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- ENGLISH -

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
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Oral statement

The Palestinian citizens of Israel: New racist bills at the Knesset

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

Three bills currently making rounds in the Israeli Knesset reveal an obscene and dangerous targeting of the **individual and collective rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel**.

One bill seeks to prohibit marking the day Israel declared its independence as a day of mourning, event Palestinians commemorate as the *Nakba* (Arabic for catastrophe). The second prohibits negating the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. The third requires Israeli citizens to sign oaths of loyalty to the state, its flag and national anthem, and to perform military or civil service before they can be issued a national identity card. Though still at an early stage, if the bills pass, violators could face harsh sentences including imprisonment and revocation of citizenship.

Palestinian citizens of Israel are part of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine who were made a minority in their homeland through the expulsion of two thirds of their people in 1948 by Zionist militias during Israel's establishment. **Attempts to force compliance with the Zionist narrative, character, symbols and practices of the state is equivalent to demanding that Palestinians sanction their own historical dispossession while rubber stamping their contemporary second-class citizenship as "non-Jews" in the Jewish state.**

Moreover, these attempts come in the context of an escalating campaign against the Palestinian community. The Director of the Israeli General Security Service, has described Palestinian citizens' demands for equality as constituting "a strategic danger to the state", that must be thwarted "even if their activity is conducted through democratic means". Israeli politicians speak openly of "population exchanges" between Palestinian citizens and Israeli settlers in the West Bank. Moreover, the Israeli press made recent revelations that the Israeli army is engaged in training special units to occupy Palestinian towns and villages inside Israel in the event of a regional war, to prevent protests and access to highways.

A broader campaign of incitement is at play here. These laws aim to polarize the situation between Jewish and Palestinian citizens, while justifying the quashing of legitimate Palestinian demands. Israel also appears intent to extend elements of its military practices against Palestinians in the OPT to those who are its own citizens.

Given Israel's historical record of repeatedly dispossessing Palestinians, either beneath the 'fog of war' or through incremental bureaucratic means, the initiation of these laws can only be seen as strengthening Israel's *de jure* policies of apartheid to compliment its *de facto* apartheid practices on both sides of the Green Line.

In this context, instead of trying to engage the new Israeli government, it is time for the world to boycott, divest and sanction the Israeli regime until it abandons all racist policies and practices and implements international law.