



# ISRAEL'S MINORITIES



EVEN THOUGH ISRAEL IDENTIFIES AS, AND INDEED IS RECOGNISED AS, THE HOMELAND OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, 2.1 MILLION OF ITS 8.85 MILLION POPULATION IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS NOT JEWISH. THEY MAKE UP APPROXIMATELY 25% OF ISRAEL'S POPULATION.

THROUGH A SERIES OF BASIC ISRAELI LAWS, EVERY ISRAELI CITIZEN, REGARDLESS OF RELIGION, RACE, GENDER OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION, HAS EQUAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS AND IS GUARANTEED FREEDOM OF RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION.

# ISRAEL'S MINORITIES

The majority of Israel's 2.1 million minority population is the Arab Sunni Muslims, who number approximately 1.5 million (including approximately 300,000 Bedouins).



In addition, another two Muslim groups found in Israel are the Circassian community of the Galilee, consisting of approximately 4000 members, and the Ahmadi community, mostly located in Haifa and consisting of approximately 2200 members.

The Christian community in Israel consists of approximately 162,000 people. The majority of them are Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic.



The Druze, whose population is approximately 130,000 people. They live mostly in the northern part of Israel and the Golan Heights.



The Baha'i, whose population is approximately 200 people. They have their global center in Haifa.

The Karaites, an ancient community, whose population numbers approximately 40,000 people.



The Samaritans whose population numbers approximately 800. Both the Karaites and Samaritans are parallels of the Jewish faith.

## Facts about Israel's minorities:

- Arabs and other minorities in Israel have equal voting rights to Israel's Jewish citizens.
- Israel is one of the few places in the Middle East where Arab women may vote.



- Israel's minority citizens have freedom of speech, religion and the press, access to the Supreme Court, 17 non-Jewish Knesset (Israel's Parliament) members, and are freer than any other Arab citizens in the region.



- The vernacular of most of Israel's Arab citizens, irrespective of religion, is Arabic, although most Arab citizens of Israel are functionally bilingual, their second language being Modern Hebrew.
- The Circassian Muslims speak both Adyghe and Hebrew, and many also speak Arabic and English, while cultivating their unique heritage and culture.
- Israel is the only country in the Middle East where Ahmadi Muslims can openly practice their version of the Islamic faith.



- The sole legal distinction between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel is that the latter are not required to serve in the Israeli army. This was to spare Arab citizens the need to take up arms against their brethren. Nevertheless, many Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, have volunteered, and continue to volunteer, for military duty.
- Of Israel's minorities, only the Druze and Circassian communities are subject to Israel's military draft.
- Under the current coalition government led by PM Benjamin Netanyahu, more has been done, and more funds have been committed to the minority population than ever before.
- Israel is the only country in the Middle East whose Christian population is not only integrated and flourishing, but is increasing too. Without exception, the Christian population of every other Middle Eastern country has declined.

- Israel's Arab Christians matriculate to university at a higher rate than Jewish Israelis.
- At the time of Israel's founding in 1948, only one Arab high school was operating. Today, there are hundreds of Arab schools throughout the country.



- In general, the standard of living for Arabs in Israel is significantly better than that of Arabs in other countries. For example, the rate of female literacy in Israel is 88% among Arabs, while in Egypt, only 43% of females are literate.



# ISRAEL'S MINORITIES IN ITS POLITICAL & LEGAL SYSTEM

The founders of the State of Israel committed themselves to ensuring equal rights for all its citizens (including minorities), and this is reflected in Israel's Declaration of Independence, which was read out by David Ben Gurion, on 14th May 1948 in Tel Aviv.

## Paragraph 13 of the Declaration states:

*"it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations."*

**And Paragraph 16 of the Declaration appealed to the Arab inhabitants of the land:**

*"in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months - to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions."*

Whilst the Declaration is neither a law nor an ordinary legal document, the Supreme Court has ruled that the guarantees were guiding principles, principles that have subsequently been enshrined into a series of Basic Laws. Although the name of the Israeli parliament - the Knesset - is derived from Jewish history, the members of the Knesset are elected by all citizens of the State of Israel, Jews and Arabs alike, in elections that are equal. In addition, the proportional electoral system ensures relative and egalitarian representation for each sector of the population and does not enhance the advantage of the Jewish majority beyond its relative weight in the population.



02/2015 Bill Voelker

**Insofar as ALL of Israel's citizens are concerned, there are two relevant Basic Laws.**

## Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty

is a Basic Law in the State of Israel, enacted to protect the country's main human rights for ALL its citizens. It declares that basic human rights in Israel are based on the recognition of the value of man, the sanctity of his life and the fact that he is free. This Basic Law enjoys super-legal status, giving the Supreme Court the authority to disqualify any law contradicting it.

## Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation

is a Basic Law in the state of Israel which guarantees every Israeli national or resident's "right to engage in any occupation, profession or trade".

Whilst Israel's Nation-State Law

which was passed in July 2018 drew international criticism, as well as from the Palestinian leadership and heads of Israel's minorities, the Nation-State Law contains no additional rights for Jews; nor does it promulgate fewer rights for Arabs. Amongst some of the criticism is that the Law downgrades Arabic from an official language to one with a 'special status.' However, upon closer scrutiny of the content of the Law, this can be seen largely as a symbolic sleight since a subsequent clause says, "This clause does not harm the status given to the Arabic language before this law came into effect."

