender rights in a case in which *ACRI* joined in defending the café chain *Aroma* against a class action suit filed by a group of women who opposed the company's policy of providing unisex restrooms for customers' use.

Looking Ahead

NIF and its grantees will remain vigilant in combating the erosion of Israel's democracy and upholding of basic rights during the COVID-19 crisis and in its aftermath. NIF will also continue work to prevent annexation, which will have critical implications for both Israel's democracy and human rights in the West Bank. NIF will also continue to support organizations and initiatives defending the rule of law and the judicial branch, and is stepping up efforts to support freedom of assembly and to fight over-policing and police brutality.

PALESTINIAN SOCIETY

Palestinian-Israeli leaders and civil society organizations, many of them NIF grantees, have been urgently calling on the government and health maintenance organizations to address the wide gaps between services provided to Jewish and Palestinian communities in Israel. In addition, *Shatil*, NIF and its grantees continue to work toward enhanced security, improved quality of life, and equal access to housing opportunities for Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Recent Accomplishments

- **Halting Bedouin home demolitions during the COVID-19 health crisis:** The Ministry of Justice committed to cease all Bedouin home demolitions during the March-May COVID-19 lockdown following calls from twenty-three civil society organizations, including the *Regional Council for Unrecognized Villages in the Negev*, the *Negev Coexistence Forum*, *Shatil*, *Adalah*, *ACRI*, *Sikkuy - The Association for Advancement of Civic Equality*, *Omdim Beyachad (Standing Together)*, *PHRI*, and *Bimkom*.
- **Cracking the housing shortage:** *ACAP's* efforts helped increase existing and planned availability of housing in nine Arab towns by over 15,000 units and secure allocations of NIS 78 million (\$22.5 million) to strengthen municipal engineering departments and help subsidize land development as part of a three-stage Ministry of Construction and Housing program.
- **Combating discriminatory budgeting:** Following *Adalah's* petition to the Supreme Court, Ministry of Interior and Finance officials held talks with NIF grantee *The National Committee for the Heads of Arab Local Authorities in Israel* to allocate NIS 200 million (US \$57.2 million) for Arab towns, where the severe economic repercussions of the coronavirus crisis are threatening provision of essential public services.
- **Accessing the right to education:** A productive community and legal campaign on behalf of parents' associations and the *Regional Council for Unrecognized Arab Villages*, led by *ACRI* and with *Shatil's* assistance, yielded a precedent-setting ruling that the government must provide for the transport and schooling of children from unrecognized villages studying in nearby recognized Bedouin regional councils.

Looking Ahead

NIF will support emerging initiatives to ensure protections for Palestinian-Israeli communities under increased threat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of NIF's work to address the growing problem of violence in Palestinian-Israeli communities, the *National Committee of Arab Local Authorities in Israel* is launching a pilot intervention plan to address root causes of violence, such as unemployment and poverty. NIF's priorities in this issue area also extend to developing housing solutions for the Palestinian-Israeli sector and to supporting interventions to address escalating violence in Palestinian-Israeli communities.

SHARED SOCIETY AND COMBATING RACISM

NIF grantees *Sikkuy*, the *Abraham Initiatives*, *Omdim Beyachad (Standing Together)*, and many other organizations are standing shoulder to shoulder to advocate for equal protections for all of Israel's communities during this health crisis. Recent months have witnessed an outpouring of appreciation for Israel's medical professionals, more than 20 percent of whom are Arab, which has underscored for many the inter-reliance of Jewish and Palestinian society. Perhaps now more than ever, the work of NIF and its grantees is resonating with and rallying the many Israelis who decry the rise in racist rhetoric, policies, and attitudes.

Recent Accomplishments

- **Ensuring Arab representation in coronavirus-related emergency decision-making processes:** Following petitions by *Sikkuy* and the *National Committee of Arab Local Authorities* as well as advocacy and a media campaign led by the Shatil-led *Jewish-Arab Citizens' Forum for the Promotion of Health in the Galilee*, the government's interdepartmental coronavirus emergency decision-making team added its first Palestinian committee member, Prof. Bishara Basharat, president of the Arab Society Health Development Association and a member of the *Forum*.
- **Banning racist politicians:** *Tag Meir* and *IRAC's Racism Crisis Center (RCC)* received an emergency NIF grant to petition the Supreme Court to bar leaders from the racist party *Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power)* from running for the Knesset; three party leaders were banned from running in the recent elections. The *RCC's* sustained legal campaign resulted in Bentzi Gopstein, the notoriously racist leader of the Jewish anti-assimilation organization *Lehava* and a member of *Otzma Yehudit*, being charged with incitement to violence and racism and support for terrorism. If convicted, Gopstein could face up to five years imprisonment.
- **Fighting discriminatory practices in the education system:** *Noar Kahalacha* succeeded in pressuring the city of Elad to publish a list of ultra-Orthodox schools that do not discriminate against prospective students from Mizrahi (Middle Eastern or North African) backgrounds. This is a step toward delegitimizing the common practice among ultra-Orthodox schools of only accepting a small percentage of Mizrahi pupils.
- **Curbing exclusion and discrimination:** *IRAC* collaborated with the organization *Mossawa* to stop the practice of large employers (such as hospitals and factories) demanding that only workers from Arab villages present evidence that they had tested negative for COVID-19. The organizations further compelled local municipalities to issue instructions to prevent discrimination.

