



ACRI Activity Report Covering the Period July – December 2017

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) is a policy driven, non-profit organization protecting the human rights and civil liberties of all people living in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

Since its founding in 1972, ACRI has worked with the courts, the Knesset, government agencies and civil society to tackle the most urgent injustices in our country. We uphold the pillars of democracy by demanding duty bearers change practices that violate rights and liberties, especially where harm is caused to marginalized communities, and by advancing a public discourse of human rights using litigation, policy advocacy, and education.

The president of ACRI's board is accomplished and outspoken author Sami Michael, and as of 2017 the Chairperson is Rachel Liel. Rachel is joined by 11 dedicated board members – all of whom are human rights activists from academia, civil society, and the law profession.

ACRI is a member of INCLO – the International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations – together with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Liberty (UK), the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA), and similar organization from Argentina, Colombia, Egypt, Hungary, India, Ireland, Kenya, Russia, and South Africa.

The following report provides brief descriptions of ACRI's significant achievements during the period July through December 2017, in each of the organization's priority focus areas.

These include:

1. Arab Minority Rights
2. Social and Economic Rights
3. Political and Civil Rights
4. Human Rights in the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem
5. Migrant Workers
6. ACRI's Public Hotline
7. Human Rights Education
8. Public Outreach and Policy Advocacy

1. Arab Minority Rights

The Right to Education: In July 2017, ACRI submitted a [second petition](#) for the establishment of the **first Arab state-school** in Nazareth Illit, along with the Mossawa Center and 37 Arab parents and children from the city. Many of the city's 2,600 Arab students are compelled to travel to Nazareth and surrounding villages to receive a proper, often private, education in their mother tongue. In contrast, almost all of their Jewish neighbors attend state schools in their own cities.



A student in Nazareth Illit getting ready to attend school in a neighboring town

ACRI's petition makes the case that the Nazareth Illit Municipality, with the support of the Ministry of Education, has consistently and stubbornly refused to establish an Arab school due to racist and discriminatory policies. ACRI will continue to hold officials accountable for providing the fundamental service of free, proper, and suitable education for all residents.

Other actions undertaken by the Arab Minority Unit include:

- ACRI joined the Israel Religious Action Center and other organizations in a petition demanding the prosecution of Ben Zion Gopstein, the head of the racist anti-assimilation group, Lahava, and other activists from the organization who **incite violence and racism against Arabs**. In response to the petition, the State announced its intention to prosecute Gopstein and other activists.¹
- ACRI is actively resisting the [Nation-State bill](#), which seeks to **prioritize Jewish characteristics of the state over democratic elements**, and is especially liable to harm the rights of the Arab minority. We participated in Knesset committee discussions in preparing the bill for its first reading, and have submitted position papers on the proposed law in general and regarding specific clauses, including lowering the status of the Arabic language and separating places of residence.

Arab Minority Unit work in safeguarding the rights of the Bedouin Population in the Negev

- In July 2017, a verdict was drawn regarding ACRI's [petition](#) on **planning regulations for the largest unrecognized Bedouin village, Wadi al-Na'am**. The court ruled that the petition was no longer necessary following a government decision to establish an independent settlement for the approximately 10,000 residents of Wadi al-Na'am. It was further determined that residents would be able to object to the determined plan following its approval by the planning institutions. ACRI is of the position that the government's decision does not meet the needs expressed by the villagers, and thus continues to assist them in their struggle for full and equal rights.

¹ [NGOs petition High Court against anti-assimilation group](#) Sep 4, 2017
[Benzi Gopstein to be indicted for incitement pending hearing](#) Nov 13, 2017

2. Social and Economic Rights

The Right to Health: As part of our [ongoing campaign to reform the nursing care system for elderly](#), ACRI continues to address policy alternatives and raise awareness in the media. One in four elderly Israelis requires daily assisted care and ACRI's policy reform plan offers comprehensive improvements that go beyond advancing the right to healthcare as it will also advance women's rights in Israel, and the right to live in dignity.



Photo from ACRI's campaign to reform nursing care

In November 2017, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health announced a national nursing program, which related directly to policy concerns ACRI has raised.

