

May, 24 2016

To: Government Ministers and Members of Knesset

Re: Do not promote the NGO Bill - which is harmful to civil society in Israel

On Wednesday May 25, 2016 a hearing will take place in the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee regarding the bill and the requirement to disclose donations from a foreign political entity. The bill in question was promoted by the government under the guise of promoting transparency; however the true purpose of the bill is to mark out certain organizations as illegitimate and to impose disproportionate restrictions upon them, that would harm their activities.

It is well known that the law already imposes extensive obligations on NGOs to disclose their funding sources, with increased obligations regarding the disclosure of donations from foreign countries. This is despite the fact that foreign countries donate significant amounts of money to all areas of life in Israel.

This bill seeks to extend disclosure requirements, even though this is unnecessary, whilst imposing disproportionate limitations on the activities of certain organizations which would reduce their effectiveness. If that were not enough, the proposal discriminates between organizations by distinguishing between disclosure requirements for private donations and grants from foreign entities; even though the public interest requires equal disclosure and transparency about all of an organization's funding sources.

We believe that these arguments, however poignant, should be clarified in the public sphere; and not via laws that limit people's ability to express opinions or act. The delegitimization and vilification that is inherent in this legislation, disrupts the activity of civil society organizations, and discourages others from being part of the essential and legitimate public discourse in Israel.

Civil society organizations, including the organizations that the bill was formulated to target, play a vital role in promoting the voices and rights of the disadvantaged and providing assistance to those communities. The employees and volunteers of these organizations are fulfilling their civic right and duty to participate actively in public debate and the democratic process. This legislation will harm these extensive activities, which are being conducted with great concern for Israeli society; will erode democratic principles and universal values; and limit the freedom of expression and association in Israel. The harm that this bill is expected to cause for organizations and activists will hurt us all.

We urge you not to promote this legislation.

Itaach Maaki – Women Lawyers for Social Justice

Amnesty Israel

Anu – Planners for Planning Rights

Assaf - Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel

Bimkom

Gisha – Legal Center for Freedom of Movement

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)

The Public Committee against Torture in Israel

Hamoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual

The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants

Israel Movement for Reform and Progressive Judaism

The Social Guard (Hamishmar Hahevrat)

NGO Monitor

The Movement for Freedom of Information

The Abraham Fund Initiatives

Yesh Din – Volunteers for Human Rights

Israel Hofsheet – Be Free Israel

Mossawa Center – The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel

Our Heritage (Morashtenu)

MachsomWatch – Women against the Occupation and for Human Rights

Adva Center

Sikkuy – The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality

Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel

Ir Amim

Akevot Institute for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Research

Coalition of Women for Peace

Worker's Hotline

Physicians for Human Rights

Breaking the Silence

Rabbis for Human Rights

Transparency International – TI Israel

Shatil: The New Israel Fund