Looking Ahead

NIF is developing and expanding initiatives to deepen Jewish-Arab partnership and to promote an equal, shared society. To that end, one of NIF's focuses is increasing the prominence of Palestinian citizens on

the public stage, especially in mainstream media. As always, work toward building Israel's shared society goes hand in hand with efforts to combat racism against Arabs and other minority groups in Israel. NIF also will continue to provide support for Ethiopian-Israeli activists as they tackle endemic racism against their community.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

NIF grantee organizations have successfully elevated religious freedom's prominence within the public conversation and advanced local actions, such as increasing municipal budgets for pluralistic activity, publicizing and often succeeding in reversing gender segregation and women's exclusion from public life and institutions, and pushing back against the increased presence of religion in secular schools. NIF continues to support initiatives to erode the Chief Rabbinate's monopoly over Jewish life and use the courts to promote changes in conversion, representation of women in religious life, and funding and recognition of non-Orthodox religious life. Alongside this work, NIF and Shatil work to bolster moderate voices in religious communities, those able to move the public toward a more pluralistic interpretation of Jewish values and norms.

Recent Accomplishments

- **Launching public transport on Shabbat:** In part thanks to *IRAC's* ongoing work and longstanding campaigns by *Be Free Israel (Israel Hofsheet)* and other NIF grantees, Tel Aviv and nearby areas introduced public transportation on Saturdays in November 2019, attracting tens of thousands of passengers. In the wake of the success of these Shabbat buses in Tel Aviv, other localities throughout the country intend to begin operating public transportation on the Jewish day of rest.
- **Promoting egalitarian support for religious leaders:** A more than decade-long battle by *ACRI* to secure equal pay for Ethiopian-Israeli rabbis resulted in a ruling by the National Labor Court that the rabbis had been discriminated against by national religious councils and will receive compensatory back-pay on their wages since the 1990s. In addition, petitions by *IRAC* resulted in the government providing funding for the salaries of non-Orthodox rabbis who serve in towns. (Previously, only regional council rabbis were funded by the state.)
- **Upholding religious freedom.** A High Court petition by the Secular Forum and *Adalah* resulted in a decision that neither hospitals, the Rabbinate, nor the Health Ministry have the authority to prohibit leavened bread products (*hametz*) from being brought into hospitals during Passover.

Looking Ahead

Israel's new governing coalition, which includes Blue and White, for which religious freedom has been a banner issue, presents NIF grantees with new opportunities to advance key issues such as civil marriage and expanding public transportation on Saturdays, and to push back against religious coercion and extremism. NIF continues to expand its activity with organizations strengthening moderate voices within the religious community, including ultra-Orthodox Israelis, some of whom are increasingly open to secular learning, employment outside the home, and new technology. NIF's work with *The New Haredim* provides a jumping-off point as NIF seeks to build further relationships with those in the ultra-Orthodox community who are committed to developing a vibrant civil society.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

NIF aims to safeguard Israel's democracy and build a cohesive society by narrowing social and economic gaps within the Israeli population. The COVID-19 pandemic has left economically vulnerable Israelis the

hardest hit, and Israel has been slow to present a comprehensive social and economic plan to handle the rapid economic slowdown and high unemployment. Even before the onset of the pandemic, Israeli hospitals were dangerously overcrowded and understaffed, and differences in access to medical care across communities and geographies, dangerous before the pandemic, are exigent now. As described throughout this proposal, NIF grantees are mounting campaigns to attend to the most pressing needs of vulnerable communities and building broad coalitions to drive social change to benefit all Israelis.

Recent Accomplishments

- **Keeping roofs over the heads of vulnerable Israelis:** The Housing Ministry provided direct assistance and eased bureaucracy for public housing residents during the current health and economic crisis, following appeals from *ACRI* and the Shatil-led *Public Housing Forum*.
- **Protecting benefits for the needy.** Thanks in part to the *Israel Women's Network's* advocacy, the Knesset passed a bill enabling those laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic to retroactively receive both unemployment benefits and other government allowances for which they were eligible. More than 50,000 individuals, mostly disabled people, single mothers, and women between the ages of 62 and 67 who either lost their jobs or were put on unpaid leave, received thousands of shekels that were deducted from their government allowances in March – May.
- **Protecting women's benefits and rights.** Following the enactment of emergency regulations that allowed employers to lay off without restrictions pregnant women or those on maternity leave, women's and human rights organizations, including *ACRI*, *Itach-Maaki: Women Lawyers for Social Justice*, *Adalah*, *IWN*, and others petitioned the Supreme Court. Soon after, the government rescinded the decision.

