



Legislative Roundup

לקט חקיקה **תقرير اخبارى التشريعية**

19th Knesset – Summer Session Review

As we approach the end of the first session of the 19th Knesset (April – July 2013), we look back over some of the bills and laws that were discussed over this period.

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State Budget & Economic Arrangements Law

The top items on the agenda for the first session of the new Knesset were the **State budget and the Economic Arrangements Law**. Although it may seem of late as though social matters have been the key issue for the general Israeli public, and the Knesset and government in particular, this focus did not result in positive changes in the budget, which included a number of severe cuts to social services. These cuts, which in particular harm the lower to middle class income groups, are indicative of the government's unchanged priorities and perceptions of class and status.

Among other items, the budget contained an increase in the VAT tax, large cuts to child allowances, a freeze in the long-planned reforms in dental healthcare, a rise in income tax rates for all tax brackets, wide-scale cuts to the budgets of all government ministries including social services, and more. The budget also signaled the return of the "**Wisconsin Plan**" [under its new name "Heading to Work"](#), which is almost identical to the previously rejected plan. This bill passed its first Knesset reading and will be discussed in the next session. Following a torrent of public criticism from both Knesset Members and organizations, the ministers responsible for formulating this revised Wisconsin Plan announced that it would undergo substantial changes to ensure the protection of program participants' rights. It remains to be seen if and how these promised changes will be expressed in a revised bill.

Another matter that was included in the broad Economic Arrangements Bill is an amendment that would allow **the confiscation of the vehicles** of people with outstanding tax debts in a manner that bypasses a High Court of Justice ruling prohibiting such conduct. This bill is also expected to be advanced in the next Knesset session.

Government Policies in Other Essential Areas

First and foremost, **the government's Bedouin resettlement plan (known as the [Praver-Begin Plan](#))** was approved by the government, and the Bill on the Arrangement of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev [passed in its first reading in the Knesset plenum](#). It is set to be discussed by the Knesset Interior Affairs Committee when the Knesset reconvenes. This worrying plan advanced despite heavy criticism from the Bedouin population itself as well as the human rights community. This proposed bill violates the basic rights of the Bedouin population, and forms the basis of the government plan to concentrate the Bedouin population in the Negev into settlements in the Siyag region whilst evicting some 40,000 people from their homes.

On the topic of refugees – the Knesset approved a bill that places [limits on the amount of money that "infiltrators" can send out of Israel](#), and the Ministerial Committee for Legislative Affairs approved a continuity motion for a bill that limits the employment opportunities available for refugees and asylum seekers. Additionally, many Knesset committees initiated discussions on the "problem" of asylum seekers and refugees. It is possible to infer from this that there has been no change in government policy regarding refugees, and that initiatives limiting their employment prospects, restricting their access to social services and promoting their arrest and subsequent deportation will continue.

Another phenomenon that we have witnessed during this session is a series of **anti-democratic bills** initiated by a number of different MKs. Some of them received approval by the Ministerial Committee for Legislative Affairs despite the objection of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. These bills include – a draft law by MKs Yariv Levin and Ayelet Shaked seeking to amend the Basic Law of Israel to reflect that Israel is **fundamentally a Jewish state**; a draft law by MK Yariv Levin on [increasing benefits for those who do national service](#); and a draft law by MK Ayelet Shaked [limiting foreign donations to non-profit organizations in Israel](#). As of now, these bills have not received government approval, and it is unclear whether the government will choose to support them later on.

Another bill that advanced during this session, which will potentially severely harm freedom of expression, is the ["Jenin, Jenin" bill](#) that seeks to prohibit criticism of IDF soldiers. Even the Attorney General expressed the opinion that this bill is unconstitutional and would be difficult to defend before the courts.

During this session, the government approved a string of bills on the topic of **planning and construction**. Foremost among these were the extension and expansion of the [National Housing Committees Law](#), a comprehensive reform in the field of planning and building, a new government program for the establishment of 150,000 new housing units, and more. Amendments to these bills are expected to be advanced during the next session. Despite the importance of dealing with the shortage of housing and removing barriers in the planning system, none of the proposals possess any socially oriented characteristics – they do not include the possibility for the provision of affordable housing for lower-class social groups and they do not

incorporate any social planning measures (the right to fair representation, appeal, placing objections, social consultants, etc.)

Other Issues That Emerged During the Session

Human rights in criminal proceedings:

- The government approved a continuity motion for the [Counter-Terrorism Law](#), which gives a permanent status to a string of dangerous temporary provisions such as allowing law enforcement officials to detain suspects without legal representation for extended periods of time;
- The [Alcohol Law](#) makes permanent a temporary provision granting authority to the police to confiscate beverages in public places after 9pm;
- The **Noise law** grants permission to security personnel to enter houses to deal with noise complaints. ACRI intervened to insist that such authority be proportionate and appropriate to the circumstances;
- The **Body-Search Law** that enables the police to conduct a body search of a person based solely on suspicion of illegal conduct with no compelling evidence. ACRI fears that this could lead to discriminatory practices and increase the likelihood of racial profiling.

In the field of Arab minority rights:

- [Discussion over the construction of an Arab school in Nazareth](#);
- The handling of [planning and construction matters](#) was very much of the agenda during this period, as was the issue of house demolitions in Arab communities.

Migration, status and residency:

- The Interior Ministry refused to abide by the court's instructions and sent parents to court or to have DNA tests conducted to prove their parenthood for the purposes of granting citizenship to children.

Right to Privacy:

- [The biometric database](#) – ACRI has been keenly tracing progress in the establishment of the biometric database that will undoubtedly constitute a severe blow to privacy and public security, as leaks will cause irreversible damage.

Freedom of expression and the right to protest:

- [Police Violence](#) – a number of instances have been reported over this period of police forces using excessive force during demonstrations.

Women's rights:

- ACRI was involved in discussions to limit [security guards carrying firearms outside of work](#);
- [Depo Provera](#) – ACRI closely followed up on the issue of Ethiopian women being forced to take birth control medication.

Privatization processes:

- Authority of inspectors: The further transferral of powers naturally belonging to the police into the hands of municipal inspectors;
- Debt collection in local municipalities: This is being conducted without regulation or supervision and in a way that harms peoples' basic rights.

The final day of the Knesset summer session will be July 30, 2013.

The Knesset will resume legislative activities in October 2013.

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