

Israel Expands Law that Allows Villages and Towns to ‘Reject Palestinians’

Israeli parliament has quietly passed a law that could see Palestinian citizens of Israel screened from living in almost half the country's small villages and towns

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The [Israeli](#) parliament has been accused of passing a “racist” piece of legislation that would see [Palestinian](#) citizens of Israel screened from living in almost half of the country's small villages and towns.

The so-called “admissions committees” law passed on Tuesday would strengthen a controversial [2011 piece of legislation](#) that allows those same panels – made up of members of the local community – to screen applicants for housing units and plots of land in hundreds of Jewish Israeli “community towns” built on state land.

Human rights campaigners have stressed that this is aimed at giving small Jewish communities the power to prevent Palestinians from buying or renting homes. There are almost two million Palestinian citizens of Israel, who are [estimated](#) to make up 20 percent of the country's population.

The law does not officially allow the committees to reject residential candidates for reasons of race, religion, gender, nationality, disability, class, age, parentage, sexual orientation, country of origin, views or party political affiliation.

However, the wording of the 2011 law allows committees to reject candidates who they deem to be “inappropriate for the social and cultural fabric” of the community.

“In practice, this power has led to the exclusion of Palestinian citizens of Israel from these communities, which are built on state-controlled land,” said Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, in a [statement](#) after the legislation was passed.

Hassan Jabareen, Adalah's founder, is worried by the latest piece of admissions committee legislation and [Israel's judicial reform](#) plans, which are set to open the court to political interference.

"We are now in a very critical situation," Jabareen told Middle East Eye, adding that there is now a "climate in which Arabs can be easily discriminated against".

'Apartheid in Israel'

In 2012, Adalah took the Israeli government to court, arguing that the admissions committees law was a racist piece of legislation that mainly targeted Palestinians.

Four members of Israel's supreme court agreed, while five members thought it was too soon to rule on the matter.

With the Israeli parliament now expanding the number of towns that can screen who lives in their community, "we are talking about almost half of the towns in the country" that are potentially off limits to Palestinians, Jabareen said.

To date, the law, which previously applied only to the Galilee in northern Israel and the Negev (Naqab) in the south of the country, allowed Jewish communities with up to 400 households to run admissions committees and select who could live in the communities.

The newly passed expansion raises that limit to communities with up to 700 households, and after five years the minister of economy and industry will be able to increase the number of admissions committees to towns with more than 700 households.

It also expands the areas in which the law will be applied beyond the Galilee and the Negev to areas designated as having a national priority regarding housing.

"The area north of Haifa and up to the Galilee, which covers 241 towns or 80 percent of the towns in the north" could now be denied to Palestinians, according to Jabareen.

In the south of the country, in the Negev region, 89 percent of towns could also be considered off-limits to Palestinians.

With a high concentration of Palestinians living in the north and south of the country, it's hard not to conclude that the law is being carefully targeted to demographically engineer Jewish supremacy.

"We are clearly talking about a country that has decided to be an apartheid state inside the greenline," Jabareen said, referring to Israel's pre-1967 borders. "A huge part of this country won't be allowed for Arab citizens."

"What's strange is that this law passed yesterday without any media or public attention [in Israel]. It's becoming easier to infringe on the rights of Arabs," Jabareen added.

'Palestinians have the right to build homes'

Aside from politicians representing the two Arab parties in parliament, only two opposition Labour parliamentarians voted against the legislation, with all others voting in favour.

Ahmad Tibi, a Palestinian member of the Israeli parliament who voted against the law, told MEE that while Jewish communities continue to receive preferential treatment in housing and land allocation, “a new Arab village has never been established in the Galilee or for that matter any part of Israel”.

“The building planning process in Israel is Zionist and ideological, and thus it alienates and is hostile to the Arab population,” Tibi said.

Over the years Israel has used a number of different instruments to prevent Palestinians from expanding their communities, according to Tibi.

The [Kaminitz Law](#) was passed in 2017. It imposed strict penalties on construction work it deemed illegal, but campaigners saw it as penalising the country’s Palestinians, who rarely get permission to expand their homes.

“Arab towns have the right to plan for their future,” Tibi said. “There is a shortage of land for young couples and plots of land are not being made available.”

“Some of the young Arabs go to other towns, mixed cities or Jewish Israeli towns, but this admissions committees law prevents them from entering hundreds of towns and villages with national priority,” he added.

“I am afraid that this ban will be further expanded to mixed cities and there will be Jewish neighbourhoods that ban Arabs.”

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