



The annual report you hold in your hands is a record of our organization's activities and accomplishments in 2022. The positive and optimistic tone of the report is a testament to the work of our dedicated staff and supporters, who seized the moment that the "government of change" (2021-2022) provided and made incredible progress in advancing shared society.

As you know, much has happened in the six months since the end of last year. Unlike the previous coalition government, which for the first time in Israel's history included a party representing Palestinian citizens of Israel, the current government contains ministers who are deeply hostile to the ideals of equality and shared society. Several, including the minister in charge of the police (Itamar Ben-Gvir), have lengthy records of open bigotry and continue to espouse hate from positions of power. The threat posed not only to our work but to all who care about Israeli democracy cannot be overstated.

We are likewise alarmed at the government proposal to undermine the independence of Israel's judiciary, particularly the High Court. The court often serves as an arbiter of last resort for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the prospect of its rulings has in the past prevented extremist legislation from being passed. The Abraham Initiatives has been involved in the extraordinary protest movement since its first week, where we have emphasized the importance of including Arab society.

Perhaps most tragically, the decline in murders in the Arab community last year has not continued. Indeed, murders are on track to more than double in 2023. This failure of the government to protect its citizens is inexcusable. Unfortunately, it is not surprising: Much of the cooperative infrastructure established by the last government within the Ministry of Public Security has been either neglected or dismantled.

Despite these setbacks, we hope you will take the time to read and appreciate our 2022 annual report. First, because it shows what is possible when shared society initiatives succeed. Second, because all hope is not lost. Many of our most important accomplishments, from securing budget commitments for mixed cities to the national adoption of Shared Learning, remain on track—but we must be vigilant and proactive in defending them. Furthermore, even with a national political leadership such as this one, there remain opportunities to achieve our priorities through advocacy and persistent government relations work.

Below, you will find our analysis of the current government, how it has affected key areas related to our work, and how The Abraham Initiatives has adapted to meet this moment of crisis.

## Protecting Accomplishments

Under the last government, as well as previous Netanyahu-led governments, The Abraham Initiatives successfully secured a number of significant advancements to advance shared society. One of the most important was pushing the issue of crime and violence plaguing Arab communities to the top of the agenda. A number of constructive initiatives, including Government Resolution 549, were adopted by the government to invest billions of shekels in improving policing in these communities, increasing trust between residents and law enforcement, and, perhaps most critically, addressing the root causes of violence. These resulted from recommendations made by an inter-ministerial taskforce established in 2019 following lobbying by The Abraham Initiatives, to which we also offered expert advice.

While Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously supported such a multilayered and collaborative approach, his current coalition partners — especially the far-right Otzma Yehudit and Noam parties — prefer to treat the issue as one of “Arab violence” for which only aggressive ultra-nationalist responses are warranted. Furthermore, the newly formed Ministry of National Security, headed by Otzma Yehudit’s leader Itamar Ben-Gvir, has fundamentally changed the landscape of law enforcement in Israel. The difference between the previous Ministry of Public Security, which had a dedicated deputy minister in charge of working with the Arab community, and Ben-Gvir’s Ministry of National Security, could not be starker. The distressing rise in murders and violent crime in Arab communities this year has not been met with the attention and care it deserves.

Despite these challenges, Government Resolution 549 remains the Israeli government’s policy and The Abraham Initiatives is determined to see it implemented regardless of the government’s political inclinations. Our key approach is to work closely with the civil servants within the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) to monitor the resolution’s implementation; where the government falls short, we will follow up directly with the officials responsible. In meetings with our staff, the PMO director overseeing the implementation of Resolution 549, Talal Dolev, has told us that her work will continue even in light of the changes in the Ministry of National Security and the PMO. She also expressed hope that her office will continue to assist and cooperate with The Abraham Initiatives. Ultimately, however, there remains a serious risk that a political directive will prevent direct cooperation. Still, as a leading Israeli civil society organization active on this issue, we will continue our monitoring and evaluation efforts with or without the direct cooperation of the PMO.

Other accomplishments potentially at risk include Government Resolution 550, which set aside billions of shekels for addressing the gaps between Arab and Jewish communities in Israel. This is another area in which Prime Minister Netanyahu has previously supported but his far-right coalition partners are less enthusiastic about, if not outright hostile toward. While we remain concerned that certain ministers may be able to delay or effectively scuttle parts of the plan, we are pleased to report that the budget the coalition passed in the spring maintains the previous government’s funding levels in this area. As with 549, the government has inherited commitments that are not easily ignored if proper monitoring and follow-up are conducted, tasks to which we are doubly committed in these times. Our initiative directors

for both Shared Cities and Safe Communities are working hard with civil servants within the relevant ministries to ensure that the government is following through on its promises and that local communities and municipalities understand exactly what they are entitled to from the national government.

