

# **Environmental (In) Justice Report 2007**

## **Environment, Planning and Society in Urban Space in Israel**

World Habitat Day

"A Safe City is a Just City"

October 2007

Executive Summary

**Editor:**

Carmit Lubanov

**Translation and Arabic Editing:**

Mousa Diabat

**Translation and English Editing:**

Sagit Porat

**\*\*\* Documents in this report represent the opinions of their authors\*\*\***

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**Alona Sheaffer (Karo), Adv.**

Executive Director, *Life and Environment*

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**Life & Environment** is the umbrella organization of environmental organizations in Israel and the support framework for activity of the country's environmental movement. It incorporates about 100 organizations from all over Israel, active in promoting environmental-social policies. *Life & Environment* works to increase public involvement and representation of the public in decision making processes pertinent to its environment and health. *Life & Environment* coordinates a network of volunteer professionals in planning and science, and initiates activity and research on social-environmental issues.

[www.sviva.net](http://www.sviva.net)

**The Environmental Justice Committee** was initiated by *Life and Environment* - umbrella organization of Israeli environmental NGOs - as an endeavor to endorse policies based on fairness and more equal division of environmental resources and risks, and to promote significant involvement of the entire population in decision making processes.

More than thirty social and environmental grassroots organizations are involved in the activities of the Committee: Jewish and Arab, secular and religious, central and peripherally located. The committee works to generate awareness and achieve broad consent to processes of change, with the participation of the harmed parties.

[Justice@sviva.net](mailto:Justice@sviva.net)

Member Organizations in the Environmental Justice Committee (in alphabetical order):

Arabic Center for Alternative Planning (ACAP); Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES); Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights; Bustan - Sustainable Community Action for Land and People; Citizens for the Environment in the Galilee; Clinic for Environmental Policy and Practice - Bar Ilan University Faculty of Law; Coalition for Public Health in the North; 'Community' Association - Beit-Shemesh; Democratic Rainbow- New Discourse; EcoNet; El Amal (The Hope) Association; El Razi-El Talubiya; Environmental Justice Clinic - Tel Aviv University Faculty of Law; Forum for Public Transportation; Friends of the Earth Middle East; Galilee Society; Green Action; Green Course; Green Rahat Association; Haredim (Ultra Orthodox) for the Environment; Israel Bicycle Association; The Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership; Israel Union for Environmental Defense (IUED); Jewish-Arab Coalition for the Shajur Reservation in the Galilee; Life and Environment - Umbrella Organization of Environmental NGOs; Link to the Environment; Mahapach; Mossawa Center; Naja Association; Negev Coexistence Forum; Physicians for Human Rights; Qalansuwa Community Center; Regional Council of Unrecognized Negev Villages; Shatil; Shomera Le'Sviva Tova; Shemesh Association for Social Justice for all; Society for the Protection of Nature (SPNI); The Association for Distributive Justice; Transportation Today and Tomorrow.

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**Document Abstracts in Arabic**

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## **Urbanization and Environmental Justice in Israel**

### **Situation Report 2007 - Executive Summary**

Carmit Lubanov, The Environmental Justice Committee

The 2007 report by the Environmental Justice Committee is being published in a time that will be noted in human history as the date in which, for the first time ever, the number of people living in urban areas exceeds those in rural areas. Out of a total of six billion people, three billion reside in towns and cities, and about one third of them live in slums. Looking twenty years ahead, the forecast anticipates a world population total of some 8 billion people, out of which five billion will live in urban areas and two billion in slums.<sup>1</sup>

A senior officer at UN Habitat, architect Lars Reutersward, mentions that "every year the urban population increases by 80 million, equivalent to the population of Germany. Within that there will be an increase in slum dwellers... (of) 35 million every year. This is a complete disaster, and it doesn't have to happen... We are lacking a sense of urgency; we are not coping with the speed of it". The UN further estimates that only approximately 5% (!) of present-day construction work in urban spaces worldwide, are undertaken subsequent to planning. In Asian towns, for example, it is approximated that 70% of the urban population resides in unplanned areas. They are generally the poorest residents, dwelling in the margins of cities under poor living conditions and lacking access to electricity, water and sewerage.

Urban Audit, published last April, determines that cities will have to invest massive amounts of money in upgrading outdated infrastructure, otherwise they risk losing qualitative population to settlements in which the level of services is higher. The data, echoed in the international media, is an outcome of research by the international strategy consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, and was published in the company's quarterly 'Strategy and Business'<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the article: "As the Earth Urbanizes, Architects Aren't Ready", Amelia Gentleman, IHT, p. 2, August 21, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> "Lights! Water! Motion!", Doshi V., Schulman G, and Gabaldon D., In Strategy and Business, Global Perspective, Issue no. 46, Spring 2007.

