



# I'lam's Essentials: Free Expression

The focus of I'lam: Media Center for Arab Palestinians in Israel is to promote media rights for the Palestinian community in Israel and to create a more open and democratic climate in both the Hebrew and Arabic press. Founded in 2000 by Arab journalists and academics, I'lam works to empower and educate the Arabic media and public living in Israel as well as to educate, monitor and communicate with the mainstream Hebrew media. For over a decade, I'lam has been the only NGO in Israel that focuses on the issue of media rights and media empowerment for Palestinians living in Israel. I'lam has achieved great success in training and empowering Arab journalists as well as helping them professionalize and establish a code of ethics. Through its programs that include advocacy for more equal coverage of the Palestinian minority, I'lam works to create a more democratic environment in Israel while preserving the shrinking space for free expression.

Promoting freedom of expression is one of the most important issues I'lam works with. Independent journalism and free expression are essential to

Continued on pg 2



*I'lam's Conference on Human Rights in Media Discourse*

## The State of Freedom of Expression in Israel

*Dr. Amal Jamal, the General Director of I'lam talks about the state of freedom of expression in Israel and why freedom of expression is so important to a free society.*

Freedom of expression is conceived as a value central to democratic political culture. People tend to value the importance of freedom of expression mostly on the political level. I would like to clarify that freedom of expression is a much deeper functional, existential and political need of society. The ability to express an opinion or worldview or any idea is a basic need and also a reflection of the self-constitution of society. Freedom of expression

Continued on pg 2

democracy and a free society and that is why I'lam devotes its time to improving the media situation in Israel. I'lam works towards professionalizing the Arabic media and promoting impartiality, fairness and in depth coverage of human rights issues in all Israeli media. I'lam wants an unbiased and fair representation of Palestinians in the Hebrew media and to enable Arab journalists to freely report on the issues of the day. Media-related human rights and specifically the public's right to know are one of I'lam's biggest concerns.

The work I'lam does both empowers and professionalizes the Arabic media and creates a climate where journalists are free to practice their trade honestly and without censor. Raising media awareness about Palestinian society and political issues as well as educating the community to critically consume media, allows I'lam to create an environment where the community is both fairly represented in the media and also able to think critically about the media it is consuming. The work of I'lam is essential because the voice of Palestinians in the Israeli media has been excluded from the public discourse and the already shrinking space for Palestinian free expression needs to be preserved. A free, empowered and professional press is essential to a democratic society and without it there can be no free civil society. That is why I'lam works to promote media rights for Palestinians living in Israel, to ensure that they have access to free and fair media.

is the nerve of society and without it society cannot function. The intensity of communicative acts between individuals and groups in society is what makes societies conceive themselves and differentiate between themselves and others. The self-constitution of society makes freedom of expression an existential dimension, which if abolished or limited can harm the development of society and its progress to meet its values, expectations and future horizons. Freedom of expression enables societies to continuously verify the preferable ways of life and better forms of interaction. Therefore limiting freedom of expression does not only harm the ability of the individual to convey what he or she believes but it also prevents society from being exposed to different opinions, which is something indispensable to reaching the better opinion on different matters.

The zeitgeist in Israel has translated into legislative efforts that seek to limit the spaces of expression and exclude certain topics from being freely deliberated in the public sphere. This does not only harm the freedom of expression of individuals but also imposes a limited and exclusive worldview on the entire society. These trends limit the pluralistic and multiple world views available, and lead to a closed nationalistic and chauvinistic society. The result is more racism, ignorance, incitement and xenophobia. This reality is orchestrated by a coalition composed of nationalistic and racist parties seeking hegemony, that translates into a growing willingness of a number of Israelis to fight for values that harm the moral foundations on which the entire Israeli existence stands on. The process of de-legitimization of Israel starts at home, instigated by the growing unwillingness to hear critiques and opposing voices.

I'lam is working hard in this process. The various activities of the Center come to celebrate the importance of freedom of expression and the discourse of human rights seeking to convince a growing number of Israelis as well as Palestinians that communication is a necessity that cannot be overcome and shouldn't be emptied of its substantial meaning.