In regard to Shared Learning, our landmark initiative pairing classes from Jewish and Arab communities to learn core subjects together that was adopted by the Ministry of Education last year, cooperation with relevant ministry officials has continued. We are on track to complete the transfer of the program to the government next year. The main potential political threat to this work is MK Avi Maoz, who was initially appointed as a minister in charge of regulating external education programs in Israel's schools. Maoz regularly attacks us in public remarks and media appearances. However, Maoz's status in the coalition is unclear as of this writing, and he has thus far not been able to obstruct our work.

## **Focusing on Young Adults to Turn the Tide**

The threat posed by the current government emerged in large part due to growing support of extreme parties and personalities by young people, a problem that is especially acute in mixed Jewish-Arab cities in Israel. Between the first round of Israeli elections in 2019 and the recently completed fifth round, more than 400,000 new voters aged into the electorate, of which 70% cast their ballot for the current extreme right-wing government. Of the votes received by the Religious Nationalist Party, a full 20% were cast by active IDF soldiers. This drift to the extreme among young Israelis stands in stark contrast to trends in other democracies, in which young people tend to be more progressive and open minded than their parents' and grandparents' generations.

Consequently, anti-racism education in Jewish high schools and mechinot (pre-army academies) is a key concrete step to shift the tide in advance of the next election. We plan to significantly deepen and expand our Living in One Land anti-racism education program to reach as many students as possible. It is essential to change attitudes among this group to cut off the pipeline of new voters supporting extremist candidates and providing a boost to the constituency voting in favor of a platform supporting shared society and equality.

Arab society in Israel has experienced a parallel development in recent years as young people feel more and more alienated from Israeli society, significantly more than older generations. This has led to a disconnect that has helped depress voting turnout among Palestinian citizens. To address this challenge, we have launched a major initiative in Arab high schools focused on building a sense of civic responsibility and connection to Israeli society. We believe that engaged young people in Arab society are key to increasing the constituency supporting shared living in Israel that will have an impact in the next election cycle.

In addition to the direct benefit of these projects, our work in high schools has a built in layer of insulation from the hostile national politics, due to local municipal control of secondary education in Israel. The Abraham Initiatives is committed to offering these programs to all high schools, particularly those under the jurisdiction of local governments that have rejected the national government's dictates.

## Preventing Violence

The aftereffects of the May 2021 disturbances are very much still present and contributed to the far-right's performance in the November 2022 elections. Transforming mixed cities into truly shared cities remains the pressing goal of our Shared Cities Initiative, especially our ongoing work to expand access to welfare and other services to Arab residents, but we must also be ready to respond to emergency situations. If violence is prevented, so are the damaging social and political consequences. As a nongovernmental organization working in the shared society space, this objective is best achieved through supporting like-minded municipalities and local officials to work together.

Since 2018, The Abraham Initiatives has operated the Mixed Cities Leadership Forum, comprising Jewish and Palestinian council members from mixed cities, including mayors, deputy mayors, and others holding key portfolios. We envision the forum as not only an advisory body but a platform through which to defuse hostilities and safeguard the fragile social fabric of the mixed cities in times of crisis. Last year, the forum grew from 14 to over 20 members.

With upcoming municipal elections in October 2023, we hope the results in the mixed cities will offer a sharp rebuke of the politics of extremism and discrimination embodied at the national level. In the lead up to the elections, The Abraham Initiatives will launch a campaign promoting a platform of shared society and equality for candidates across the political spectrum. We believe that success will both head off potential violence and offer a shining example of the potential for shared political leadership beyond the borders of the mixed cities themselves.

Finally, a priority in preventing violence between youths is investing in our work on security on university campuses. Higher education institutions are among the most intense, explosive meeting points between young Jewish and Palestinian citizens. Political extremism and incitement (exhibited in the controversy surrounding Palestinian flags, for instance) are expected to generate tension and violence on campuses. It is crucial to train security personnel to ensure they respond sensitively and without bias against Palestinian students. We have made strong inroads in training security officers at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev, where our work has been praised by both university administrators and students. We plan to expand this project significantly in the coming year.

## Conclusion

Our work faces unprecedented challenges, but we are determined to make sure advancements made in shared society are protected and to locate opportunities, even in these difficult times, wherever possible. It is up to all of us who care deeply about equality, democracy, and shared living to fight for an Israeli society that reflects our values. Together, we can do just that.