According to the abovementioned report, the extended water shortage and water bans that occurred in the city of London in 2006, as well as the electrical blackouts throughout whole boroughs of New York City, are a testament to the severe problems in issues of basic infrastructure endured by some of the largest cities around the world. The London water shortage results from an aged piping system and the electrical blackouts stem from problems with 60 year old cables. The estimated water loss due to pipe leaks in London alone reaches billions of liters of water annually. The report determines that the water, electricity and transportation infrastructures in the large urban centers fail to meet the rising demand, and anticipates that the required sum for investment in (basic) infrastructure in cities could reach some \$40 billion. The necessary investment in infrastructure only in Middle Eastern countries reaches, according to the report, \$900 million (water, electricity, roads).

International estimates correlate, to a great extent, with the existing situation in Israel, as reflected in the 2007 Environmental Injustice Report.

### **Environmental Justice in Urban Space in Israel**

Environmental Justice in Urban Space in Israel 2007 presents a complex situation in social and environmental aspects, in relations to western countries and in particular European countries.

The State of Israel, only recently notified of the decision of the organization of 30 developed countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD) to accept it as a member state, is characterized by phenomena usually identified with Third World Countries, such as the absence of running water in the Bedouin settlements in the Negev and the Galilee; water supply disconnections in villages and urban neighborhoods; lack of public transportation in Galilee villages constituting a hindrance to women who are unable to join the employment cycle; and more. According to this report, unlike European countries in which public participation is a customary standard procedure at different planning levels and

applied through a variety of mechanisms, Israel is still far behind on issues of public participation in planning.

**The main characteristics arising from the report are:**

**1. Absence of minimal environmental infrastructure and the creation of 'frontier areas' within veteran cities -**

The grave state of infrastructure characterizes neighborhoods in mixed-population Jewish-Arab towns in Israel, both in the center and the periphery.

The findings of this report demonstrate that in Israel 2007, neighborhoods exist with physical characteristics reminiscent of a Ma'abara (immigrant camp) in the 1950s: tin shacks, joint habitation compounds for people and animals, absence of sidewalks and roads, lack of sewerage and drainage, and no waste collection infrastructure. These 'frontier areas' are not habitable and constitute a safety and health danger to those who do reside in them. The most damaged neighborhoods are the Arab neighborhoods in mixed-population cities. The report finding further suggest that environmentally neglected places are also unsafe places and the rate of injury (of children, mostly) is much higher than in well established and invested places.

A clear hierarchy is evident in this sphere of 'minimal living environment conditions', with neighborhoods in mixed-population towns at the bottom rank. Just above them are neighborhoods in southern Tel Aviv and Jaffa and other settlements reviewed in the report such as Arab sector settlements, the Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) town of B'nei B'rak and development towns in the south of Israel, in which basic infrastructure is also in poor condition and open spaces are scarce while existing ones are in poor maintenance.

**2. Planning processes in urban space and public participation -**

Unlike the UN data suggesting that only about 5% of construction undertaken in urban space worldwide is carried out following a planning process, in Israel construction and development are mostly based on structured planning, except that

the population takes no essential part in these processes. This phenomenon has two significant aspects:

- a. Public Participation – The report mentions that the obligation of including the public in planning procedures in theory is based on a government resolution on adopting sustainable development policies and on guidelines for planning in different ministries, whereas in practice it is not observed. The Strategic Negev Development Plan is examined, a plan with numerous implications for the future of the Negev population and its varied population groups – in the city of Be'er Sheva, the development towns and the Bedouin settlements – and for an area more than half the country in size. Since it was defined as a 'strategic plan', it bypassed the process of public participation. Furthermore, its preparation was assigned to a private association. In other words, we are witnessing a process of '**privatized planning**' that is not obligated to include public participation, and the interests it represents might be opposed to those of "the public good", or at least parts of the public.
- b. Planning a 'Place' According to the Needs of its Residents – This report reviews for the first time the importance of planning that is considerate of populations with adaptable planning needs, such as children in the city. The report suggests that even in places where reasonable basic conditions for accommodation exist, in many cases the city today is not adapted to the needs of children, for instance due to a severe shortage of play areas, which are essential for the proper development of children and for a healthy and stable society. With the expansion of cities, the accessibility to public areas narrowed drastically.

The Jewish ultra orthodox sector was broadly reviewed in the report and the necessity to integrate planning principles in accordance with the Haredi lifestyle in urban space is raised, such as the need for a large number of public buildings and public playgrounds (in relation to the secular population).

The report presents two worthy initiatives in the sphere of public participation: one describes the work process of formulating a master plan for the Shapira Neighborhood in Tel Aviv with the participation of the residents; and the other is the work of *Life and Environment* for the participation of the public in Committees for the Environment in local authorities, by virtue of the amendment to the Local Authorities Law compelling the establishment of such committees in every local authority in Israel. While it is still early to evaluate the present situation as a revolution in the planning field, such initiatives, in addition to continuous progress in the work of grassroots groups and organizations active in neighborhoods and different localities, like southern Tel Aviv-Yafo neighborhoods, Holon and the former immigrant neighborhoods in the southern towns, are a turning point in the involvement of civil society in shaping the environmental-social agenda in Israel.