# The Palestinian Press - A Genealogical Fragment

*The history of the press in Palestine before and after the 1948 war reflects the devastating impact that the Israeli government has had on the Palestinian media. In Dr. Amal Jamal's book "The Manufacturing of "Quiet Arabs" and the Role of Mizrahi Jews in Arabic Newspapers in Israel" which is excerpted below, he lays out a brief history of the Palestinian press and the effect that the Nakba had on both the Arabic media and the civil society as a whole.*

By 1948 about 60 newspapers were published, especially in the centers of the large cities, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and Akka, including the well-known Filastin, al-Karmil and al-Difa'a, the newspapers which enjoyed the widest circulation. Some of the Palestinian newspapers were even exported to other Arab states, while newspapers from neighboring Arab countries reached the large cities of Palestine, and especially the coastal cities. The local newspapers expressed the opinions and the feelings of Palestinians who predicted the growing threat represented by Zionist immigration and settlement in Palestine. The newspaper reporters belonged to the most active groups of the Palestinian elite who expressed the same fears of the possible implications of Jewish immigration and of the intentions of the Zionist movement. They also endeavored to disseminate information and commentary about the political aspirations of the Palestinians and the social and political barriers which stood in

the way of achieving Palestinian political independence.

The 1948 war had disastrous results from the Palestinian point of view. City centers like Jaffa and Haifa, in which a Palestinian public sphere had begun to develop and become galvanized, were completely destroyed and became peripheral depressed neighborhoods within Jewish cities like Tel Aviv and the Jewish sections of Haifa which were intensively expanding. Along with the loss of their homeland, the war led to the loss of control of most Palestinian social, economic and cultural institutions.

This also applies to Palestinians who were left within the borders of the state of Israel. During the war, the political, cultural and economic Arab elites either fled or were expelled, and the urban centers were destroyed by

the Israeli army. As a result, most Arab institutions collapsed, including the mass media which had been developing until that point. With the outbreak of the war, a cultural and communications vacuum was created and the local Palestinian population was cut off from Palestinians and Arabs living in neighboring countries, as well as being disconnected from the surrounding Arab cultural and social landscape. This isolation intensified the sense of crisis and helplessness of the local Palestinian population.





# Debating the Future with the Youth of our Present

A large part of I'lam's mission is to educate and empower the Arab public to consume media critically so that they can be active and informed participants in society. The program 'Palestinian Citizens as Constituents of a Debating Society' supported in part by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, is one of I'lam's most ambitious projects aimed at empowering and educating the Palestinian society in Israel. The project consists of training Arab youth how to research and formally debate important issues to the Palestinian community. Richard Asbeck of the Hanns Seidel foundation explained why supporting this debating program was so important. "Public debates are essential features of a vibrant democracy. At the same time, participants of public debates need debating skills. Hanns Seidel Foundation has supported various activities inside and outside Germany, which strive for educating the future generation of decision makers in public debate. As these skills are hardly taught at university or in public education, we think that it is up to civil society to provide for such training. Thematically - and in view of various legislative initiatives, polls on Jewish-Arab relations in Israel as well as socio-economic reports on the situation of the Arab minority - the public debates will focus on subjects related to majority/minority relations in Israel."

The program aims to create a climate where Arab youths can learn formal debating technique and how to think critically about issues that impact their lives. The project is spread across seven months, from May of 2012 until the end of November and includes training workshops as well as three live public debates that will be broadcast to the Palestinian community through the internet and local and international television stations. The youths will participate in the debates and judge them. In addition to educating the Arab youth, the debates give I'lam the opportunity to educate and empower the Palestinian community in Israel as a whole.

A reason for the debating project's

necessity in Arab society is that the Arab youth are often excluded from the actions of civil society and feel alienated from politics. Topics such as women's rights, the poor and youth issues are often ignored in the mainstream Arabic media; this program gives both the youth and the public the chance to engage in dialogue about these issues that are often forgotten. Through watching these debates, the Arab public can join in the intellectual discourse and be exposed to issues that they otherwise might not engage with. In this way, both the participating youth and the larger Arab public are being empowered and educated so that they can be active and involved citizens in civil society.