It is worth noting that the Palestinian Authority's own Basic Palestinian Law confirms that Arabic shall be the official language of a Palestinian state (making no mention of any other language), that Islam is its official religion and Sharia will form the basis of its legal system.

# HOW ISRAEL'S MINORITIES FIT INTO ISRAELI SOCIETY

Israel's minorities are present and represented throughout every level of Israeli society, from its Knesset (Parliament) and Supreme Court, to its defence forces and media, and beyond.

## Politics:

- The 2015 elections included 18 Arab members of Knesset (MKs). Along with 13 members of the Joint List, there were four Arab parliamentarians representing Zionist parties, which is more than double their number in the previous Knesset.

- Ahmad Tibi is an Arab-Muslim Israeli politician and leader of the Arab Movement for Change (Ta'al), an Arab



party in Israel. He currently serves as one of ten Deputy Speakers of the Knesset.

- Salim Joubran, a Christian Arab, is a former Supreme Court Judge and was the first Arab to receive a permanent appointment in the Israeli Supreme Court.



- George Karra is a judge in the Israeli Supreme Court and was the judge who convicted former Israeli President, Moshe Katsav, of rape.



## Security:

- Faten Nassraddin is a female Israeli Druze police officer.



- Jamal Hakrush, an Arab Muslim, serves as a deputy commissioner in the Israel Police.



- Monaliza Abdo, a Christian Arab, serves as a Commander in the IDF.



- Major Alaa Waheeb, a Muslim Arab, is the IDF's highest ranking Muslim soldier.



- Amira al Hayb was the first female Bedouin soldier to serve in a combat position in the IDF.

## Popular culture and television:

- Israel's Eurovision entrant in 2009 was a Christian Arab, Mira Awad.



- Rana Raslan, an Arab Muslim model was Miss Israel in 1999.



- Dr. Nof Atamna-Ismaeel, an Israeli Arab, won Israel's MasterChef in 2014, beating two Jewish contestants for the title.



- Hiam Abbass is a Palestinian actress and film director living in Israel. During the filming of the Steven Spielberg film Munich, Abbass lived in a hotel with the Palestinian Arab and Israeli actors for three months. During that time, they had many discussions that "helped both sides grow closer".

## Academia and medicine:

- Professor Alean Al-Krenawi, a Bedouin, is President of the Achva College at Ben Gurion university.



- Dr. Aziz Darawshe is the head of emergency medicine at Jerusalem's Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital.



- Israel's public health system is a model for Jewish/Arab co-working and collaboration. As of May 2017, 42% of all nursing students in Israel were Arabs, 38% of pharmacists in Israel were Arab, and 38% of medical students at the Technion in Haifa were Arab as well.

- Israeli-Arabs look to jobs in the healthcare industry because it allows them to find work outside of the normal confines of Arab society in Israel.

## Education:

- In 2012, the government initiated a program to make higher education more accessible to the Arab public. A study released in January 2018 by the Council for Higher Education found that the total number of Arab-Israeli students pursuing all forms of higher-education in Israel rose by 78.5% from 2010 to 2017.

- The number of Arab Ph.D. candidates more than doubled from 355 in 2008 to 759 in 2018. In 2018, 40% of these students were in the fields of engineering and natural sciences and 40% in the social sciences.

- The number of Israeli-Arab students in master's degree programs has risen dramatically – by 90% – between 2008 and 2018.

- The number of Israeli-Arab teachers in Israel's state schools increased by 40% between 2013 and 2016, as reported by Israel's Education Ministry in August 2016.

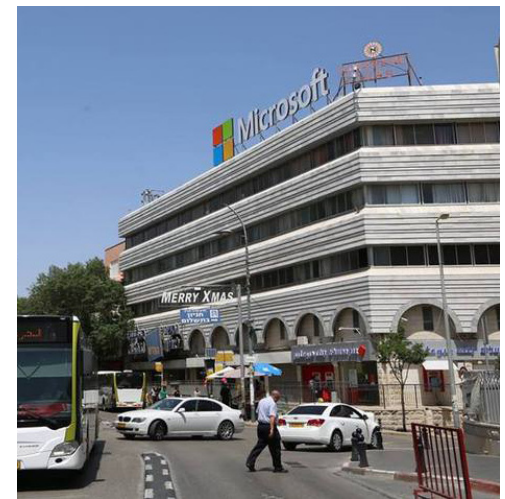


## Hi-tech:

- In April 2018, the Knesset committee for Arab affairs approved a \$5.6 million two-year plan for the creation of technology parks within Arab towns in Israel to boost local employment opportunities.



- An additional \$1.4 million was earmarked to create access roads and transportation to and from these parks.



- This plan is an extension of a 2015 program for the economic development of the Arab Israeli sector and other minority communities from 2016 through 2020.

- High-tech firms are increasingly opening offices and plants in Arab towns. In Nazareth, the largest Arab city in Israel's Northern District, more than 950 high-tech employees — up from just 30 in 2008 — work in companies such as Amdocs, Microsoft, and Broadcom.

- Of these employees, 25% are Arab women.





## **The Zionist Federation**

020 8202 0202 | [office@zionist.org.uk](mailto:office@zionist.org.uk) | [www.zionist.org.uk](http://www.zionist.org.uk) |   @zionistfed

Produced and published by the ZF, March 2019