

Introductory Remarks*

By Shawqi Khatib†

In October 2000, the Arab masses raised their voices against the occupation and its actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and against the attack on their existence. However, the Israeli establishment wanted to teach this group a lesson. The establishment wanted to tell them that they were still under examination and that they, the Israeli establishment, have yet to decide whether or not these citizens are entitled to full citizenship. In the mindset of the Israeli establishment decision-makers, the Arab masses are still a part of the enemy. It was, therefore, no accident that thirteen young men were killed by the bullets of their own police force, or that the reaction of the Israeli community was one of revenge. This has proved and continues to prove the truth of what we have said and what I have always said; that the decision-makers and Israeli society at large see us as enemies. But, as an experienced community that wants to live and have a future; through our understanding of citizenship in a state that claims to be democratic and claims to proceed according to the rule of law; and through our understanding of democracy, the law and the system, we believed that such a crime committed against the Arab minority could not be clarified, except through an official commission of inquiry. That is why the High Follow-up Committee insisted on the establishment of the Or Commission.

Following the establishment of the Official Commission of Inquiry, we made many criticisms against it and its work. For example, through Adalah, we immediately expressed our concerns about the Commission's mandate. The mandate authorized the Commission to investigate, "The conduct of the inciters, organizers, participants in these events from all sectors." We understood the mandate as pertaining to the Arab political leaders.

The Commission published its report a year ago, but it contained nothing new for us. It was written in the report that the Arab minority in Israel is an indigenous minority. This was nothing new, in our opinion. The Or Commission did not provide us with any answers concerning the killers from the police.

Subsequent to an intensive reading of the official report, the members of the High Follow-up Committee concurred on a unified position: our refusal to draw a comparison between the Arab political leadership and executive branch officials. In spite of our objections to the report, we did, however, acknowledge its importance as an official document and demanded that the government implement its recommendations on the ground. However, the Israeli government set up a political committee, the Lapid Committee, which was composed of members from the extreme right who advocate the 'transfer' of Arabs. This Committee drained any positive content from the Or Commission's report. We, the Follow-up Committee, boycotted this political committee.

* This text is a summary of remarks made at the "October 2000: A Memory for Protest" conference held in Nazareth on 2 October 2004. The conference was hosted by Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, the Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens in Israel, and the Victims' Families Committee in remembrance of the October 2000 protests.

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The October file is still alive as we have yet to obtain clear answers. We therefore declared a strike this year. We also initiated and took part in many activities to keep the memory of the protest alive, and we asked the schools to educate their students about everything related to the events of October 2000. The aim was to send a message to the Jewish community. Once again, I want to emphasize that the case file remains open and will remain so until we receive clear and specific answers.