Discussion topics for the public debates will focus broadly on issues such as



*Opening Session of the Debating Workshop*

freedom of expression and the rights of Palestinians in Israel as well as Palestinian educational issues. Many thousands are expected to view the televised debates and each one will have a live audience of about thirty persons that can ask questions and interact with the debaters. The hope is that at the end of the program, there will be a group of Arab youths that are trained in research and debating and possess leadership skills that they can use in the community. The program also intends to build greater awareness among the Arab public about issues that affect Palestinians living in Israel.

# I'lam's Video Message to Community on World Press Freedom Day

May 3rd 2012 marked an important day for I'lam and for journalists worldwide. On that day I'lam celebrated the 19th annual World Press Freedom Day. Founded and sponsored by the United Nations, World Press Freedom Day is a day dedicated to the promotion of free press in all areas of the world and to remember those nations that do not permit their citizens and journalists access to a press free of persecution and censor. The issue of freedom of expression for citizens and journalists is one of the core principles of I'lam and thus World Press Freedom Day is very dear to the hearts of I'lam's advocates. To commemorate World Press Freedom Day and to raise awareness about the restrictions on free expression for Palestinians living in Israel, I'lam Media Center produced a short video entitled "I have the right".

"The concept behind I'lam is journalist rights and freedom of the press in Israel, and we believe it's very important to show the world that we are working towards protecting and promoting these rights" explains Mariam Farah, I'lam's Public Relations Strategist. "Our audience is also the civil society and it's important to show them that their media rights, freedom of expression and freedom of the press are related and you can't separate them."

The three minute video features various people from the Palestinian community – including established rappers, writers, artists and dancers - asserting their rights. Some rights are general ones that all people around the world should have, like the right to wear and freely state their opinion. However, the video's power lay in the rights that were specific to Palestinians living in Israel. Some stated that they had the right to raise the flag they wanted, be called by their Arabic name and not by its Hebrew version and to identify with Palestinian symbols. The recitation of these rights ended with each participant asking the audience in Arabic "What are you afraid of?"

"People love to see more than to read, in my opinion. In this present moment, we are in a visual world where everything is seen and I think it's the fastest way to get to the audience. The visual is very important" says Farah.

The spirit of I'lam was captured in the video because it not only took inspiration from the right of journalists to fairly cover the news, but it also made the statement that all people have the right to express themselves freely. When asked what she hoped people took from the video Farah said "motivation to express themselves freely, some awareness about their basic right to freedom of expression. I think they weren't aware enough. So motivation and awareness to act, sing and play what they want, in keeping with an authentic identity."

The idea that all people have the right to free expression is a central principle at I'lam and the message of World Press Freedom Day is echoed every day through I'lam's engagement with the Hebrew and Arabic media in Israel. The short film was a success, garnering over 19,000 internet views. It is the hope of I'lam that projects like these will raise awareness and diversify the discourse about the issues that face Palestinian journalists, and citizens, living in Israel.



I have the right to raise the flag that I want

*I'lam's Film - I have the Right*

# A Recap of the Past Year's Activities

## **First Annual Arab Media Conference:**

On December 17<sup>th</sup> 2011 I'lam hosted the first annual Arab media conference at the Rimonim Hotel in Nazareth. The conference was titled "The Role of Palestinian Journalists and the Professional Challenges they Face" and had a very successful turnout of over 100 journalists, media students and civil society activists attending. The conference consisted of three panel discussions that focused on the challenges that Palestinian journalists face as well as the role of new media and Arabic news channels. The event's success led to many participants calling for it to become an annual event.

## **Critical Media Consumption Project:**

The Critical Media Consumption project is an ongoing project that I'lam sponsors along with three area high schools. It has been running since 2010. The project's goal is to teach young people at the high school level how to critically consume and analyze media so that they can understand it objectively. As a result,

several dozen students now look at the media in a more circumspect and critical way.



*Arab Journalists' Visit to Globes Newspaper*

**Naqab Tour for Journalists:** On March 18<sup>th</sup> 2012, I'lam in partnership with legal rights NGO Adalah organized a tour of the Naqab for journalists on the eve of Land Day. The journalists on the trip were a mixture of both Jewish and Arab and were escorted to Naqab villages that are set to be impacted by the government's Praver Plan. The Praver plan was adopted by the Israeli government in September 2011 that threatens the livelihoods and living conditions of 65,000 Palestinian citizens, who will be displaced and have historical lands expropriated, in order to concentrate them in state planned 'development towns'. Participants represented all fields of media with journalists from websites, newspapers, international and local television and radio channels.