The key data arising from the status report presented by the *Environmental Injustice in Urban Space in Israel 2007 Report* include:

- Significant disparities in living environments in Tel Aviv-Yafo. For example, in northern Tel Aviv, in many neighborhoods 15 sq m of green space per resident may be found, while in southern neighborhoods the average is between 0 to 4 sq m per resident. Concerning exposure to environmental pollution and noise: in southern Tel Aviv and Yafo there are particularly high noise levels, reaching as much as 75 decibels in residential areas, some 50% higher than permissible by law. Among the major causes of noise are: the Central Bus Station, Ayalon Highway, flight routes, workshops and craft studios etc.
- In approx. 70% of the Arab settlements there is no organized sewerage system.
- Despite reports of significant rise in cancer morbidity amongst the Israeli Arab population, the Ministry of Health report on cancer mapping in Israel (2005) makes no reference to this population whatsoever.
- Approximately 70% of children injured in accidents in their residential environment are Arabs. Findings of a report published on the matter attribute

causes to a wide variety of environmental, economic and familial factors, including the accessibility to medical services.

- Disconnection of entire settlements from the water system for durations of 3 and 4 consecutive days due to unresolved debts by local authorities to Mekorot, the National Water Company.
- Alongside the entire urban border of the Geva Highway is an acoustic wall, excluding a road segment adjacent to the Haredi neighborhood Neve-Ahiezzer, where the absence of an acoustic wall is conspicuous, causing severe noise nuisance to residents.
- Garages and car 'slaughterhouses' are part of the urban landscape in residential neighborhoods in Bnei Brak and the Arab neighborhoods in Ramla and Acco.
- Reliable and accurate information is lacking concerning basic data on housing – including the real number of homeless people in Israel, the percentage of home owners, the annual number of evictions from residences – and on the other hand, there is no comprehensive perception of a suitable housing policy for Israel. In the absence of full and reliable information, it is difficult to identify the problems accurately and in any case difficult to suggest comprehensive solutions.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The harsh infrastructural conditions in residential neighborhoods nationwide, as described in this report, entail environmental and social threats with implication far broader than the mere geographic range of these neighborhoods. These threats cast a heavy shadow on Israeli society and pose a question mark concerning the ability of the government, at the time of the State's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, to cope with deepening environmental and social inequality in the present generation and the chances of the next generation for a fair life in a proper and safe urban space.

Addressing the environmental-social issues raised by this report, in addition to the harsh estimations of reports published internationally on issues of the deteriorating state of environmental infrastructure in urban space and the danger facing urban

population, should be a warning sign to decision makers in Israel, and necessitate action addressing the issue with a sense of national urgency, cooperating with the relevant government ministries including the Ministry of Construction and Housing, the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Finance Ministry and the Ministry for Environmental Protection.

The Environmental Justice Committee working within *Life and Environment*, umbrella organization of environmental NGOs, calls Members of Knesset and Members of the Israeli Government to act towards achieving the following five policy objectives:

- √ Directing **financial resources** to investments in infrastructure of neighborhoods in mixed-population towns, in Haredi neighborhoods and in Arab sector settlement must be given utmost priority. Any delay in addressing the matter means continued risk and discrimination of large population groups. This issue must be anchored in the budgetary framework of the Israeli government.
- √ **Public Participation** must be an evident obligation, possibly through legislation necessitating public participation regardless of the ministry initiating the plan, as is the case at present. With regard to plans that have strategic significance to the future of the population in the relevant area, assigning the process of planning to private factors must be opposed.
- √ The government should adopt a policy determining that **narrowing the gaps** is no longer merely an educational issue. A broad plan for environmental-social infrastructure should be promoted, with the goals of narrowing gaps on issues of living conditions, quality of education facilities, availability and accessibility to sporting fields, playgrounds and recreation areas of a suitable standard that instills safety among their users.

The children in neighborhoods of mixed-population towns and Arab sector settlements are left behind due to their harsh living conditions, which threaten their safety and affix their inability to benefit from safe mobility.

- √ Increasing **social mobility** must be set as a target for the promotion of peripheral and weakened populations, by means of developing suitable transportation infrastructure. This will advance the realization of their right to achieve employment and social and economic advancement.
  
- √ In Israel 2007, entire sectors of the population are still without environmental-social awareness. **Educational plans** and community projects in the Arab sector and the Haredi sector must be developed, respective of their specific cultural values, in order to encourage the population to act for the improvement of their living conditions and residential environment, and for ensuring public health in their midst.