

האגודה לזכויות האזרח בישראל
جمعية حقوق المواطن في إسرائيل
The Association for Civil Rights in Israel



The Project for Democracy – Fighting for the Ground Rules

Chapter One: Education to Human Rights and Academic Freedom

We decided to begin our report on the erosion of democracy in Israel by examining the field of education. A democratic society, in which citizens are committed to the values of human rights, tolerance, and mutual respect, does not emerge of its own accord. Education plays a crucial role in shaping such a society. The education system can help ensure the stability of democracy by exposing students to additional values to those they encounter at home, in the media, under the influence of consumer culture, or with the encouragement of elements representing commercial interests. Education to democratic values exposes students to diverse views and positions, and teaches diverse skills, including the collection and critical analysis of information and independent thought. Such education can enable the students – who later go on to become citizens – to respond respectfully and tolerantly to different opinions and narratives, and to make informed and autonomous choices in terms of their own positions and actions.

Alongside the recent deterioration in democratic norms in Israel, education to human rights and democracy also seems to have been impaired, and has sometimes even been the subject of attacks. Themes relating to human rights, pluralism, and coexistence, which issued to be uncontroversial, have suddenly begun to be seen as “dangerous” and questionable. Militaristic values are being emphasized in school culture; the right of the Arab minority to its own culture and language has been impaired; and freedom of expression of teachers and researchers is under threat.

These trends are particularly alarming against the background of numerous surveys and studies showing that the perception of democracy in Israel, particularly among young people, is increasingly confined to its formal dimension, i.e. the perception of a democratic system as one that holds regular and free elections to parliament. There has been a grave erosion in terms of the substantive dimension of democracy, and particularly the protection of the rights of minorities in society against the strength of the majority.¹ Thus, for example, a [survey](#) conducted among hundreds of

¹ Thus, for example, the Israel Democracy Indexes for 2007 and 2008, published by the Israel Democracy Institute, found that most of the respondents (seventy-eight percent in 2007 and eighty-three percent in 2008) agreed with the general statement that “all people should have the same rights, regardless of their political opinions.” However, when the surveys examined attitudes toward specific rights, the level of support fell. Fewer than half the respondents, for example, agreed that a speaker should be allowed to present severe criticism of the State of Israel in public;

Jewish and Arab youth in the 15-18 age range in February 2010 for the School of Education at Tel Aviv University found that, in theory, most of the youths support the democratic system: eighty percent of the respondents (seventy-nine percent of the Jewish respondents) stated that they would prefer a democracy they disagree with to a dictatorship with whose leadership they agree. However, the findings suggest that for most Israeli youths, democracy is restricted to its formal dimension, whereas its substance – i.e. individual and minority rights – is not recognized or supported. By way of example, forty-six percent of the Jewish respondents in the study do not think that Arab citizens should enjoy equal rights, and fifty-two percent believe that Arabs should not be elected to the Knesset.²

True democracy cannot survive for long without the protection of human rights in general, and minority rights in particular.³ The erosion of democratic values directly encourages the violation of these rights and leads to manifestations of hatred, intolerance, and violence, challenging the very foundations of democratic society. In recent years, for example, racism has spread in Israel, as has the social legitimacy attached to this phenomenon. The freedom of expression of groups and individuals has been impaired, and there is an increasing tendency to delegitimize those who are perceived as different. This trend has included acts of violence against minority groups in Israel, such as Arabs, immigrants, gay and lesbian people, Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews), and migrant workers.⁴

In light of the alarming trends described above, it is more important than ever to encourage education to democratic values – human rights, tolerance, pluralism,

only fifty-four percent in 2007 and thirty-six percent in 2008 supported freedom of religion; and just half the respondents (fifty percent in 2007 and fifty-six percent in 2008) recognized the need for Jews and Arabs to enjoy full equal rights. See: [The Israel Democracy Index](#) on the website of the Israel Democracy Institute.

² For further details on this survey, see the [article on the Ynet site](#). Similar attitudes were found in the [2004 Israel Democracy Index](#) of the Israel Democracy Institute, which focused on attitudes among youth.

³ On the connection between human rights and democracy, see the Introduction to the [State of Human Rights Report 2009](#).

⁴ We examined this issue in depth in the [State of Human Rights Report 2009](#), published in December 2009. For example, see the chapter on the subject of hatred and racism. We will return to this subject in subsequent chapters of the Democracy Report, which will be published on this site.

critical thought, and respect for others. This chapter examines the state of education to democracy in the Israeli education system, focusing on several key areas. We also discuss in detail the threats to academic freedom in Israel – a subject that has recently been the focus of stormy debate in Israel. The chapter closes by presenting ACRI's recommendations in order to strengthen education to democracy. After all, today's students are tomorrow's citizens; they will shape the future character of the State of Israel.