*First Arab Journalists' Conference 17.12.2011*



## Globes Tour for Arab Journalists:

The prominent economic and business newspaper Globes joined with I'lam to organize a tour for Arab journalists that took place on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012. The activity included meetings and presentations between the editors and staff of Globes and the Arab journalists. The purpose of the tour was to discuss the coverage of business news and Globes' coverage of Palestinian society.

**The Young Journalist Project:** I'lam, supported by the Tsadik Foundation, and in cooperation with the social service department at Nazareth municipality, runs this project to help at risk children.

“The Little Journalist” project works with children whose parents struggle with addiction, with the objective being to help the children find a healthy creative outlet for their emotions. The students learn how to think critically

about media and are trained how to write creatively as young journalists. In addition to training the students in journalism, the program helps them to cope with their home situations by writing about their feelings and struggles. Each year the participating students contribute creative writings to a journal entitled “The Young Journalist”. The fifth edition of the journal was published in March of 2012.

**Cinema Club:** The cinema club is a part of I'lam's educational programs for the Arab community and its main goal is to promote media literacy in Arab society



Cinema Club – Nazareth

through cinema. The program attempts to educate the Arab Palestinian public on how to critically consume film and documentaries and thus create a more educated public that can contribute to a more democratic Palestinian society. The films included a showing of the film “Paradise” on December 14<sup>th</sup> 2011 for the Democratic Women's Club of Nazareth. Five film screenings and discussions were held in the first part of 2012 and included work with NGOs and community and youth organizations.

## The New Content (Madmoun Jadeed) Project:

The New Content project ran from February 2011 to the end of that year and was a collaboration between I'lam and media NGOs Ammannet and Amin (the Arabic Media Internet Network). The project's goal was to encourage Arab journalists to do more investigative journalism by training journalists to conduct investigative research and how to write in-depth reports about said research. Journalists were trained how to write detailed investigative pieces on three thematic issues - foreign labor, environmental issues and consumer protection. The journalists were supervised and aided in writing deep investigative pieces about issues ranging from women's issues and economic

exploitation, the dangers of industrial chemicals to the Bedouin population and discrimination against Arabs in service allocation.

**Interim Member at IFEX:** In mid-2012, I'lam became an interim member of IFEX, the global free expression exchange network that monitors free expression violations worldwide. As IFEX's latest member, we are the only media NGO monitoring free expression issues exclusively in Israel.

**I'lam's Advocacy Program:** Over the past year I'lam has been actively involved in advocacy for the legal rights of Palestinian journalists and the Palestinian community in Israel. The advocacy initiatives that I'lam carried out this year included:

**Advocacy with the Government Press Office (GPO):** The GPO controls the issuing of press cards and the decision of whether or not to issue a card is made by the head of the GPO and is thus arbitrary in nature. Some Arab journalists have been refused the opportunity to get a press card and have not been given a sufficient reason for this. In March of 2011, I'lam submitted a request to the GPO that there be adequate Arab

representation on a committee that was investigating new practices to issue press cards. The request was granted. When the committee's report was issued, I'lam issued a counter report calling for press cards to be issued on a purely professional basis and not be denied because of "security concerns" and that the body that issues press cards should



*The Language of Human Rights Workshop*

be neutral and not under government influence.

**Advocacy with the Government Advertisement Disbursement Agency (LAPAM):** In March of 2011, I'lam sent a letter to the Government Ad Disbursement Agency asking how the process for budget allocation for government ads was conducted. The agency has pulled funding for ads from Arab newspapers previously because they disliked the editorial slant of the paper. At a November 2011 meeting with a LAPAM official, I'lam argued that the budget to advertise in Arab papers by the Arab public was not adequate. I'lam argues that this violates the Arab public's right to information and conducted a letter writing campaign to rectify the situation. Alaa Abdallah, I'lam's advocate and head of the Advocacy program, explains why this is so important to the Arabic media in Israel "because



*Debating workshop in Partnership with Hanns Seidel Stiftung*



the government institutions have the right or authority to decide and we want to influence the decisions of the government institutions so they can be more human rights sensitive. We want to increase the announcements these institutions give to Arab papers to advance the Arab community's needs.”

