

“On Guard” – An Emergency Program to Prevent the Situation from Deteriorating into Violence between Jews and Arabs within the State of Israel

A Joint Initiative for Foundations and Civil Society Organizations

Introduction:

Israel is in an unprecedented period of emergency and the continuing war in Gaza has left all of us on the home front shaken. We are trying to balance our own immense sense of loss and mourning that is still mixed with rage and total shock. As a society we are trying to understand what happened and what is happening while at the same time watching the situation change daily. We recognize that these emotions color all of our actions, but despite this we are trying to work towards a better reality.

Only two and a half years ago, we saw the fragile fabric of coexistence in Israel strained to the breaking point with riots and severe violence in Israel’s mixed cities. Given the tremendous difficulties we have in contending with the feelings that are sweeping over us, there is a real concern that inter-community violence will flare up again. There are forces and interested parties, both in the Government and supported by the Government, that are working systematically to cause the situation to deteriorate into violence. In addition, incitement campaigns are being conducted by extremist groups from inside Israel.

Our reading of the situation – which is based on among other things, Israel civil society organizations working on the ground – shows us that the risk is real.

Therefore, as philanthropic foundations, civil society organizations, and local leadership, we feel it is imperative to invest heavily now to keep this potential catastrophe from becoming another self-fulfilling prophecy as the fog of war deepens.

We propose this outline of a multi-arena prevention program for the next three months.

Channels of action

To this end, we propose action in four synergetic channels:

- a. Action headquarters in the mixed cities.

- b. Focused, accelerated action among adolescents and young adults.
- c. A social network and media campaign.
- d. Training and support of organizations and shared spaces.

* Details of processes below.

Potential philanthropic partners and cooperative ventures

As of November 1, 2023:

Partner foundations that have approved funding	
San Francisco Jewish Community Federation; Lautman Foundation, Gandyr Foundation, Russell Berrie Foundation, Ted Arison Family Foundation, NextGen Foundation, The Bloom Foundation, Bustan Foundation, Mubadarat	

Managing and steering the process

Adv. Rasool Saada, Head of Operations at Al Bayader, has been selected to lead the process in the next three months (he will be on temporary loan from Al Bayader for this process).

The program director’s position includes the following:

1. Develop the program with the potential partners involved, including constructing detailed budgets and integrating and leveraging existing processes in the field.
2. Work with all interested parties: foundations, grassroots organizations, municipal leadership, government ministries, local civil leadership.
3. Manage and monitor the rapid implementation of the operational programs in each of the channels.
4. Support and monitor implementation of the programs and manage the budget.

Managing the partnership

1. Representatives of the partner foundations will hold a weekly meeting to receive reports from the program director and make decisions regarding the progress of the program.
2. Funds from the foundations will be transferred directly to the organizations active in the various areas, according to an agreed-upon distribution.
3. The program director's salary will be transferred to Al Bayader, which will continue to employ him during this period as well.

Budget

The program budget is appended to this document, in the attached presentation (it will be updated according to the needs that develop during implementation and the extent of the resources raised).

Channels of action

1. Establishing action headquarters in the mixed cities and clusters

The need

Israel's major mixed cities are seen as high-risk for violent flare-ups between Arab and Jewish citizens, based on the experience of the violence that broke out in May 2021. Since the outbreak of the war, calm has prevailed, which is an encouraging sign. Nonetheless, in the absence of a municipal-community infrastructure for coordination and joint work in periods of emergency; and the ongoing war, with its numerous casualties and incitement against Arab citizens that is already widespread, we fear that the situation has the potential to flare up and deteriorate rapidly. Therefore, an immediate need for intervention exists and needs to be implemented on two levels.

1. Provide support and guidance to the community and the local leadership.
2. During periods of emergency, build or activate mechanisms for cooperation between local governments, the Israel Police and the local (Arab and Jewish) leadership.

The process

Establish local action headquarters in the mixed cities and clusters where the risk of violence is the highest. The headquarters will take measures to prevent violence, promote Jewish-Arab partnerships, and rapidly respond to events when they occur. They will consider each area's unique challenges and will adopt a holistic and integrated approach. The headquarters will be set up in 11 areas and cities throughout Israel, which will be selected according to criteria that must be met, to ensure that the programs are feasible. The principal channels of action in this process include consciousness-raising and tolerant communications and discourse, promoting a joint Jewish-Arab guard organization, and monitoring acts of violence against population groups, in cooperation with the Israel Police and each municipality/local government.

Objectives

- Reduce manifestations of violence and hatred and prevent radicalization.
- Strengthen the partnership and build trust between the various population groups, the municipality/local government, and the Israel Police.

- Increase all residents' sense of personal security and safety.
- Provide intermediation and access to information and needs among the institutions, communities, municipalities/local governments, and various local entities.

Leading organizations

Givat Haviva, the Abraham Initiatives and the Tzedek Centers.

2. Preventing escalation and violence among adolescents and young adults

The need

The population of adolescents and young adults in Arab society is the segment in Israel facing some of the most difficult challenges and the current conflict makes their situation even more complex. Israel's Arab youth population has the highest rates of school dropout and unemployment in the country. They have evidenced strong feelings of pain, anger, and helplessness in recent weeks, and this needs immediate attention. If not, there is a real risk that their frustrations and sense of hopelessness will turn into acts of violence that will result in long-term harm to themselves and their communities.

