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The Abraham Fund Initiatives: Law Gives Legal Justification to Nationality-based discrimination

A law bid granting preferences to Israelis who served in the army or in national service will in practice make it harder for Arab citizens to take part in the workforce, and will deepen the economic gaps between Jews and Arabs in Israel - The Abraham Fund Initiatives said in response to the "Rights Of Those Contributing to The State" law bid, by MK Yariv Levin (Likkud), that is to be discussed today by the Ministerial Committee for Legislation.

The Abraham Fund objects to preferences for those who serve as long as the option of national/civic service is not a viable option for most young Arabs. That is because the national/civil service in its current framework is a subject for deep controversy in the Arab society and does not constitute a consensual volunteering option. Moreover, the numbers of volunteering positions offered by the state for Arab youth are not meeting the demand that exists, meaning that not everyone wishing to volunteer can do so.

The NGO explained that the bid's proposed amendment to the "Equal Opportunities Employment" law will render the protection from nationality-based discrimination meaningless. This will deepen the existing discrimination against Arabs in the workforce, which is one of the main obstacles for the minority's economic integration, and will give a legal justification to racist trends such as businesses taking pride in not hiring Arabs and publicizing themselves under the slogan "Hebrew Labor".

In addition, the bid's section pertaining to preference for spots in university dorms for those who served in the army or national service, stands in contradiction to the State's own efforts to make the higher education system more accessible to Arabs, as described in a report by the Council for Higher Education's (CHE) Planning and Budgeting Committee issued last March.

Co-executive directors of The Abraham Fund Initiatives, Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu and Mohammad Darawshe said: "The government must initiate dialogue with the Arab leadership regarding community volunteering for young Arabs as part of a broader framework for narrowing socio-economic gaps between Jews and Arabs. As long as there is no agreed framework, any attempts to legislate preferences for those who partake in national service will damage the efforts to integrate Arabs into the workforce and the higher education system, including efforts led by the State itself. Also, such legislation attempts are perceived by the Arab minority as affirming their concerns that the current framework of national service is only meant to justify discrimination, and thus do not create incentives for volunteering."



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