A. Civic studies are not enough

In the mid-1990s, the education minister appointed a committee to develop a comprehensive plan for inculcating civic studies among Israeli students. A year later, the committee, headed by Professor Mordechai Kremnitzer, submitted a [detailed report](#) entitled Being Citizens. The report emphasized that 'the resilience and quality of the democratic system are determined by the citizens' commitment to the democratic ideal.' The report went on to emphasize that "education to citizenship must be provided for all students in the education system. Such education is a vital condition for life in a democracy. To succeed in this task, education to citizenship must be manifested in an ongoing process, throughout the entire period of schooling, in a holistic form and in coordination with all fields of studies; this in addition to develop the civic climate in schools." According to the Kremnitzer Report, education to the values of substantive democracy is considered the core of civic studies in all the democratic nations.

The committee concluded its report by presenting a series of recommendations, focusing mainly on the expansion of civic studies from pre-school through graduation from high school, and on developing a system-wide process in cooperation with all teachers and principals in order to inculcate democratic studies beyond the confines of civic studies classes. The committee recommended the nurturing of a civic and pluralistic atmosphere in schools, with an emphasis on an encounter with the other;

conflict resolution through discourse; and the development of the students' ability to engage in critical thought.

It should be noted that since the submission of the Kremnitzer Report, there has been a significant improvement in civic studies, both in terms of scale and in terms of content and methodology. Many of the recommendations in the report have been implemented, and this is to be welcomed. A [mapping process undertaken in 2007-2008](#) by the Ministry of Education, the Abraham Fund Initiatives, the Center for Educational Technology, and the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem discovered, among other findings, that six different units within the Ministry of Education are responsible for promoting civic studies⁵ by developing appropriate study materials, running in-service training for teachers, budgeting civic studies hours, and so on. The examination also showed that approximately seventy-five percent of teachers in post-elementary schools have participated in in-service training programs in the field of civics education, and that seventy percent of schools in Israel hold activities on this subject, including community action, environmental education, education to human rights and multiculturalism, encouraging dialogue between religious and secular Jews, and education to joint life of Arabs and Jews.

Moreover, since the previous school year (2008-9), [all ninth-grade students have been required to take civic studies on the scale of two weekly study hours](#), and since the last school year (2009-10), [all graduates of the twelfth grade are examined in civic studies at the level of two study units in the matriculation exams](#).

However, this improvement is far from satisfactory. Firstly, some of the recommendations of the Kremnitzer Report have never been implemented. Israeli students take civic studies in just six grades (three in elementary school, one in junior-high, and two in high school) – the committee recommended that civic studies be included in all twelve grades. Moreover, many schools still do not provide civic studies, and there is a shortage of teachers with a specialist teaching certificate in the subject. For example, the [mapping](#) mentioned above found that thirty percent of

⁵ It should be noted that civic studies is used here in a broad sense – in addition to education to democratic values, it also includes nurturing leadership, Israeli identity, and community action.

schools in all age groups do not run any activities relating to civic education or coexistence. Many other schools that report civic education activities confine their programs to “active citizenship” or community action, without any attention to the broader context of citizens’ involvement in democracy. The researchers conclude (p. 32): “The mapping paints a picture of broad-based activities in the field of education to citizenship in schools. In some cases, however, these activities do not constitute real educational action; in others, they are implemented only among limited circles of teachers and students. In most cases, these activities are random in nature, short term, and not connected to the broader civil context.”

Some fourteen years after the Kremnitzer Report was published, our impression is that education to democracy and human rights is still perceived by the Ministry of Education as the prerogative of a single ministry unit (the “Kremnitzer Headquarters”) and a single school subject (civic studies), rather than as an issue that must be addressed by the entire education system. Moreover, comments by the education minister, the head of the Pedagogic Secretariat, and other senior ministry officials (see below) suggest that education to democracy and human rights is actually moving further away from the core of civil studies in Israel.

The second factor explaining the need to enhance education to human rights and democracy is the deterioration that has occurred in recent years in the manner in which young people experience and understand the essence of democracy. This deterioration suggests that even the full implementation of the committee’s recommendations would not be sufficient, and that broader and more dynamic steps must now be taken.

As early as 1996, the Kremnitzer Report noted the problematic perception of democracy that was prevalent among the public. “In most groups, their status as citizens is perceived as an essential formal matter with meager content, and not as the source of prestige,” the report found. “In some groups there is a strong tendency to insularity within the group, to ignore other groups, and to develop negative and stereotypical images of others.”

All the evidence – including public opinion polls, violence incidents among youth, manifestations of racism, and so forth – suggest that things are only getting worse. Accordingly, halting the decline in the values of democracy and human rights requires more substantive and broad-based actions now than those proposed in the past. The Ministry of Education must invest greater efforts in education to democracy and human rights in order to halt these trends, which are liable to destabilize the very foundations of Israeli democracy.

B. Watch out, human rights about!

The [State Education Law](#) specifies a list of values according to which the state education system in Israel seeks to educate its students. Alongside the inculcation of national and Jewish values, the law states that the goals of state education include “developing a respectful attitude to human rights, basic liberties, democratic values, observance of the law, and the culture and opinions of others; [...] educating toward the desire for peace and tolerance in relations among people and nations,” and educating to independent and critical thought, social justice, and a recognition of the equal rights of all the citizens of Israel. Senior officials in the Ministry of Education, the body responsible for implementing the law, sometimes emphasize their commitment to these values, although on occasions their actions are inconsistent with this declarative commitment.