In addition to increasing the scope of activity by young people's organizations in Arab society and adapting the activities to the present emergency, a need has arisen, on the one hand, to intensify and focus that activity, and on the other, to expand these activities to specific groups (such as young people at risk, and young people who neither have jobs nor attend school). We need to form young leadership groups, composed of grassroots organizations for young people, which will operate in the public sphere within the Arab cities, towns, and villages. These groups will constitute a positive force in the community, which will help the local governments cope during emergencies and prevent escalation.

The process

Form leadership groups of 30-40 young volunteers, which will operate in Arab cities, towns and villages at high risk of flareups and escalation during security emergencies. Emergency and peacetime functions will be defined for each group, including patrolling the city/town/village and providing responses as necessary, saving lives, PR activity for young people and for the community, educational activity for children and adults, relieving loneliness, promoting volunteer activity in the community, communications within the city/town/village, and more. The groups will operate in 15-20 locations, which will be selected according to set criteria to ensure that the plans are realistic and can be implemented successfully. The start of the activities in these selected areas will be gradual.

Objectives

- Reinforce the community and its mutual assistance network.
- Direct the strengths of Arab adolescents and young adults toward expanding community responses in time of emergency and cooperative ventures on local issues.
- Provide a response to youngsters in general, and youngsters who neither work nor attend school in particular, through constructive action and spheres of influence.
- Increase adolescents' and young adults' civic involvement, and strengthen their sense of belonging, significance, and local patriotism.
- Monitor negative phenomena and trends and prevent the downward slide into violence.

Leading organizations

In addition to supporting the existing organizations for young adults and adolescents (Ajyal, Midad, Qadaya [The Arab Center for Alternative Planning], HaNoar HaOved VeHaLomed [Working and Studying Youth], AJEEC-NISPED, etc.), a small cadre will be set up to integrate the process, support grassroots activities, train the groups and build connections with the various government entities.

3. Social network and media campaign for the prevention of violence and harm to the fabric of coexistence

The need

Studies and surveys published since the outbreak of the war report a significant increase in negative perceptions and positions between Jewish and Arab citizens, including fear, suspicion, pain and anger. Currently, incitement campaigns promoted by extremist entities, who are emboldened by these prevailing sentiments, are further bringing hate speech and incitement into the mainstream. In addition, Israel's Arab society is encountering concerted attempts to silence them, and we are seeing people from all backgrounds expressing radical views. The proliferation of online fake news, among other causes, has played a major role in this dangerous phenomenon.

Therefore, a campaign is needed to promote universal values, call for calm, emphasize stories of civic solidarity, and partnership, provide an outlet for expressions of pain, and create an organizing narrative for citizens given the complex reality of this war.

The process

A bilingual campaign that will focus on “calming the waters,” the shared future of Jews and Arabs, and preventing escalation, and will continue for approximately three months. The process will consist of several complementary campaigns led by different organizations for different target audiences (e.g., age, employment, socio-economic group, etc.), on various levels (local and national), with different emphases for each campaign, under an umbrella with a coordinated strategy.

Objectives

- Decrease the proportion of negative positions adopted by Jews as a group vis-à-vis Arabs as a group and vice versa.
- Increase trust between Arabs and Jews and influence public discourse.
- “Calm the waters” and encourage initiatives for joint action and dialogue.
- Enlist major employers in Israel’s economy as partners in the campaigns.

Leading organizations

aChord and The Citizens HQ (the mind behind the campaigns), high-tech companies (Monday, Facebook, Wix), the Abraham Initiatives, the Tzedek Centers and Givat Haviva, AJEEC-NISPED, Co-Impact, Keshet, the Arab Emergency Committee, the Business Forum, the Histadrut – Israel Federation of Labor, the Israel Medical Association, the Peres Peace Center, Qadaya [The Arab Center for Alternative Planning], “Have You Seen the Horizon Lately?”, Jewish and Arab influencers, and more.

4. Training and support for organizations and shared spaces

The need

Under the shadow of war, Jewish-Arab relations have deteriorated; this is affecting the ability of workplaces and academic institutions to contend with the tensions that arise. Hostility and withdrawing from each other are becoming evident, even in places that formerly enjoyed exemplary cooperation between Jews and Arabs. This deterioration not only threatens the progress of the last decade toward the integration of Arab citizens into the Israeli economy, academia, and society, but also constitutes another risk factor for manifestations of hatred and violent flareups. Meaningful and targeted intervention are required to enable cooperation and coexistence to continue in these shared spaces.

The process

We seek to integrate and disseminate the tools, guides, and models that were developed for employers, academic institutions, and local governments to address the escalation of tensions between Arabs and Jews. This process of assimilation will include lectures and applied workshops, as well as processes of advising and supporting academic institutions, business companies, public entities, educational institutions, and mixed local governments, on subjects including management of intra-organizational space, preventive measures, and responsible handling of extreme cases. The process will be gradual, based on mapping the potential hot spots, and the organizations' needs during security emergencies: a) essential services; b) high-tech and academia; c) government ministries. The process will be supported by ongoing research, which will help to refine the responses.

Objectives

- Prevent the downward slide into violence in shared spaces.
- Prevent profound, long-term damage to the fabric of relations between Arabs and Jews in employment and the job market, in academia, and in Israeli society.
- Build employers' and managers' ability to contend with social tensions.

Leading organizations

aChord and Co-Impact.