**Advocacy with the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA):** I’lam has taken issue with the running of the Arabic news station and protests that there has not been a permanent director of the Arab station since 2002. Instead, a former IBA chairman who speaks no Arabic has been in charge of the station. I’lam has sent a letter to the station demanding that the director situation be rectified and that there be a professional and transparent approach towards the running of the

public and for a lack of Arabic news programming for Palestinians in Israel. I’lam has also sent letters of complaint to the Council of Cable and Satellite Television and Hot satellite regarding their limited availability of Arabic news. The Arabic program was being offered at midnight and was too short to adequately inform its viewers. I’lam sent two letters protesting the time and quality of the programming as well as the firing of seven Arab workers from the Arab news show. CCST responded by bringing the Arab program back to primetime and a letter from Koda stated that the company was negotiating with the workers who had been laid off.

**Knesset ‘Anti-Defamation’ Bill:** In response to the passage of the first reading of an anti-defamation bill by the



*Arab Journalists Tour of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority*

station. There is a proposal in the Knesset to have an independent committee select candidates for top positions in broadcasting instead of the government. I’lam has been suggested as one of the organizations that would be represented on the committee.

**The Second Broadcasting Authority:** I’lam has sent numerous letters to the main Israeli news channels criticizing them for ignoring the needs of the Arab



*Establishing a Knesset Lobby for the Communicative Rights of the Palestinian Community in Israel*

Knesset, I’lam sent a strongly worded letter against the adoption of the bill as law. The bill would allow large settlements in libel suits and such cases could be won without sufficient proof of damages. Such a law would be dangerous to freedom of the Israeli press and thus is harshly opposed by I’lam. I’lam also opposes two bills that would severely limit the amount that Israeli NGOs can receive from abroad. These bills pose a great threat to NGOs and democracy in Israel.

# The E.U. supported project “Freedom of Expression as a Basic Human Right Guiding Human Rights Sensitive Media Practice in Israel”

**Study Day and Human Rights Discourse Conference:** This conference was held on June 12th 2012 and was a forum where I’lam presented research on the extent of human rights sensitive coverage by the Arabic and Hebrew media in Israel. EU Ambassador to Israel, Andrew Standley offered the welcome address. The presentation of the research findings was followed by two lively panel discussions by human rights activists, journalists, editors and media scholars. The event was attended by over one hundred persons, chiefly journalists. The event was a great success and was held at the Gardenia hotel in Nazareth.

**Training of Journalists:** Within the framework of this EU supported

project, I’lam has also been offering human rights courses for both Arabic and Hebrew media journalists. The courses have as a whole focused on training the journalists how to properly cover human rights issues.

The second stage of this EU-funded project saw I’lam running workshops for Arabic and Hebrew media journalists over 2012, with journalists producing HR-sensitive reports and news items as part of the training.

*Human Rights  
Workshop – Sakhnin*



*Human Rights Workshop -  
Baqa Al-Gharbiyah*



# How Sensitive are the Arabic and Hebrew Media to Human Rights?



*Speakers and Audience in Human Rights Conference on 12.6.2012 - Nazareth*

I'lam's Study Day on June 12, 2012 was held to present the findings from a year-long research project focused on the human rights performance of the Arabic and Hebrew media. The event was held in Nazareth.

The conference attracted over one hundred attendees, most of whom were journalists. The conference was broken up into two presentation sessions, the first was in Arabic and I'lam presented its critique of the Arabic media and human rights. Session two was in Hebrew and I'lam presented the research it conducted about the status of human rights in the Hebrew media.

The conference was a success according to I'lam's Arabic Media Coordinator, Samah Bsoul, because "First of all we succeeded in getting people interested in coming to see the research and they [the audience] also participated during the discussion of the results. This is also a success because they are interested in the results and they have things to say about them and that's really good."