Over the past year, in particular, the impression is that senior officials in the Ministry of Education have made a particular effort to distance the ministry from themes relating to education for democracy, human rights, tolerance, and freedom of expression. For example, *Ha'aretz* reported that the Ministry of Education ordered the [removal of its logo](#) from the website [Common Denominator](#), which was developed by the Center for Educational Technology and the Abraham Fund Initiatives. The website offers students and teachers study material on the subject of democracy and coexistence. The content offered by the Center for Educational Technology has been accepted for years by the Ministry of Education without

modification. The decision to remove the ministry's logo creates the impression that this content is now less acceptable, and that the ministry does not wish to be identified with the site.

In another case, Ministry of Education inspectors ordered in March the cancellation of the [distribution of children's books containing an illustrative presentation of the articles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights](#). The ostensible reason given for this decision was that one picture shows part of a female breast. According to the publication (NRG-Maariv), the inspectors also disapproved of two sections in the document, which is a binding covenant in all democratic nations. The passages that aroused their displeasure were those on the subject of freedom of religion and political asylum.

Civil society organizations in the field of education to democracy and human rights have also conveyed the sense over the past year that something has changed, and that they are facing unprecedented challenges. The activists in these organizations report a growing sense that elements in the education system consider their activities to be illegitimate, even to the point of an attack on civic studies and education to democracy. Their sense is that there is a constant decline in the space devoted within educational discourse to the themes they seek to advance. They also report a dramatic erosion in democratic values and human rights as manifested, for example, on school notice boards, on work with teachers, and in discussions with instructors and social coordinators. "We repeatedly hear from elements within the education system that it is time to start talking about obligations and stop talking about rights," says Sharaf Hasan, director of the Education Department in the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. "There are also teachers who acknowledge the importance of education to human rights and democracy, but who avoid participating in training programs on this subject, since they are well aware that they will not gain positive recognition for their expertise in these fields, and certainly not for implementing them in the classroom." Hasan also notes that the leadership echelon of the Ministry of Education does not emphasize the need for education to democratic values. "One of the recommendations of the Kremnitzer Report," he explains, "relates to the function of the education minister in leading the process of

education to substantive democracy. In reality, however, the subject of democracy has been highly marginal in the public activities of the education minister and the chairperson of the Pedagogic Secretariat, in terms of their declarations and at the numerous conferences of educators in which they have participated. Issues that are emphasized by the leadership of the Ministry of Education unsurprisingly receive considerable attention in schools, while aspects relating to education to democracy and human rights are shifted to the sidelines.”

The reluctance to address human rights and democracy in the education system seems to be due, in part, to the false assumption that these issues are connected with left-wing political tendencies. In November 2009, for example, the Knesset Education Committee held a [discussion](#) on the subject of civic studies in schools, on the initiative of the Institute for Zionist Strategy. A press release published by the committee after the discussion quoted the comment by chairperson MK Zevulun Orlev (National Religious Party) that “there is a [left-wing, liberal, and universalist](#) bias in civic studies.”⁶

Creating an association between democracy and human rights and any specific political position is dangerous; the essence of democracy is that it encompasses pluralism, freedom of expression, and a plurality of views within society. Moreover, civic studies seek to inculcate students with basic knowledge concerning theoretical concepts such as different types of government, the authorities of state, and principles such as the separation of powers and relations between citizens and the state – this in addition to the substantive side of democracy, i.e. the importance of protecting human rights. This knowledge, and the acquisition of skills for coping with complexity and dilemmas, provide a vital foundation for life in a democratic society. Connecting these subjects with political positions implies the civic education is a controversial subject and raises alarming doubts as to its importance.

⁶ See also : <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/971/311.html>

C. Coexistence? Not in our school!

Although Israel is a relatively small country, both in area and in population, it is characterized (perhaps more than any other country) by a series of social and class-based rifts and by the presence of numerous minority groups – Arabs, Haredim, migrant workers, Ethiopian immigrants, immigrants from the CIS, and so forth. In such a complex reality, it is particularly vital to provide education to tolerance of the other, coexistence, social justice, and the protection of minority rights. This will enable the diverse communities that live in Israel to coexist in peace. Although some positive steps have been taken in this field, much work remains to be done.

On the positive side, we note the [forthright comments by the education minister](#) emphasizing the need to accept those who are different in society, following the murder in 2009 at the youth club of the gay community in Tel Aviv. “I urge public figures on all levels to speak out clearly and to oppose homophobia,” [said Minister Sa’ar](#) in June 2010 at an event held at the LGBT community center in Tel Aviv. Two months later, at a ceremony to mark the first anniversary of the murder, [Sa’ar announced](#) that “we are acting to ensure that violence on homophobic grounds will be recognized as violence rooted in hatred of the other and those who are different. Curricula have been initiated on these subjects over the past year.” In other cases, [Sa’ar has spoken out strongly against racism](#), in the context of discrimination against students of Ethiopian origin, and has [taken action to regulate the status of the children of migrant workers](#).