Looking Ahead

During this health crisis and beyond, NIF will continue to focus on projects and organizations that empower disenfranchised Israelis, emphasizing emergent and urgent needs. NIF and Shatil continue to advocate to ensure the adoption of the expansive housing plan introduced in 2017, which called for an addition of 72,000 housing units over a decade. Shatil and NIF grantees will monitor the implementation of hard-won policy gains and regulations related to both housing and regional budgetary allocations, and to equitable tax-revenue distribution for underprivileged communities that suffer from fewer resources and greater need.

NEW INITIATIVES FOR DEMOCRACY (NIFD)

NIF launched its New Initiatives for Democracy (NIFD) program in 2014 to strengthen Israel's character as a vibrant, liberal democracy by identifying and supporting organizations that crosscut individual issues and unite and expand the progressive sector. NIF, with Shatil's convening and capacity-building support, is supporting NIFD grantees that are building progressive power by bringing together dozens of pro-democracy leaders and activists who specialize in different issues, sectors, and strategies, but share goals of advancing democracy and human rights, shared society, social justice, full equality for Palestinian Israelis, and religious freedom.

Recent Accomplishments

- **Building the constituency for Jewish-Arab partnership:** With the leadership of *Omdim Beyachad (Standing Together)*, dozens of social change organizations mounted a united call for expanded aid and state responsibility for citizens' welfare. National demonstrations have been held across the country under the banner "The People Against the Disconnected." For the first time in many years, a broad, cross-sector spectrum of Jewish and Palestinian Israelis have united behind a joint call for government accountability and fair economic policies.

- **Guarding against incitement, misinformation, and voter intimidation in national election campaigns:** *The Seventh Eye's* monitoring of covert election propaganda in social media led to Facebook limiting Likud's activity on Facebook and suspending the account activity of Netanyahu's chatbot. The *Democratic Bloc* uncovered suspicious Facebook profiles linked to suppressing Palestinian-Israeli voting, prompting Facebook to remove seven of the accounts. Disclosure research by the *Democratic Bloc* partner Lighthouse revealing that Jewish settlers were behind an Arabic-language campaign calling on Arab citizens to boycott the elections received extensive coverage in Arab media. The several organizations working with *Citizens' HQ* helped expose misinformation and fake news, campaign irregularities, and the funding sources of extremist groups, garnering coverage in front page articles in Yedioth Ahronoth and in The Nation. *Zazim* and *Standing Together's* work contributed to the Central Elections Committee's rejection of Likud's request to install cameras in predominantly Arab polling stations.
- **Exposing funding sources of extremist activity:** NIF grantees the *Movement for Freedom of Information (MFOI)* and the *Democratic Bloc* revealed discriminatory government spending and other sources of funding for ultra-nationalist groups, along with up-to-date figures on the Israeli government's investments in the settlements.

Looking Ahead

Many NIFD grantees are actively involved in leading the opposition to Israeli annexation of West Bank territories. One example is the NIF-seeded collaboration between the *Democratic Bloc*, *Mehazkim*, *Standing Together*, *Shatil*, and *Lighthouse* (which specializes in opposition research), *Citizens' Headquarters*. *Citizens' HQ*, with the support of an NIF emergency grant, is focused on coordinating and amplifying efforts of groups fighting to prevent annexation. NIF also recently provided an emergency grant to a pop-up Jewish-Arab think tank established by NIFD grantee *Alliance for Israel's Future* to address the need for coherent, inclusive policy proposals following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Called "Crisis Expert Committees," the group produced and publicized joint Jewish-Arab expert analyses and prescriptions on health; welfare; planning, housing and transportation; economy and employment; education; women; police-civilian relations; local governance; and justice, work that has been widely covered in the press and further form the basis of ongoing advocacy. Later this year NIF and *Shatil* will convene an online summit of NIFD grantees and other partners to further a unified strategy for the promotion of democratic values in Israel.

IN CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic requires unprecedented flexibility and ingenuity from NIF and its civil society partners; what remains immutable is NIF's commitment to its core values of democracy, equality, and shared society. In the coming months, NIF will continue to provide emergency assistance to Israel's most vulnerable communities, monitor and defend human rights and democratic institutions, and support civil society by helping organizations act strategically and resourcefully as they navigate these challenging times. We look forward to partnering with you to ensure that democratic and progressive values remain central to Israel's character today and in the future.