The fact that the journalists and other audience members participated and responded to the research was a major success for I'lam because it meant that the research was becoming part of the discourse in both the Arabic and Hebrew media. Bsoul and I'lam director Dr. Amal Jamal presented their research entitled "The Marginality of Human Rights Discourse in the Local Arab Press in Israel". The study focused on how human rights were covered in the Arab media and presented a critique of the way human rights were presented and made recommendations to improve the discourse. Conclusions reached by the study included the observation that although the Palestinian press was generally supportive of human rights, they did not have active opinions or support for human rights issues and took no steps to educate the public about human rights in general. The study also concluded that most newspapers viewed the mention of human rights as implicit support, causing them to assume a passive role

and allowing their readers to make their own conclusions.

Collective rights were emphasized more in the Arabic language media than individual rights and although violence is often covered, little attention is given to the connection between violence and the violation of human rights. Disadvantaged groups in society like women, children and the elderly whose rights are violated are given less attention than the collective rights of Palestinians as a whole and there is no defined policy on human rights. Most articles that do focus on human rights only focus on one human right and the research showed that many Arab journalists are not properly educated on how to cover human rights issues accurately. Importantly there are no powerful actors in the Arabic media that promote human rights visibility. Bsoul stressed that “critique is very important” and is meant to encourage dialogue about human rights coverage and not to place blame.

Dr. Jamal and Bsoul also shared recommendations that they had formulated based on the study that are meant to improve the human rights

discourse in the Arabic media. The study recommends that Arabic media outlets should define an editorial policy that specifically emphasized human rights and aimed at educating the general public about human rights. This includes “linking human rights with international organizations, conventions, principles and norms related to human rights” according to the study. The public also needs to be educated about human rights violations and the ways in which they can combat them. Human rights violations need to be related to historical events so as to put more gravity on the current situation and journalists need to be trained to cover these kind of issues especially when disadvantaged groups are involved. Bsoul says that after the presentation of the research many journalists were interested in the study and wished to explain their point of view to I’lam. “The journalists who were at the conference defended themselves, they talked about the results and wanted to explain their opinions of it [the results]. It’s very important to have journalists react and respond to the critique.”

*Recent Publications on Human Rights Sensitivity in the Media*



*The contents of this article are the sole responsibility of I’lam and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union*





*Television Reporting Workshop*

The second part of the conference centered on research presented about the Israeli Hebrew media. Dr. Jamal and Kholod Massalha presented their study “The Discourse of Human Rights in the Israeli Media” in Hebrew to the study day audience. The study concluded that most human rights stories were actually given prominence on the front pages of newspapers and at the beginning of TV broadcasts; however these human rights issues are slanted towards violations that affect the Israeli Jewish population. The Israeli media generally covers the rights violations of disadvantaged groups and supports them, however their portrayal of these groups are often stereotypical. The study also found that the Hebrew media largely ignores the human rights violations against Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and of the Palestinian community in Israel, though there were not an insignificant number of articles supportive of the rights of the latter. The Israeli media covered social issues extensively in Israel during the monitoring period, especially those raised around the social protests, though it tends to ignore international covenants that Israel has ratified.

The study recommended that

the Hebrew media enhance the prominence of their human rights discourse and install a human rights vocabulary as a regular part of the system. Workshops have also been conducted to educate Israeli journalists about human rights in the hopes that it will contribute to a more balanced portrayal of human rights issues in the Hebrew media.

The study day was a success and it encouraged dialogue about the issues facing both the Hebrew and Arabic media. I’lam hopes that both types of media will take the recommendations seriously and implement change. “It depends on how serious they are” Bsoul says about the possibility of journalists making changes to the way they cover human rights issues. The importance of the research is that it not only criticizes the media but it encourages them to make positive changes to the way they cover human rights. With regards to the Arabic media, Bsoul explains that



*Journalists’ Consultative Meeting in Sakhnin*

“the research is not blaming them, the research wants to put a spotlight on problems in our newspapers in order to correct them so that they (journalists) can be more aware of the needs of us as Palestinians in Israel, that’s the aim of this research”.