Additional actions undertaken by the Social and Economic Rights Unit include:

- **The Right to a Dignified Existence:** Along with the Human Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University, ACRI addressed over 40 cases of **power outages on the basis of debt** accrued by ill and disabled persons, as well as families with young children. In all cases, we managed to prevent disconnection from electricity and to arrange for a reasonable payment of debt commensurate with their economic capability.
- **Welfare System Rights:** ACRI acted to prevent delays in transferring **payment to foster families**, and are monitoring implementation on the ground. ACRI is also working to promote a uniform nationwide policy regarding the **provision of services by welfare offices to mentally and emotionally challenged individuals**.
- **The Right to Housing:** In July 2017, an amendment to a law for which we advocated over several years was enacted, **regulating relations between landlords and tenants** and providing protections to tenants. ACRI also continued to intensively resist **housing discrimination and discrimination due to place of residence**. We submitted a revised appeal regarding discrimination against non-residents in the purchase of membership to the Kochav Yair Country Club; amended a petition against the Israel Land Authority demanding that it fine a company that discriminated against an Arab client in a housing project; [approached](#) the Ministry of Justice's real estate brokers to instruct intermediaries that it is forbidden to discriminate against those interested in purchasing or renting property at the request of the property owner; and produced [a video](#) on the topic that was circulated widely on Facebook.

Agent: It's not racism, I have a house in the Shikma neighborhood, but the landlord wants to sell it only to Jews. He is a Haredi man, and told me "I ask – only sell to Jews"

The Ministry of Housing has renewed guidelines regarding eligibility for rental assistance in small communities, and also **increased the number of Arabic translators** examining requests for assistance.

3. Political and Civil Rights

Prisoners' Rights: In June 2017, the High Court accepted ACRI's 2014 [petition](#) regarding **severe overcrowding of prisons and detention facilities in Israel** marking a momentous victory for ACRI and asylum seekers, detainees, and prisoners, nationwide. The High Court ruled that within 18 months (by March 2018), the State must allocate a living area of 4.5 square meters to every prisoner and detainee, including a toilet and shower, or four square meters without a toilet and shower.



ACRI brings living conditions for prisoner up to international standards

This is one of the most dramatic rulings in ACRI's history, which will revolutionize the penal system in Israel, upon implementation. Throughout the reporting period we acted to ensure execution of the ruling, as relevant authorities dragged their feet (namely the State Attorney's Office, the Prison Service, and the Ministry of Internal Security). Among other measures, we appealed to the attorney general demanding immediate urgent steps to implement the ruling on time, thus preventing grave humiliation for the High Court.

Additional actions undertaken by the Political and Civil Rights Unit include:

- **Freedom of Speech:** In September 2017, the High Court accepted the petition we submitted against the Second Authority for Television and Radio's decision to omit three sentences from ACRI's broadcast on human rights: including, "to fearlessly speak Arabic,"² and "my right to love and marry whomever I want even if I'm gay." The High Court heeded our petition in ordering the Second Authority to allow the broadcast to air, by omitting the words "and marry."
- Following two respective related petitions, the Jerusalem Municipality published a new procedure making it [easier to hold protest events in the public sphere](#), and the Israeli Police began publishing **licenses for rallies and marches** on their website.
- We are working against legislative initiatives and governmental measures to increase **Internet supervision and censorship**. ACRI also participated in discussions held in the Knesset regarding blocking websites, removing content from websites and offensive publications from the Internet.³
- As a result of our appeal, the attorney general instructed government ministers **to permit civil servants to participate in civil society events**, and emphasized the great importance of these organizations' activities.⁴
- **Freedom of Information:** We acted against **excessive confidentiality and severe restrictions on the right to peruse the State Archives**, submitting a position paper to the Higher Council of Archives regarding a **proposed amendment to the archive regulations**.

² [Israel's High Court Orders Words 'To Marry' Removed From Ad for Same-sex Couples' Rights](#) Haaretz Sep 13, 2017

³ [Will Israeli Internet Censorship Law Prevent the Next Terror Attack?](#) Haaretz Dec 27, 2016

⁴ [Let Government Officials Participate in Human Rights Events, Instructs Attorney General](#) Haaretz Sep 27, 2017

4. Human Rights in the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem

50 Years of Occupation: To shed light on the reality that has crystallized over 50 years of occupation, we created a campaign called "**A State Without Borders,**" informing the public on the gradual creation of a state with unclear borders, and ambiguous human rights related policies.

ACRI engaged the public through launching a [mini-site](#) in three languages, boosting posts on [Facebook](#), and developing an [online game](#) (in Hebrew). The content addressed five decades of systematic violation of Palestinian rights in blurring the lines of here/there, ours/yours, occupation/annexation, incursion/withdrawal.



Marking 50 years of occupation.

Photo by: ChameleonsEye/Shutterstock

The campaign was preceded by a letter that we sent to the Prime Minister, in which ACRI requested the State's official position regarding its borders. Public work continues as the occupation approaches its 51st year.

