

To
Mr. Reuven Rivlin
President of the State of Israel

15.6.2016

Re: Stopping anti-democratic legislation

Dear Mr. President,

We, the directors of organizations for human rights and social change, are turning to you to request that you make every effort to stop the wave of anti-democratic legislation in Israel; intervening in order to put an end to the systematic harm inflicted upon the work of human rights and social justice activists.

In recent years, there has been a dangerous and troubling erosion of Israeli democracy on all fronts. We, organizations working for social change and civil and human rights, have been under a fervent onslaught that not only harms us, but also Israel as a democracy.

This onslaught manifests itself in anti-democratic legislation aimed at silencing critical voices, limiting freedom of expression, diminishing the rights of minorities, and weakening the status of the Supreme Court. Legislative initiatives like the NGO Bill, first and foremost harm organizations working for human rights and peace, along with left-wing groups. Moreover, laws like the “Suspension Law,” designed to intimidate and alienate public officials who represent the Arab minority among others, are being fervently advanced in the Knesset – and no one disputes the fact that they are explicitly anti-democratic.

These initiatives are taking place in a hostile atmosphere of incitement and political persecution against human rights and social change organizations. We currently live in a reality in which senior politicians allow themselves to label members of Breaking the Silence “spies,” “traitors” and “foreign agents”; Right-wing organizations pay impostors with public funds to penetrate organizations as “moles” with the aim of defaming them; and there is even a concerted effort to shut down Breaking the Silence through legal means. In parallel, we are witnessing how selective enforcement sends young Israeli Arabs to jail for comments they posted on social media, in a sense that explicitly violates freedom of expression; and administrative detention continues to be used as a legitimate tool against both Palestinians and Israelis alike.

This reality, in which it is legitimate to label and slander individuals and groups as dissidents against the State – from the Israeli president, to the IDF chief of staff, defence minister, members of Knesset, artists, academics, intellectuals and others – solely for their social and political positions, is unacceptable and must be stopped.

It is clear to all that the common ground shared by these initiatives is the determination to narrow the impact of organizations that do not align with the government, both in Israel and abroad. This is due, among other things, to the fact that they advocate for human rights in the OPT, oppose the occupation, and work to

ensure rights for asylum seekers. The success of such persecution will come at a heavy price: the weakening of Israel and grave harm to its democratic nature.

The work of human rights and civil society organizations in Israel is essential to its democracy, especially when it comes to organizations that directly oppose government policy. Without legal and political protection that creates space for safe and free action in Israel, we will be barred from fulfilling our civil duty to identify injustices and work to correct them.

Thus, we, organizations for human rights and social change in Israel, call on you, the president of the State of Israel and someone who holds democracy dear, aware of what it's like to be the target of incitement and hate, firsthand – to make every possible effort to stop the anti-democratic wave engulfing us; to stop the persecution against civil society organizations and prevent further violations of the freedom to organize, the freedom of expression, and other Israeli democratic values.

Only a country that provides legal and political recognition of human and civil rights, and freedom of expression, which embodies the simple and just principles of equal rights and human dignity, is deserving of being called a democracy.

Sincerely,

Sharon Abraham Weiss – **Association for Civil Rights in Israel**, Hagai El-Ad – **B'Tselem**, Judith Oppenheimer – **Ir Amim**, Arik Ascherman – **Rabbis for Human Rights**, Avi Buskila – **Peace Now**, Alma Biblash – **Human Rights Defenders Fund**, Ran Goldstein – **Physicians for Human Rights**, Yonatan Gher – **Amnesty International - Israel**, Rawnak Natour and Ron Gerlitz – **Sikkuy**, Tania Hary – **Gisha - Legal Center for Freedom of Movement**, Ala Khatib – **Kav LaOved**, Lior Yavne – **Akevot - Institute for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Research**, Raya Yaron – **MachsosWatch**, Nirit Moskovich – **The Social Guard**, Reut Michaeli – **Hotline for Refugees and Migrants**, Yuli Novak – **Breaking the Silence**, Reem Amer and Maayan Dak – **Coalition of Women for Peace**, Neta Patrick – **Yesh Din**, Michael Pinchuk – **Assaf**, Dalia Kerstein – **Hamoked Center for the Defence of the Individual**, Hedva Radovanitz – **Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights**, Rachel Stroumsa – **The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel**.