# Money Matters and other Socio-Economic Challenges on the Arabic Media in Israel

In November of 2011 I'lam's Director Dr. Amal Jamal and media monitoring researcher, Rana Awaisi published a report entitled "The Challenges to Journalistic Professionalism: Between Independence and Difficult Working Conditions". The report focused on Arab-Palestinian journalists and the work conditions they operate within and how those conditions affect professional conduct within the Arab media. This study was significant because it was the first of its kind to focus on these issues. As Awaisi says "It's the first research that concentrates on the challenges that Arab journalists face." The importance of the research lays in its evaluation of Arab journalism as a whole. It is an examination of the problems the media faces, why these problems exist and proffers solutions as to how they can be remedied. Awaisi explains that the importance of the study is that "it gives a big picture about the journalistic profession in the Arab society in Israel."

The research was conducted through interviews with thirty one Arab journalists that live and work inside Israel. Dr. Jamal and Awaisi found through the research that Arab journalists in Israel are hindered by a number of factors in their profession, ranging from censorship from owners to severe economic hardships and racism from the Israeli government and

Jewish majority. The study addresses all of these issues and examines how they impact the state of the Arab press. "It talks about social, economic, political and security hardships", summarizes Awaisi.

The issue of censorship from owners and managers because of personal, financial or ideological considerations was presented as a hindrance to journalistic professionalism and was a source of contention for many of the journalists interviewed. Freedom of the press can be restricted because of this, managers can refuse to run articles or allow interviews and this curtails journalists freedom of expression as well as the public's right to be informed. Sometimes this takes place for

financial reasons and in partisan papers it usually happens because the higher ups disagree with the writer's stance on an issue.

Dr. Jamal and Awaisi found that there were five general categories of hardships that Arab journalists faced. The first was the censorship that comes with working in partisan journalism and the ideological line that these journalists are forced to adhere to. The second, the control that owners exert over the published content based on their own financial, personal and partisan interests. According to Awaisi "journalists need a journalists union that advocates for them" to combat issues like internal censorship and





freedom of expression. The third general category of obstacles to Arab journalists is the social and religious challenges they face from their own communities, where patriarchal forces limit the ability to deconstruct sensitive subjects such as heteronormativity and religious ideals. These social constraints hinder journalists from reporting on certain human rights abuses within the Palestinian community.

The fourth general category of obstacles for Palestinian journalists are the material conditions they work in, specifically the lack of money and resources. I'lam researchers found that this was one of the most pressing issue facing Arab journalists. "The basic economic challenges are most important because they don't get paid well and good work conditions are also lacking which means its harder to do work professionally" explains Awaisi. The lack of monetary resources in the Arabic media creates overworked journalists that often have to function as editors and photographers as well as writers. In addition, journalists do not have social benefits or enough money to have vital equipment needed for their trade. There is a lack of stability in the Arab press because media outlets are so poor that the threat of collapse is a real problem and creates a lack of permanence and a fear that journalists might lose their jobs at any time. In addition to the economic issues that Arab journalists face, they also have to overcome political challenges from the Israeli government in the name of security. Arab journalists do not receive the same level of respect that Jewish journalists do and they are often mistrusted by the police and government officials because they are seen as a "security" risk. This

has translated into systematic and official marginalization, meaning they lack adequate access to government officials, events and even reporting from certain closed military zones (even though other non-Arab Israeli journalists are often permitted access) in this regard Arab journalists are significantly sidelined in practising their profession freely.

This study done by I'lam was groundbreaking because it took a critical look at the problems faced by Arab journalists in Israel and makes recommendations on how to remedy these issues. The recommendations include: an improvement in financial



*Tour for Journalists in the Naqab (Negev)*

conditions, separation of editorial and managerial departments in media organizations, professional training courses for journalists, public education about the importance of journalism, and unionization of journalists to improve financial and social conditions. I'lam conducts programs that work towards implementing these recommendations and making it easier and safer for Palestinian journalists in Israel to practice their profession.

# Arab Palestinian Media Students Speak Out

One of I'lam's goals is to foster the growth of Arabic language journalism in Israel. It is incredibly important for the future of the Arabic media that its members are professional and educated in media practices and ethics. Historically few Arab students have been able to study communication or media studies in Israeli universities and this has been an issue because the lack of higher education has impacted the quality of reporting in the Arabic media. That is why I'lam supports and provides education for established Arab journalists in Israel. I'lam is also excited by the increasing number of Arab youths that are venturing into Israeli universities to study journalism, it is I'lam's sincerest hope that these young men and women will lead the way in the field and use their education to improve the Arabic media in general. I'lam had the privilege of interviewing two Palestinian students that are both working on their masters' in media studies; they discussed the challenges and benefits of being one of the few Palestinian students in an Israeli university's media department.

