

New Israel Fund's New Initiatives for Democracy

The New Israel Fund and our partners in Israel are deeply concerned that Israel is heading in a direction at odds with the values on which it was founded. The challenges with which we are wrestling have reinforced the immediate and long-term necessity of NIF's work and particularly the investments made as part of our new strategy, aiming to strengthen and expand pro-democracy forces in Israel. This information sheet outlines two key pillars of this strategy: our programmes and investments to *safeguard democracy* and *reclaim national security*.

SAFEGUARDING DEMOCRACY

Our strategy focuses on three core interlinked areas, crucial to safeguarding Israel's democracy: combating anti-democratic legislation, protecting the right to freedom of speech and assembly, and promoting democratic participation. In addition, we are investing in think and do tanks which make the case for core democratic values and clarify their urgency and relevance to all Israelis.

Combating Anti-Democratic Legislation

The 18th, 19th and 20th Knesset assemblies have seen numerous legislative initiatives aimed at weakening Israeli democracy, including the Nation State Bill, the Anti-Boycott Law, the Citizenship Loyalty Law and most recently the NGO Transparency Bill. At the forefront of NIF's work to combat this lies the **Centre for Policy Change (CPC)** of NIF's action arm Shatil. With a team of experts in lobbying, public affairs and strategic communications, the CPC advocates vis-à-vis legislators, engages media, academic and public institutions, and mobilises civil society to consolidate diverse stakeholders into an effective oppositional force. This work is augmented by New Israel Fund's public advocacy department which rolls out campaigns to raise awareness within the Israeli public of the key issues at stake. NIF's current campaign against the attacks on Israel's human rights community – galvanised by the NGO transparency bill – has reached unprecedented numbers. The campaign video, narrated by **Shaanan Street** of Israeli rap group **Hadag Nahash**, has so far received almost 1 million views on *Facebook* and *YouTube*.

Protecting the right to freedom of speech, expression and assembly:

Recent years have seen alarming trends in relation to freedom of expression and assembly in Israel. In the cultural sphere, artistic works critical of dominant worldviews have been censored, banned from schools, or had public funding cut. In the private sphere, businesses have fired employees for expressing unpopular opinions on social media during times of tension and violence. And in the public sphere, Israel's vibrant culture of protest has been rocked by incidents involving violent suppression of demonstrations by minority communities including Israel's Bedouin community and the Ethiopian community. In this crucial area of defending the right to protest, we have embarked on a broad programme of activities, including creation by **Shatil** of a booklet and smartphone app **The Pocket Guide to Protestors' Rights**, provision of funding to enable the **Human Rights Defenders Fund** to provide legal aid for detained non-violent demonstrators, and support for the work of **TMURA – The Antidiscrimination Legal Center** which aims to foster accountability of authorities when protestors are injured or encounter other impediments to expressing their right to protest.

Promoting democratic participation

Democratic participation is essential to the vibrancy of a democracy. NIF supports innovative online platforms enabling citizens to gain access to information, monitor and influence policy-making and budgeting processes. One key initiative is **Hasadna – the Public Knowledge Workshop**, which has literally opened up formerly inaccessible information about government spending to the public through its Open Budget, Open Knesset and Open Finance Committee projects.

NIF recently entered into a new strategic partnership with **Molad –The Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy**, a think tank which offers new ways of thinking about and understanding some of Israel's basic challenges and assumptions around security, government spending and more. Molad has led efforts to expose misappropriation of millions of shekels of public funds to promote undemocratic and extremist activity. This has included exposing State funding flows to the WZO's Jewish Settlement Division and to ultranationalist NGOs which promote Price Tag vigilante attacks by hard-right extremists and other illegal activity. Another new strategic partnership to expand the circles of democratic participation is the think tank **Shaharit - Creating Common Cause: A Politics of the Common Good**, whose leadership initiative for Haredi, Arab, secular and traditional Israelis is nurturing emerging local leaders and a spirit of collaboration between Israel's diverse communities.

RECLAIMING THE CONVERSATION AROUND NATIONAL SECURITY

National security in Israel has vital importance, influencing virtually all aspects of life. Polls indicate that the Israeli public feels that those who advocate for peace and human rights do not offer sufficiently compelling ideas on the immediate and long term security challenges facing the country. New Israel Fund believes it is vital *to re-establish the credibility of the peace and human rights community on national security and develop a larger vision* in which the framing of Israel's national security is expanded from sole focus on military power to also include social cohesion and solidarity, economic security, and the values of equality and equity. To this end, we have entered into key strategic partnerships with a new generation of Israeli strategists.

The Council for Peace and Security (CPS) argues for a two-state diplomatic solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, and maintains that Israel's most vital security priority is the need to establish final borders. Its leaders and membership number over a thousand former military and security officers. In the recent wave of violence, CPS sent various position papers to decision makers with tactical recommendations on how to calm the situation in the short term, while continuing to promote a long term diplomatic solution. *Major media outlets are increasingly approaching CPS for experts to appear on radio and TV programs, and it has become the "go-to" organisation for an alternative perspective on security matters.* CPS is also expanding its efforts with Russian-speaking and Haredi communities.

Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, is an important new player in the effort to provide a nuanced perspective on Israel's foreign relations, to reshape Israel's position in the Middle East, and *to affect change in how Israel conducts diplomacy.* Mitvim played an instrumental role in facilitating the repair of Israel/Turkey relations last year, is engaging with Arab think tanks in Europe and partners with the **Centre for Israel Studies (CIS)** in Jordan. Mitvim also challenges the exclusion of Arab-Israelis from foreign policy conversations and considerations, and has played a key role in *facilitating dialogue between opposition parties and the international community.*