These declarations are important and courageous, but they are not enough. The eradication of all forms of racism in Israeli society requires an open, holistic, and democratic worldview that is not in evidence in today’s education system. In particular, there is a need for awareness of the importance of accepting minorities in society while respecting their rights, and of ensuring genuine recognition of the right of minorities to nurture their distinct culture. This is particularly true in the case of the Arab minority in Israel. In recent years, racism, violence, and demands to condition the rights enjoyed by Arabs on their loyalty to the state⁷ have become

⁷ See the [State of Human Rights Report 2009](#) pp. 16-23.

common and even legitimate phenomena. Conditioning the rights of Arab citizens on loyalty to the state is the main message of Israel Beiteinu, the third-largest party in the Knesset, [which enjoyed a particularly high level of support among young people](#).

At the beginning of 2009, Professor Yuli Tamir, the education minister at the time, received a copy of an [important report](#) entitled Education to Shared Life for Jews and Arabs in Israel. The authors of the report explained its central concept of “shared life” as including equality between Arabs and Jews; positive and decent relations; shared responsibility; mutual respect and legitimization; and a common desire for peace.

The report, which was prepared by a public committee against the background of “evidence of alienation between Jews and Arabs,” recommended a series of important steps to reform the education system in order to reinforce education to shared life between the two peoples. The recommendations include: education to shared life from pre-school through the end of high school; encouraging encounters between Jews and Arabs; study of Arabic language and culture in Jewish schools ; the establishment of joint schools for Jews and Arabs; and the integration of Jewish teachers in Arab schools, and vice versa.⁸

It should be noted that the list of goals in the State Education Law also includes “gaining familiarity with the language, culture, history, heritage, and unique tradition of the Arab population and of other population groups in the State of Israel, and recognizing the equal rights of all Israeli citizens.”

However, the report’s recommendations for education to shared life have not been implemented, and it seems unlikely they will be implemented in the near future. At present, activities in the education system to promote shared life between Jews and Arabs in Israel are marginal and superficial and cannot facilitate real change. The civic studies programs include activities on the theme of “coexistence.” However, education to shared life cannot be reduced to a one-time encounter or short-term,

⁸ See the [report on the Walla website](#) for more details about the report and its recommendations.

localized, and superficial programs. The Ministry of Education does not at present have any serious programs designed to promote shared life between Arabs and Jews.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Education should act urgently to implement the recommendations of the Shared Life report. In addition to these recommendations, genuine education to shared life requires a comprehensive and long-term process including education to the values of substantive democracy, human rights, tolerance, acceptance of the other, and pluralism; the condemnation of racism; acquaintance with the other in the spheres of history, language, culture, and recognition; creating democratic space within the education system, including the legitimization of differences, pluralism, and openness to criticism; the substantive involvement of the Arab minority in determining the contents of education in Israel in general, and in the Arab sector in particular (see below); and the investment of resources in promoting equality and closing educational gaps.

D. Too much democracy?!

Over the past year, some of the members of the Knesset Education Committee decided to launch an [attack on civic studies in schools](#). In November 2009, the committee held a discussion on the subject (as mentioned above) on the initiative of the Institute for Zionist Strategy, a research institute that is strong opposed to many of the themes addressed in civic studies. During the discussion, committee members – led by committee chairperson Orlev – demanded changes to civic studies, arguing that the current curriculum places democracy above Jewish nationhood.

There is no factual basis for the claim that the curriculum has too much “democracy” and not enough “Judaism.” Values such as Zionism, Judaism, and nationhood are manifested in many school subjects, including history and Bible studies, as well as in activities throughout the school year. Both the formal curriculum and the informal curriculum and school culture are committed to conveying the Zionist narrative and Jewish tradition. Moreover, this argument implies a false dichotomy between

democratic and Jewish values – something that is as misleading as it is harmful. There is no reason why Jewish values should contradict democratic and universal ones; the contradiction is only created when themes labeled “Judaism” or “heritage” are used to inculcate ethnocentric approaches that negate the place and rights of others.

In recent months, the Ministry of Education has taken several decisions encouraging the study of Jewish and Zionist themes. In May, for example, Ha’aretz reported that the Ministry of Education has initiated a project for students to write verses from the Bible. The ministry recommended that [male students wear skullcaps](#) during this activity, and start again if they make a mistake. In June, a new school subject was presented to teachers. Entitled [Jewish Heritage and Culture](#), this subject will require students in the sixth through eighth grades to study religious texts that have not previously formed part of the curriculum. The new program prevents schools from choosing for themselves which texts to study and how to position these within the overall study material.⁹ In addition to school students, it was reported in February (on the NRG-Maariv website) that the government has also decided [to require students in institutions of higher education](#) to participate in classes on the subject of “Jewish heritage and the Zionist enterprise.” The requirement will apply to all students, regardless of their religion, views, or chosen field of studies, with the goal of supporting the “rehabilitation and reinforcement of the infrastructure of national heritage.”