The two students interviewed are both studying for their masters in media studies and discussed with I'lam the unique challenges that they face as Arab students in a predominantly Jewish university. As Faleh Habib, 27, a student pursuing his masters in political communication at Tel Aviv University describes the situation, "Higher education institutions in the state of Israel were initially established to serve the interests of the Jewish student." Habib goes on to explain how the problem of language is often an obstacle for Arab students when they enter Israeli universities. Hebrew is the main language of instruction and for most Arab students

this is their second language and this can be problematic if they are not completely fluent in Hebrew. Habib explains the language barrier that Arab students face when entering the Hebrew speaking Israeli university system:

"Although Arabic possesses the status of being an officially recognized language in the country; Hebrew enjoys dominance in the academic institutions widely. This situation illustrates an obstacle for Arab female and male students who use Arabic as their mother tongue... these students are not fully proficient in the Hebrew language, the reason being that their



*Maison Zoabi (R) -media student interviewed*

high school education is mainly in Arabic. Hebrew is considered a second language for all of us, not to mention English which is an official language in the academic research field, and which most do not fully master since we use it as a third language."

The issue of language illustrates how many Arab students are disadvantaged, both because of their cultural and educational background. Because these universities are designed to cater to Israeli Jews, Arab students may find it difficult to



adjust to the language of instruction and be able to get the most out of university education.

While Israeli universities might be hard for Arab students to navigate from an institutional perspective, for some, socially it is easier to engage with their Jewish peers and they feel less alienated than previous generations. Maison Zoabi, 33, a masters student at The Hebrew University, who is studying politics and communication explains how she does not feel alienated from her Jewish classmates. She feels they are sensitive to, and want to learn about, the Arabic media and culture. She explains that “It’s easy to speak with Jewish students. I don’t have any problems there, especially because it’s a big university and there are academic people and there is a fair dialogue.” She goes on to explain how at the university level, or at least the masters level, Arab and Jewish students are able to engage in fair intellectual discussions about the issues that face both the Hebrew and Arabic media. Zoabi tells I’lam that she has found that the Israeli Jewish students at the Hebrew University are interested in learning about the Arabic media. As she explains “they help me and I help them to learn and know more about the local Arabic media.” Although, she does admit that most Jewish students who do enter university know very little about the Arabic media and political issues. In contrast, “We, the Arab students know more about the Israeli Hebrew media than they know about the Arabic media”.

When asked what the most important piece of advice that she could give other Arab students attending an Israeli university for media studies was, Zoabi responded that she thought that other prospective students should try “to be

objective and to learn more about the job of a political journalist and to learn more about the Israeli media.” Zoabi is optimistic about the prospects of future Palestinian students that want to study communications and enter the journalism profession. Habib’s advice for other prospective students is less idealistic and more practical than Zoabi’s. He stresses that Arab students need to take the initiative to educate and prepare themselves for these programs. “Self education would be in the form of reading newspapers, listening and watching educational and news programs, participation in more curricular activities involving Arabs and Jews and foreign language speakers. This will expose students to other cultures and strengthen their linguistic abilities in the target language to which they are being exposed.” According to Habib, for an Arab student to succeed in the Israeli university system they need to take the initiative to educate and prepare themselves for the challenges they can expect to face. While both students are optimistic about the prospects of future Arab media students, they also acknowledge the problems that exist within Israel. The lack of total freedom of expression is a hindrance to these students and already established journalists in the Arabic media. Even though Zoabi believes she has a relative amount of free speech in Israel, she admits that “there are a lot of things that I could not read, could not write and could not know. We are not absolutely free in our engagement with the media. We have conflict here in Israel and it hinders a lot. I feel blocked in terms of what I can see in the media and also what I can say of the limited picture I see”.

*More information on I’lam’s work can be found online at [www.ilam-center.org](http://www.ilam-center.org)*

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