

The High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel

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In Response to the Decision of the Attorney General to Close the Files of the Killers of the Martyrs of the Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem Uprising [October 2000]

The High Follow-up Committee calls for:

A general strike for the Arab public on Friday, 1 February 2008; a central, national demonstration in Sakhnin; the issue to be raised to the international level

*** Khatib: Our message to the government and Israeli society is that we will not raise the white flag in the struggle for survival ***

The secretariat of the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens in Israel held a special meeting on Tuesday, 28/01/08, in its Nazareth offices, following the release of the final report of the Attorney General, Menachem Mazuz on Sunday, 27/01/08. The report announced the closure of the investigatory files in the cases of the deaths of thirteen Arab citizens at the hands of the Israeli “security” forces in October 2000, and Mazuz’s endorsement of Mahash’s report, released in September 2005.

Mr. Shawqi Khatib, the Chairman of the High Follow-up Committee, opened the meeting by confirming the Arab public’s unequivocal rejection of Mazuz’s report, considering the report to contain three messages: **firstly** – that the Attorney General has bestowed legitimacy on and provided a legal cover for the killers of Arab citizens; **secondly** – that the standards for treating the death of an Arab citizen differ from the standards as regards the death of a Jewish citizen; and **thirdly** – that the report raises a question mark over the citizenship of the Arab public. Khatib stated that the government is sending these messages to the Arab public and its leadership through the legal apparatus and Attorney General Mazuz.

Khatib set out the views of the High Follow-up Committee and its strategy in recent years, beginning with its insistence on an official commission of inquiry, through its way of dealing with the governmental Lapid Committee and its rejection of Mahash’s report of 2005, and up to the press conference that was held shortly after the official announcement of Mazuz’s report.

Khatib pointed to the timing of the issuance of the report, days before the release of the final report of the Winograd Committee, in order to sideline the issue of the Arab public while Israeli public opinion is preoccupied with the Winograd report. Khatib also spoke of conditions in Gaza and the continuing Israeli siege of the Strip, stating that the establishment’s timing was intended to conceal the anger of the Arab public.

Khatib stated that, “Our role today is to decide how to counter these messages. We want our young men and women to live in pride and dignity on their land and in their homeland. Our reaction to this report must be loud and strong in order to deliver a message to the government and Israeli society that we will not raise the white flag in the struggle for survival.” He added that the response would proceed along two routes: the first, basic and central, route is that of popular, mass struggle and the second is the legal route. He emphasized that alongside the personal, painful factor of the families of the martyrs, this case is the case of the entire Arab public.

Attorney Hasssan Jabareen, the General Director of Adalah, also spoke at the meeting and presented the most important points in the Attorney General’s report, which is 500 pages long.

He considered it as a defense brief of Mahash in total contradiction of the conclusions and recommendations of the Official Commission of Inquiry (the Or Commission).

Jabareen surmised that the Supreme Court would not intervene in Mazuz's decision, in case a petition were submitted to it, and that the most it could do would be to send the case back once again to the Attorney General. He detailed the potential legal options that lay before the High Follow-Up Committee, which are: (1) to file a complaint to the Secretary General of the United Nations; (2) to submit a report to United Nations committees and appear before the Human Rights Committee in Geneva; (3) to approach states which exercise universal jurisdiction. Jabareen stated that the demand that must be made is the formation of an independent, objective investigatory committee with the participation of international experts.

Mr. Hassan Asleh, father of the martyr Asel Asleh, spoke for the Committee of the Martyrs' Families, stating that, "We were not surprised by the report of Mazuz, who has previously defended Mahash. The establishment's approach is to bury the issue." Asleh emphasized that the families of the martyrs stand behind and will abide by all decisions taken by the High Follow-Up Committee.

The spokespersons for all of the political movements and parties and the mayors of the municipalities were in unanimous agreement over the dangerous nature of Mazuz's report, and how it reflects a racist approach, from which the judiciary is no exception. They also unanimously agreed that it is necessary to take political and legal steps to continue on the march towards the punishment of those responsible, first and foremost the politicians, for the crimes committed against the Arab public in October 2000.

Following a lengthy discussion, the secretariat of the High Follow-up Committee adopted the following decisions:

- To declare a full general strike of the Arab public for the coming Friday, 1 February 2008;
- To organize a national unity demonstration in the town of Sakhnin on the same day, at 3 pm;
- To call on the members of the High Follow-Up Committee to organize protest activities and actions in the coming days, to rally the public in the run up to the general strike;
- To call on schools and Arab educational institutions, via the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education, to discuss the national and political dimensions of the case with students;
- To issue a publication on the case and the decision to call a general strike, and distribute it via the Arab local authorities;
- To hold a meeting of the secretaries of the political parties on Thursday (29/01/08) in the offices of the High Follow-Up Committee in Nazareth to bring the decision into the stage of implementation;
- To form a body to deal with the file of all of the martyrs of the Arab public, under the auspices of the High Follow-Up Committee;
- To raise the case to the international level through legal and judicial channels, and to demand the formation of an independent, objective investigatory committee with the participation of international experts;
- To approve Adalah as the legal advisor of the High Follow-Up Committee, and to state that we see in a positive light the participation of other rights organizations;
- To consider the raising of the case to the international level as the beginning of a struggle at the world-wide level, without abandoning the debate with Israeli society.

With regards,
The Office of the High Follow-Up Committee
for Arab Citizens of Israel
(Nazareth)