It is legitimate that the curriculum includes national and Jewish themes, such as Jewish history and the Bible. However, the impression is that democracy and human rights are perceived as material to be confined to a single school subject, rather than as values to which the entire Ministry of Education should be committed. This contrasts with the strong preference for, and active encouragement of, Judaism and nationally-oriented studies. Just like the other values the ministry chooses to promote, the values of democracy and human rights must be reflected in numerous and diverse forms within the system, both as an integral part of every school subject

⁹ See also the [report on the Walla website](#).

and in the context of the informal curriculum and school culture. Moreover, it is important to address the problematic perception that education to human rights is in some way inconsistent with education to other values, such as Judaism and tradition. It is vital to examine this complex issue and to initiate open discussions in schools relating to the connection between belonging and local identity, on the one hand, and respect for universal human rights, on the other.

E. Students, atten-hut!!

Militarist culture has been a component of public life in Israel, including in the education system, since the establishment of the state. It is present in both overt and covert forms in the curricula, at festivals and ceremonies, in emblems, and in the physical presence of military personnel in the classroom. Recently, however, a series of initiatives launched by the Ministry of Education mark a significant reinforcement of militaristic values in schools and among young people. A no less alarming problem is that this process has occurred without any substantive public discussion of the nature and goals of these programs, or of their ramifications for Israeli education, society, and democracy.

Over the past year, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the IDF, has launched a program designed to [enhance the motivation among high school students to join combat military units](#). In November 2009, the Knesset Education Committee held a discussion on the subject of “encouraging recruitment to the IDF in educational institutions.” [The education minister declared](#): “We will launch a concerted effort in schools that have a low recruitment rate, and invest special efforts to encourage recruitment to the IDF.” At the beginning of 2010, the program began to operate in hundreds of schools around Israel. [Hundreds of officers and soldiers are sent to educational institutions](#) to meet with teachers and parents, and to encourage them to participate in activities intended to increase the recruitment rates, with an emphasis on combat units. An important component of the program is

the intention to publish recruitment rates, and to [reward schools with particularly high recruitment rates among their graduates](#).

The step increase in the reinforcement of militaristic values in schools is also reflected in the reactions by the education system to principals who oppose or criticize these programs. An example of this is Zeev Dagani, principal of the Herzliya Gymnasium, who [announced that he would refuse to participate](#) in the Ministry of Education program to bring IDF officers into schools. “The idea that the army should educate teachers casts grave aspersions on the work done by the teachers,” [Dagani commented](#). “I am not against the army, but I am against the blurring of boundaries that occurs when officers come to teach teachers how to educate.” Dagani, who states that he has [received threatening letters](#) since his refusal to join the program, was even summonsed to a meeting of the Knesset Education Committee on the subject of “[the boundaries of freedom of expression of educators](#).”

If IDF officers and soldiers are to be given access to high schools, the students should also be exposed to different views, and should be engaged in critical and multifaceted discourse on the subject of the army and military service. However, the education minister this year [prohibited the participation of members of the organization New Profile](#), which opposes militarism in the education system and advocates alternative civilian service, in panels held in schools. Thus the Ministry of Education allows IDF representatives and positions to gain a significant foothold in schools, while at the same time denying students the opportunity to be exposed to other opinions opposed to militaristic values.

An example of the internalization of military values in the education system was provided this year by Alon High School in Ramat Hasharon. The senior staff at the school [refused to allow](#) the Forum of Bereaved Families – an Israeli-Palestinian organization that promotes understanding between the two peoples – to hold an activity at the school. According to the students, the refusal was connected to a fear on the part of the school that such activities might reduce the recruitment rate among its graduates.

Military service is compulsory in Israel, reflecting the security situation that faces the country. While the education minister is entitled to be concerned about recruitment rates, he should be no less concerned by the rising tide of racism, violence, and intolerant discourse among young people. These are just as dangerous as any other threat. The IDF can act to prepare young people for the army and to train soldiers through many other frameworks outside the education system. The education system in a democratic state should educate to tolerance, willingness to engage in dialogue with those who express different positions, pluralism, critical thought, and a recognition of the values of equality and liberty. This will encourage the emergence of thoughtful and caring graduates committed to human rights and democracy.

F. No Nakba

Twenty percent of the citizens of Israel are Arabs, and the proportion of Arabs in the education system is even higher. Israel's independence is inextricably linked with the disaster experienced by the Palestinian people, known in Arabic as the [Nakba](#). Many of the facts relating to the events that occurred in this country in 1948 have been the subject of debate among historians and others for many years. Unsurprisingly, interpretations have emerged that reflect at least two key narratives, one Israeli and the other Palestinian. What is undeniable is that the Nakba forms a central part of the experience of a large part of the population of Israel, and has the character of a traumatic, seminal, and formative event.

