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**Israel**

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Mr. President,

My name is Dr. Ilham Shahbari, Arab Affairs Advisor to the Director General at the Ministry for Social Equality in Israel.

My position within the government was specially created to be held by a **member of the Arab community**, and is part of a **wider program** to promote minorities in the Israeli civil service and address their lack of representation, **especially** in high-ranking positions. With my background, expertise and research, I provide **first hand** life experience to inform policymakers about the **daily challenges** facing the Arab population.

My remarks today will present the **five-year plans** for the Arab community in the Galilee and for Arab Bedouins in the Negev, but first **let me share** some background information about Israel's **Arab community**.

As of the beginning of 2022, the population of Israel was 9.6 million, out of which **1.9 million are Arabs**, who make up **20%** of the total. **Within** the Arab community, **17% are Bedouins** in the Negev desert, who have a unique traditional culture and needs.

Most Arab localities in the Galilee are **small to medium** in terms of demography, and are located in the **social and geographical periphery** of Israel. A large majority of them are in the **four lowest ranks** in Israel's poverty index.

Before COVID-19, in 2018, the rate of Arab families below the poverty line reached **57%**, including **45% of Arab children**.

Many families were hit by a **severe** economic crisis after they found themselves **out of the workplace** following the spread of the virus, as a result of which their income and standard of living worsened.

The Ministry for Social Equality is responsible for the implementation of a **major** five-year plan for both the Arab and the Bedouin communities. This 2021 to 2026 plan, entitled "**Takadom**" which means progress in Arabic, was tailored to **improve** the socio-economic standards of those two communities and **accelerate** their integration in the national economy.

It is the Government's **flagship program** to reduce the historical gaps that afflict the Arab community. With a total projected budget of about 9 Billion US dollars, it addresses **various** aspects of life, such as health, welfare, public transportation and housing. In order to **increase** prospects of Arab youth after finishing high school, the plan also offers a **fresh initiative** to provide a gap-year framework for social **engagement** and professional **development**.

As part of the “Takadom” plan, a **specific focus** is placed on the development of the **Bedouin community** in the Negev. With a total projected budget of about 1.6 Billion US dollars, the plan addresses the **specific** needs of this community, and faces the problems of **poverty** and gaps in **health and education**. It also promotes **employment opportunities**, and provides for the development of public transportation in these localities.

The plan also gives **special attention** to the poorest Arab localities in Israel, and the **special characteristics** of the mixed Arab-Jewish towns.

Furthermore, in recent years, the Arab community has faced an **alarming rise** in internal crime and violence, which have cost the lives of **many** innocent people. To fight this **acute problem**, the Government has adopted a **five-year plan** with a budget of approximately **seven hundred fifty** million US dollars, **aiming to tackle the wave of violence** by collecting illegal weapons, dismantling criminal organizations and thus **increasing the personal security** of Arab citizens.

To conclude, these ground-breaking multiple five-year plans are **unprecedented** not only in scale and scope, but in their call for **proportional budget allocation** by government ministries, as a **recognition** of inequality in **existing** allocation mechanisms.

There are **many challenges**, we need to be realistic, but the recent moves are **a sign of hope** for Israeli government policy and the society at large at tackling historical disparities and promoting **equality for all** of Israel's citizens, Arab and Jewish alike.

Thank you.