



Isha L'Isha – Haifa Feminist Center

Position Paper on the Civilian Peace Processes Feminist Perspectives

Civilian Peace Processes versus Government Negotiations

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Abstract

The Annapolis conference signified a change in the approach of the civilian population in Israel and in the region towards the diplomatic negotiations initiated and conducted by the United States and Israeli governments with the Palestinian leadership that they recognizes. Responses to the Annapolis conference included apathy and cautious hope on the part of many members of Israeli society, and an opposition on the part of sizeable portions of the population of the occupied Palestinian territories and most of the Palestinians in Israel. After 60 years during which most of the Jewish public placed its faith in the political elite to bring an end to the national-social conflict in the region, a turnabout has taken place in both the Israeli public, characterized mainly by essential lack of faith of civil society in the government's actions. The ongoing and increasing lack of personal-economic-social security among most of the population has led both to a collapse of the public's faith in Israeli government, and to the opportunity to create a new civilian discourse on the issue of the peace process, its components and goals.

Due to the above-stated, Isha L'Isha – the Haifa Feminist Center, decided, to reformulate the content, processes and results involved in a peace process based on the needs, interests and desires of the civilian population. The founding assumption of the focus group participants was that the new civilian



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discourse on the topic should be fundamentally feminist, one that would place personal-economic and social security as the foremost priority. To this end, Isha L'Isha – the Haifa Feminist Center convened two focus groups from its community, in which thirty women of different nationalities, ethnicities, social classes and identities participated. In these focus groups, the women discussed a redefinition of the content of the peace process and its goals, while relating also to fundamental questions such as "who are the desirable participants in this process?," "what are the topics to be raised for discussion?," "what are the fundamental conditions for conducting a peace process?," "what dynamic should characterize this process and what goals must be fulfilled during the process and at its conclusion?." Following is a summary of the discussion results:

A civilian peace process, in contrast to a governmental peace process, is based on the following components:

- a. broad civilian participation in the process
- b. depart from the dominant security discourse that characterizes governmental negotiations, and creating a broad discussion field to include questions relating to all aspects of the lives of the region's inhabitants
- c. creation of preconditions that will enable a broad and mutual civilian discourse

A peace process can be based, first of all, on a separate citizen initiative by each of the populations of the area: Palestinian, Syrian, Lebanese, and Jewish-Israeli.

Each one of these populations would discuss its needs and ways of coping that are appropriate to it for dealing with internal, gender, class, economic and cultural inequalities. In order to create a possibility for encounter and dialogue between the Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli populations and other



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populations, it will be imperative to take responsibility for the historical and political injustice perpetrated against peoples and residents of the region.

Freedom from military and national-cultural occupation: Many believe that achieving existential security for the regional population will require discussions on the basic conditions that will assure the removal of the discourse and practice of war and occupation. Ending the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian territories as a preliminary condition will render it possible to generate civilian discussions regarding ways of creating a geographical-political space that will contain and recognize the diversity of cultures, nations and genders, and will enable everyone to live openly according to these identities and without discrimination.

Freedom from economic-vocational and health occupation: topics such as the right to housing, the right to work and to fair remuneration, respectable economic conditions for residents of the region, and equal opportunities for all men and women in these areas will be discussed by participants, giving rise to new and varied ways of thinking on these topics. Equal economic and employment opportunities as well as the right of every person to receive medical services and to preserve his/her health independent of ethnicity, gender, and religion.

Freedom from violence against women: As part of the removal of the militant power based discourse, which is blatantly male, for the first time the opportunity will arise to create a broad discourse about gender equality in the population. For many women, a state of peace is valuable not only for bringing about an end to fighting, but to bring an end to the dominant male discourse and practice that creates systematic violence against all political minorities in the area, including the female political minority.



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Freedom from environmental occupation: An end to oppression in the realms of the military-national, gender, cultural, economic and employment is insufficient if the geographical environment in which we live does not allow us a secure existence. The control, until now, exercised by the owners of political and economical capital on the lives of residents of the region has led to severe and ongoing environmental degradation, which over time has also violated our right to health and to a pollution-free life. The nuclear reactor in Dimona, factories that pollute, disposal of nuclear and other waste in areas where weak populations reside, are just some of the consequences of the dominant ideology, which arms itself with weapons of war and destruction while preserving the security of capitalists, as they grow rich at the expense of the civilian population's health. Dignified conditions of existence thus require ridding our environment of arms and of polluting factories, in order to create for all of us a geographic space protected from militarism and from the pollution and disease that it engenders.

An end to the Systematical discriminatory policy towards the Palestinians in Israel. Needless to say, the occupation of these areas will not in itself bring about an end to the discriminatory and oppressive treatment of the Palestinian population in Israel that has been built up and taken root since the *Nakba*. In order to create conditions for a life of dignity for the entire civilian population in the area, an end to the military occupation is not sufficient, and it will be necessary to discuss an end to the policy of separation and disenfranchisement imposed on the Palestinian population in all areas of life.