Over the past two years, the Israeli government has declared war on the Nakba. "[The first thing we will do is to remove the Nakba](#)," declared Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of the beginning of the new school year in 2008, referring to the intention to remove the subject from the curriculum. In May 2009, the government supported an amendment to the Independence Day Law. In the form approved at the Preliminary Reading, the amendment, which came to be referred to popularly as the "Nakba Law," stated that no institution which receives state support will be permitted to finance activities marking the Nakba. Ahead of the present school year, Minister of

Education Gideon Sa'ar decided to [remove any mention of the events of the Nakba from textbooks in the Arab sector](#). He also [decided to reexamine](#) a history book for the Jewish sector presenting both narratives, which had already been approved by the ministry.

Once again, as in other cases, the official measures are accompanied by an atmosphere of intimidation and the delegitimization of anyone who dares to address the subject of the Nakba, even if this is only on the historical level of recognizing the Palestinian narrative. For example, after the Ministry of Education ordered the managers of the Common Denominator website of the Center for Educational Technology to remove the emblem of the Ministry of Education, and under right-wing pressure, it was decided (according to reports in Ha'aretz) [to remove the subject of the Palestinian refugees](#) from another site of the Center, "by way of a preventative measure."

Forbidding mention of the Nakba has grave ramifications. Palestinian citizens, including students, have a right to learn their history and to express their identity and collective memory. Marking the Nakba does not threaten the security of the State of Israel or of Israeli residents: it manifests the legitimate and fundamental right of all individuals, groups, and peoples to express their pain for what they perceive as a disaster. For Arab citizens, the measures discussed here reflect a lack of recognition on the part of the state and the negation of their formative narrative. This can only distance them still further from a sense of identification with the state in which they live. For Jewish students, these decisions reflect the negation of the identity of the other, and deny the students the opportunity to hear the story of the Palestinian people. For all of us, Jews and Arabs alike, this approach damages the prospects for mutual understanding and coexistence. In this context, it is interesting to note that preliminary studies have found that young Israeli Jews are capable of addressing and containing different narratives, and are highly motivated to become acquainted with the other.¹⁰

¹⁰ See: Noga Eini Alhadaf and Dan Bar-On, Differences in the Perception of the Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of 1948 among Israeli Jewish Youth – Coping with the Study of a History with Two Narratives (to be published in Studies in Education). See also: Noga Eini Alhadaf,

In recent years, voices within the Arab public in Israel have demanded the establishment of a separate pedagogic secretariat for Arab education, in order to recognize the status of the Arab citizens of Israel as a national and cultural minority.¹¹ This structure would be similar to that provide for state-religious and Haredi education, reflecting recognition of the fact that distinct population groups have the right to a degree of autonomy in determining the content of studies. This issue was discussed by the Knesset Education Committee at the beginning of 2008. A statement [issued by the committee after the discussion](#) quoted the chairman of the committee, MK Rabbi Michael Melchior: “My sense is that in reality, different streams are being granted more and more independence – until it comes to the Arabs. In their case, the ministry says, ‘That’s it! Now education must be statist and uniform.’ In my opinion, we should recognize in structural terms the strong desire of the Arab public to express and consolidate its identity.” A commitment to the values of equality and respect for minorities should have led the Ministry of Education to examine this initiative seriously; it could make a real contribution to advancing Arab education and promoting the substantive equality of Arab school students in Israel.

G. Attacks on academic freedom and freedom of expression in schools and universities

Academic activity – learning, teaching, writing, and research – is based on academic freedom: the freedom to think, to teach, and to express different ideas, even when these are highly unpopular. There can be no academia without these freedoms; no free thought; no science of philosophy; and no Nobel prizes. The essence of academic research, and the key to scientific progress, is the ability to cast doubts and to challenge basic assumptions. This is one reason why innovative scientific ideas

Studying the Historical Narrative of the Other – The Reactions of Israeli Jewish Youth to the Israeli and Palestinian Historical Narratives of 1948, thesis toward an MA degree from the Department of Psychology, Ben Gurion University, 2008.

¹¹ For example, see the position papers presented as part of the “Jewish-Arab Rift” project of the Israel Democracy Institute: Khaled Abu Asba, [Establishing an Independent and Autonomous Authority for the Arab Education System in Israel](#); Hala Espanioli, [Cultural Autonomy for Arab Education](#).

sometimes arouse opposition and criticism, but it also explains why it is so important to allow these ideas to be expressed.

Academics have always expressed views that many people find unpleasant, to put it mildly. Over the past year, however, the academic freedom of lecturers and educators has been subject to a concerted attack by public officials and political organizations.

In August 2009, Dr. Niv Gordon, head of the Department of Politics and Government at Ben Gurion University, published an opinion piece in the Los Angeles Times. In the article, Dr. Gordon urged the international community [to impose a boycott on Israel](#) in order to pressurize it to end the occupation. Other academics agree with this position. In protest at the article, the Israeli consul general in Los Angeles wrote a fiercely-worded letter to the president of Ben Gurion University. The university joined the voices of condemnation, arguing that Dr. Gordon had overstepped the boundaries of academic freedom.