Additional actions undertaken by the OPT Unit in the West Bank

- In September 2017, a [petition](#) ACRI submitted in 2007 against the intention to **demolish the village of Khirbet Zanuta** in the South Hebron Hills was expunged. The state announced that it does not wish to carry out the demolition orders at this time, and ruled that the demolition orders would not be implemented so long as new construction is not carried out in the village.
- ACRI [contacted](#) the legal advisor for Judea and Samaria following the **massive confiscation of prefabricated structures** donated to Palestinian residents of the West Bank.
- We appealed to the Major General of the IDF's Central Command to annul orders instructing two communities in the Jordan Valley to **vacate their property from their area of residence**.
- ACRI appealed to the army to change an order **permitting journalists to enter closed military zones in the West Bank** solely with a press card issued by the Government Press Office, thus preventing the entry of many Palestinian journalists.
- We contacted the Major General of the IDF's Central Command demanding that he cancel an order issued to **close eight communications companies in the occupied territories**.
- ACRI is resisting **restrictions on movement** for Palestinians in the H2 area of Hebron over the past two years.

OPT Unit work in East Jerusalem

- On Jerusalem Day we [published](#) a document of **facts and figures** on East Jerusalem in three languages, based on requests for freedom of information that we sent to the authorities, among other things. The document was circulated with an accompanying [short video](#) that we produced and published on Facebook, as well as a [podcast](#) in English that presented the main data points.
- ACRI [petitioned](#) the High Court following restrictions **imposed by the police on press coverage** of events in and around the Old City of Jerusalem.
- ACRI published a [position paper](#) in Hebrew, Arabic, and English, regarding the proposal to establish a **separate municipal authority for neighborhoods beyond the separation barrier in Jerusalem**.

5. Migrant Workers

The Right to Dignity: From June through November of 2017, verdicts were handed down for [a series of petitions](#) that we submitted with partner organizations that address humane **living conditions at the Holot detention center**. The court ordered the State to reduce the number of people in each room to six, from the current standard of ten, to minimize violation of detainees' rights to dignity and privacy. Furthermore, sweeping prohibitions on bringing food products and cleaning materials into the facility were also abolished. Petitions addressing the lack of educational and recreational activities in the absence of computers, and the Population and Immigration Authority's abhorrent service in the facility, were rescinded following improvements made after their submission - though are subject to the State's commitment to further amelioration. Yet one petition we submitted with partner organizations in May 2017, demanding an increase in the "pocket money" granted to detainees at Holot, remains pending.



Ensuring dignified living conditions at Holot Facility

Further actions by the Migrant Worker Unit at ACRI include:

- In August 2017, the High Court ruled regarding the appeal we submitted with partner organizations on the **expulsion of asylum seekers** to Rwanda. The court ruled that nothing in principle prevents expulsion, yet the agreement Israel signed with Rwanda does not allow for deportation of a person against their will. Israel subsequently announced that it had amended the agreement, enabling deportation of asylum seekers from Israel to Rwanda by force.
- Along with Kav LaOved we conducted three proceedings in the Appeals Court against the Population and Immigration Authority's policy **requiring one spouse among married migrant worker couples to leave the country** as a condition for the other to continue working. The appeals ended with arrangements made on an individual basis, yet the discriminatory policy preventing family unification was not discussed.

6. Public Hotline

During the reporting period, ACRI's public hotline, which is staffed by nine volunteers and three legal interns, received 1,500 calls for assistance by phone, email and through the website. This service, which is offered in Arabic, English, Hebrew and Russian, helps complainants to actualize their rights either through direct advocacy, referrals to other organizations or to the legal assistance bureau of the Ministry of Justice.

Examples of cases handled by the public hotline during the reporting period include:

- **Housing Rights:** an 80 year-old physically disabled person living subsidized housing with poor sanitation, received ACRI's assistance to complain to the Amidar Company and as a result received 100,000 shekels worth of upgrades to the sanitation infrastructure.
- **National Insurance:** ACRI approached the National Insurance Institute (NII) on behalf of a disabled, single-mother of four minors, and demanded that her child support stipend be reinstated and her debt be cleared by the NII after her insurance payments went in to arrears.

7. Human Rights Education Department

To mark **International Human Rights Day**, ACRI planned to hold a conference on workers' rights in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Center for Educational Technology. Yet the evening before the conference, ACRI was informed by the press that Education Minister Naftali Bennett had instructed ministry employees to refrain from attending the conference, or face disciplinary action. **ACRI in protest held the conference despite Minister Bennett's decision**, transferring it to the Tichonet high school in Tel Aviv by invitation of the school principal, and streaming it live on Facebook for educators nationwide to attend. The attempted cancellation of the conference received a great deal of media coverage, including a number of articles published criticizing the minister's decision and stressing the importance of human rights education. The Attorney General himself made a public statement expressing support for ACRI and emphasized the importance of our activities in the context of democracy and civil society.

