

December 6, 2011

Gorny Prize for Human Rights Organizations
Presented by the Israeli Association of Public Law
for the year 5772 - 2011

The Awards Committee of the Uriel Gorny Prize, under the auspices of the Israeli Association of Public Law, has decided to grant its 5752-2011 prize for outstanding activity in the advancement of human rights to the **Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)**.

During his lifetime, Att. Uriel Gorny worked on many different levels to promote a more fair and just society for all of Israel's citizens. The prize awarded in his name to an organization for its outstanding work in advancing these values is a fitting tribute to both his memory and his spirit.

Since its founding in 1972, ACRI has been actively defending human rights in Israel in the broadest sense of the term. ACRI's activities are geared toward the preservation of the entire spectrum of the basic rights of the individual, with an emphasis on those core rights whose protection helps guarantee the democratic character of the state. The extremely broad scope of ACRI's activities covers, among other areas: freedom of expression; social rights, including realizing the right to health and to education; protecting human rights in areas under the Israeli army's control; freedom of religion, as well as freedom from religion; the struggle to achieve full civic equality; protection of privacy; protecting the rights of suspects and defendants in criminal proceedings; and many other diverse areas of human rights. Through its activities, ACRI has demonstrated a commitment to defending the individual whenever and wherever his/her rights have been violated, regardless of race, religion, sex, nationality, political allegiance, or any other factor.

ACRI employs various means toward achieving its important goals. These include, among others, activities aimed at the legislative process in the Knesset, petitioning the courts, providing legal aid to the needy, educational and training activities, and holding conferences and seminars on human rights. The broad range of areas in which ACRI operates, together with its wide variety of activities protecting the individual's human and civil rights, has made ACRI a leader in defending the rights of the individual, whose contribution to Israeli democracy is particularly meaningful.

Especially noteworthy are ACRI's activities over the past year – a year marked by a prominent social awakening in Israel. There were calls for change in the country's socio-economic policies and for reform of its existing priorities in the allocation of national resources, with more weight to be given to the needs of the middle class and Israel's young people, who are just starting out. ACRI was active in this movement, proposing legislative amendments in the Knesset to laws dealing with employment, healthcare, housing, water, and the privatization of government services.

Among its many legal achievements over the past year, ACRI's success in the following matters is particularly noteworthy:

1) Following a petition submitted by ACRI, together with a number of additional organizations, the Supreme Court instructed the state to revoke its policy regarding pregnant foreign workers. That policy required any pregnant foreign worker, residing legally in Israel with the requisite permits, to leave the country within three months after the birth of her child in Israel, or conversely, to return to Israel in order to continue her employment on the condition that she return to the country alone.

2) Following a petition filed by ACRI (along with similar petitions filed by other groups) contesting the legality of Amendment No. 146 to the Income Tax Order [New Version], regarding tax breaks given to residents of Israel based on their place of residence, the Supreme Court determined that the law was one of "inequality with no grounding in clear criteria." The government was afforded the opportunity to introduce amended legislation, without which the court "would have no choice but to issue an order absolute instructing the government to fulfill its obligation and amend [the legislation in question]."

3) In light of another petition submitted by ACRI, the Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional right to equality in education had been denied to tens of thousands of children from East Jerusalem for many years, owing to the lack of free formal education available to all entitled students. The court issued an order absolute obligating the Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality to gradually create, over a period of five years, the physical infrastructure that would allow for the accommodation of every student from East Jerusalem who is entitled to universal free education, and their registration in one of the city's official schools or institutions of learning. The court further ruled that if the order were not fulfilled, the respondents would have to reach appropriate financial arrangements with unofficial schools, in order to cover the costs of providing basic education to those students not incorporated into the official educational system.

4) In response to an ACRI petition regarding the special security checks conducted on Israel's Arab citizens at the country's airports, the court issued an order nisi instructing the respondents "to provide a reason why these security checks at airports are not conducted on all Israeli citizens on the basis of equal, objective, and consistent criteria."

The importance of ACRI's activities and its contribution to Israel's human rights discourse cannot be underestimated, especially in light of the voices that are heard most loudly today in Israeli politics. These voices seek to limit and restrict civil activity and the activity of human rights groups through various means, some of which could be considered contrary to Israel's democratic character. It should be stressed that over its many years of activity, ACRI has meticulously striven to carry out its commitment to the defense of human rights without limiting the rights of one side or the other on the political map.

Human rights are the lifeblood of Israeli democracy. But it is not enough that declarations to this effect exist on Israel's law books and in its court rulings. These rights must be exercised in practice, both at the level of the individual and the collective. ACRI has both a discerning ear and an understanding heart to the plight of the needy individual, the minority group facing discrimination, and to the weaker populations who lack strength on their own to stand up against the power of the government. ACRI also

acts as voice for these groups, helping them to stand up for their rights. ACRI breathes life into human rights so that they will never become irrelevant; it takes these rights out of the abstract and makes them concrete, under the principle that human rights must be exercised in daily life.

For all these reasons, the awards committee has found ACRI to be a worthy recipient of the Gorny Prize for a Human Rights Group for the year 5752-2011, granted by the Israeli Association of Public Law.

We the undersigned, members of the Awards Committee for the Gorny Prize, so declare on the day of the annual conference of the Israeli Association of Public Law, 5 Kislev 5752, December 1, 2011.