Since then, it seems that a floodgate has opened allowing attacks on the freedom of expression of educators in general, and academics in particular. [Minister Moshe “Bogie” Ya’alon recently attacked academics](#) who expressed views that diverge from his own, accusing them of joining a campaign against the State of Israel. The education minister himself joined the attack, [announcing that he would take action against lecturers who advocate an academic boycott of Israel](#). In response, [542 lecturers signed a petition in June](#) warning the education minister not to attack their academic freedom or that of their colleagues. “In order for the higher education system in Israel to be high-quality and decent,” the petition explained, “it should include the expression of opinions that not everyone finds pleasant; it should present social and political criticism; and it should maintain critical and even controversial research and teaching.” The education minister [does not seem to have been convinced](#) by these arguments.

An article published in December 2009 in the newspaper Ha'ir¹² described the activities of an organization called Israel Academia Monitor, which presents a monthly report to the board of governors of the various universities detailing the activities of “academics who want to destroy the State of Israel.” The organization’s website explains that this epithet refers to “academics who call for a boycott of Israel at international conferences, or academics who collaborate with pro-Arab organizations such as Adalah and B’Tselem.” Academics interviewed for the article described an atmosphere of silencing and persecution.

At the end of 2009, the State Prosecutor’s Office asked Dr. David Bukai to [retract statements he allegedly made against Arabs](#), and to sign a statement undertaking not to make such comments in the future. However, Dr. Bukai denies making such comments, and it has never been proved that he did so. In another incident, Ben Gurion University recently took swift action to [remove a lecturer who expressed opinions against homosexuals](#). Although his comments were offensive, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel supported the lecturer, arguing that academic freedom includes the freedom to make outrageous comments, particularly when these are confined to the expression of an opinion. The teaching committee may require the lecturer to clarify that this is his personal view, and it should certainly ensure that the lecturer does not mislead the students regarding current research and ethical approaches. However, there are no grounds for dismissing the lecturer.

The attack on academic freedom has also reached the Knesset Education Committee. Following a report prepared by the Im Tirtzu movement, the committee held a discussion on the subject of “[the displacement of Zionist opinions in academia](#).” The members of the organization enjoyed ample time to present their position at the discussion, while participants who sought to present different views [were given almost no opportunity to do so](#). The participants did not have an opportunity to read the report before the meeting of the committee. During the discussion, the speakers attacked the content of studies in institutions of higher education, and suggested that the inspection of lecturers should be intensified. Following the discussion and the report, [the education minister announced that he would investigate the](#)

¹² Shai Greenberg and Neta Achituv, **Hated**, Ha'ir, 11 December 2009.

[movement's claims](#) about lecturers' opinions and the content of studies. The Institute for Zionist Strategy (which attacked civic studies in schools, as described above) intends to publish a [report claiming that there is a "post-Zionist bias"](#) in the sociology departments in Israeli universities. As in the case of the report by Im Tirtzu, the content of university studies were not examined in accordance with academic criteria,¹³ such as the quality, innovation, or originality of research, but rather on the basis of political criteria. In other words, an organization with a clear political agenda is seeking to restrict the academic freedom of researchers whose positions are inconsistent with those it seeks to promote.

The attack on academic freedom reached a new peak with the [threat by the Im Tirtzu movement to the president of Ben Gurion University](#). Im Tirtzu stated that it would work to halt donations to the university unless the university corrects the "anti-Zionist bias" in the composition of the faculty and the content of the syllabuses in the university's Department of Politics and Government. The president of the university was not intimidated by the attack, and the heads of the institutions of higher education were [quick to support her position](#). The gross attempt by Im Tirtzu to impose its political agenda on academic content is particularly alarming given the possible contacts between this movement and the establishment. For example, the Calcalist website revealed that Im Tirtzu [receives most of its funding through the Jewish Agency for Israel](#). The president of Tel Aviv University commented in Ha'aretz on "the open door Im Tirtzu activists enjoy to the political echelon in Israel."

The freedom of expression of students has also been impaired. In one case, the management of Haifa University, with the support of the student union, [prohibited](#) a group of students from holding a demonstration to mark the first anniversary of Operation Cast Lead. In a similar case, Haifa University [prohibited](#) a demonstration against the events surrounding the flotilla from Turkey to the Gaza Strip. In a third instance, the NRG-Maariv website [alleged that Tel Aviv University](#) prevented a reporter from a regional radio station in Judea and Samaria from covering a conference on the subject of the Nakba.

¹³ For example, see the [article](#) by Guy Grossman and Rami Kaplan on the Ha'aretz website regarding the Im Tirtzu report.