More work in Education:

- ACRI conducted **extensive programming in teacher training colleges and university schools of education**. At the University of Haifa, we provide a semester-long academic course for students; we conducted training workshops for students and lecturers at Tel Aviv University, Al-Qasemi College, Kaye College, Levinsky College, Efrata College in Jerusalem, and Beit Berl.
- We held training courses on "**Educating Human Rights - Challenges in Teaching Civics**," to dozens of civics teachers who are members of Arab society. In addition, we support, advise, and assist Arab society's Forum of Civics Teachers, especially in light of the challenges Arab teachers encounter in the absence of a civics textbook in Arabic, and in light of changes to the civics profession in the context of democracy.
- In cooperation with the Tel Aviv Municipality, ACRI is holding **a course for young filmmakers to produce human rights films** and screen them at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque.
- In preparation for Human Rights Week 2017, **along with the Ministry of Education we published a poster on the subject of employee rights** (above), along with educational materials and activities in [Hebrew](#) and [Arabic](#).
- "The Workshop" - our education department's website in [Hebrew](#) and [Arabic](#), includes **a rich database of materials on democratic, human rights, and anti-racist, education**. The site is regularly updated with lesson plans and posts on topics on the public agenda (such as freedom of speech, sexual harassment, and racism), departmental projects, and conferences and events in which ACRI partakes and facilitates. During the reporting period, an average of 1,344 visitors browsed the site monthly in Hebrew, with an average of 3,160 for the Arabic site. Furthermore, newsletters distributed through the website reached thousands of educators.



ACRI's Poster for International Human Rights Day 2017

8. Public Outreach

Eroded Democratic Space: During the reporting period ACRI actively resisted, among other things, the proposed [Nation-State bill](#) (referenced in the section on Arab Minority Rights); a bill that seeks to rescind tax exemption for NGOs; the proposition to establish a commission of inquiry for NGOs; and a bill to ban libel against IDF soldiers. In November, ACRI published an updated [document](#) aggregating the bills and anti-democratic initiatives, in Hebrew. These initiatives impact a spectrum of civil-society organizations that collectively resist attempts to impede their work and erode the country's democratic character.

Press: During the reporting period, ACRI was referenced in **hundreds of press items** in both Hebrew and Arabic, including: news reports on ACRI's activities, our responses to issues on the public agenda, and coverage of events in which ACRI took part. Members of ACRI's staff were frequently interviewed by leading media outlets and published a number of opinion pieces. [Read this piece in the NYTimes on eroded democracy in Israel.](#)

Internet and Social Media: During the reporting period we favorably increased the diversity of the mediums used on our various social media platforms, introducing more ACRI-produced short films. Our ongoing activities on **Facebook** regularly include echoes of ACRI's causes and prominent petitions relating to issues on the public agenda, campaigns around our key issues, and an impetus for action aimed at placing targeted pressure on decision-makers. As a result of this dynamic public activity, our commendable amount of Facebook followers continued to grow along with their engagement with our content. ACRI's Hebrew Facebook page rose from July through December from approximately 64,000 likes to over 75,000. ACRI's Arabic Facebook page increased from roughly 16,600 likes to over 22,000, while ACRI's English Facebook page doubled from approximately 6,000 to over 12,000 likes. On **Twitter** ACRI currently has approximately 21,000 followers in Hebrew, and 3,600 in English.

ACRI's **website** in Hebrew, English, and Arabic, is updated daily with ongoing information on court hearings, Knesset resolutions, and ACRI's activities, and is perceived as a leading database on human rights in Israel. From July through November, the Hebrew site reached an average of 20,449 monthly visitors; the Arabic site an average of 2,023 visitors per month, and the English site an average of 1,641 monthly visitors. Additionally, there were over 2,200 views of ACRI's mini-sites (namely, the [State of Human Rights 2016](#), the [nursing system campaign](#), the [State Without Borders](#) campaign, and the [State of Human Rights 2017](#)).

ACRI's **newsletter** is sent every two weeks to approximately 13,200 Hebrew subscribers, and 3,230 English subscribers. The Knesset Roundup is sent weekly to approximately 3,600 Hebrew subscribers and 980 English subscribers. Additionally, our international media list has approximately 680 subscribers. During the reporting period produced the following videos: [a guide for the demonstrator](#) (in Hebrew), [the opening of an Arabic school in Nazareth](#) (in Hebrew), [the broker test](#) (in Hebrew and English), and [Jerusalem Day](#) (in Hebrew). As of December 2017, our channel has reached approximately 4,200 subscribers, and 3,813,753 total views for all of our videos.

Volunteers: Over the course of the reporting period, **23 volunteers** worked with us, including nine in the public hotline, and 11 assisting our information center, legal research, and education department.