At a recent meeting with human rights organizations, including ACRI, Arab students at Haifa University raised complaints regarding the university's policy toward their political and social activities. The students claim that, in most cases, they cannot receive authorization for their activities (such as demonstrations, lecturers, setting up a stall, or distributing leaflets). When authorizations are given, they are often withdrawn at the last moment, sometimes without any explanation and sometimes on spurious grounds. The students also claim that demonstrations are occasionally dispersed by force and the student organizers are summonsed to a disciplinary committee. In response to letters sent to Haifa University by Adalah in recent months concerning the students' freedom of expression, the university claims that public activities are secondary to its primary goals, which are teaching and research. The university argues that it permits extensive public activities on the campus, subject to its laws and procedures.

Last June, the Knesset Education Committee discussed the subject of the freedom of expression of school teachers. The speakers at the meeting, on the subject of [the boundaries of freedom of expression of educators](#), included the principal of Herzliya Gymnasium, Dr. Zeev Dagani, who criticized visits to schools by army officers as part of the program to encourage recruitment to combat units. Another guest was Ram Cohen, principal of Ironi Aleph School in Tel Aviv, who [discussed the subject of the occupation with his students](#); Cohen was criticized by senior Ministry of Education officials and [summonsed to a clarifying meeting](#). Freedom of expression in educational institutions is a serious issue and worthy of discussion. However, the fact that these two principals alone were "invited" to the meeting suggests that an effort was being made to delegitimize specific political and social views. By way of example, the Knesset Education Committee does not seem to have any problem with events marking ["Gush Katif Day" in schools](#), which reflect clear political opinions with the approval of the ministry.

The cases described above create grave concern that views are being silenced and the academic freedom of teachers and lecturers is coming under attack. This freedom is a vital condition for higher education in a democracy. According to reports in Ha'aretz, even the Ministry of Education itself recently noted that ["there is](#)

[no willingness today to listen to opinions that deviate from the official line,](#)” and that [“some officials are afraid to express their opinion and fall into line with the instructions of senior ministry officials, in order to survive.”](#)

In March, Sa’ar was the keynote speaker at the conference of Im Tirtzu, a movement that uses aggressive and antidemocratic means in order to delegitimize any position that diverges from its own particular Zionist narrative. “I am a strong admirer of your activities,” [the minister told the participants at the conference.](#) “I think that together with other groups who are working with young age groups, this gives grounds for much hope (...) it is certainly particularly vital on our campuses.”

As a politician, Sa’ar certainly has both the right and the obligation to express his opinions. However, there is something distasteful, at the very least, about his sweeping support for a body such as Im Tirtzu, which recently declared war against human rights organizations and is systematically seeking to delegitimize them. Such a position is completely contrary to the values of pluralism, diverse views, and freedom of expression.

H. ACRI’s recommendations concerning education to human rights and democracy

The Ministry of Education should stop ignoring the erosion of democratic values in Israel generally, and among young people in particular. These values must be inculcated in the system on all levels and in all streams, in order to ensure that they penetrate the curriculum in all subjects. Every teacher in Israel should see himself or herself as an educator for democracy. To this end, a broad and comprehensive program should be developed to strengthen democratic values and to ensure that this subject is a key priority. This must include an increase in the budgets for democratic education. Such a program should be capable of reversing the alarming trends described in this chapter. In specific terms:

- The Ministry of Education and its heads should adopt the democratic worldview proposed by the Kremnitzer Report. Work should continue to implement the recommendations of the report, not only in terms of study hours, but more importantly in the field of content (substantive democracy, criticism, and activism), learning methods, and the school culture (including the educator's hour). Curricula should be developed in the different subjects – and not only in civic studies – in order to promote education to democratic values. Teachers of all subjects should receive training in these values.
- The education minister and senior ministry officials should support education to democracy and human rights, and refrain from actions or comments that delegitimize critical, humanistic, and democratic education. An atmosphere must be created that encourages schools and educators to join in this work.
- The Ministry of Education should make education to shared life a key objective of the Israeli education system, and should act swiftly to implement the recommendations of the Shared Life report. Education to tolerance, acceptance of the other, pluralism, and condemnation of racism should be promoted, and steps taken to inculcate an awareness and recognition of the other in terms of history, language, and culture.
- Education to democracy also requires the democratization of education itself. In other words, democratic values should be internalized and applied in practical terms within the education system. This includes creating a democratic, pluralistic, and civil atmosphere in schools, so that students can gain daily experience of democratic behavior; legitimizing differences, pluralism, and different worldviews; an openness to criticism; greater freedom of expression for educators; and open discussions in schools about issues on the public agenda, including issues about which there is disagreement.
- Education to democracy and human rights should form a meaningful component in teacher training in Israel, from pre-school through high school. A network of supervision and in-service training should be developed, and

educational tools should be provided in order to enable educators to cope with racism and hatred in society and with the decline in democratic values. Educators should be encouraged to realize their function in inculcating the values of democracy and human rights.

- The independence of academic institutions should be maintained, and it should be ensured that political bodies do not threaten the heads of these institutions or impair the freedom of expression of researchers and lecturers. In his position as chairperson of the Council for Higher Education, the education minister should clearly and resolutely defend the values of pluralism and academic freedom.