

Akka

City on the Front

A Review of the Events and Confrontations in Akka during October 2008

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FOREWORD

No conflict begins on the day the first person throws a stone but is part of a wider network of interlinked events. The conflict in Akka of October 2008 is no exception and is yet another manifestation of the width and depth of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

The events unfolding in Akka come almost exactly eight years after the killing of 13 Arab citizens by Israeli police forces in October 2000, shortly after the arrival of the second intifada. The subsequent Or Commission investigation into the causes of the October 2000 events noted the extensive neglect of and discrimination against Arab citizens, and concluded that this lack of equality made a fundamental contribution to the outbreak of events. Unfortunately, the failure of the state to take into account the Or Commission's recommendations has allowed this discrimination to deepen and created an atmosphere tolerant of racism in Israel. With this in mind, we have written this report not just to explain the events as they happened in Akka, but to identify the underlying causes of the conflict in the context of systematic discrimination, racial incitement, harassment and de jure and de facto socio-economic discrimination across all areas including housing, education and in public services.

The Mossawa Center, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, was involved in Akka from the beginning of the events and continues to represent and engage with those people affected. Why is this important? The work of Mossawa has been vital to fill the vacuum of responsibility left by local authorities in Akka including the police and municipality. Mossawa employed a range of activities and responses to fill this void including work on community development, legal advocacy, media advocacy and international advocacy. The situation in Akka highlights the continuing importance of building community relations and understanding in the framework of dialogue at the grassroots level.

In publishing this report the Mossawa Center hopes to significantly raise awareness and understanding of the factors that led to the conflict in Akka. We hope this report will be used to take stock of the current situation on the ground in Israel and what this means for the wider conflict in the region.

Mossawa will work to build on its experience in Akka by using the lessons learned here to improve its work in the future and develop its tools to respond to conflict and in conflict prevention. Mossawa hopes too that this report will inform the outlook and work of it's' readers.

Jafar Farah,

Executive Director of the Mossawa Center

1. Introduction

While the international community focuses its attention on the two levels of the Middle East conflict (i.e. the external conflict between Israel and certain Arab states, and the quasi-external conflict between Israel and the Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem), a third level of the conflict — the internal confrontation between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian Arab minority within Israel — remains largely neglected on the international scene, even as it grows more severe. 1.4 million¹ citizens of Israel are Palestinian, Arabs who remained within the borders of Israel after 1948, and their direct descendants. The status of this population, their relations with the Jewish majority, and their treatment by the government of Israel are issues central to peace and stability in Israel and throughout the region. The recent events in Akka (Acre) constitute an escalation of internal tensions and illustrate the severity of the situation in Israel; these confrontations have the potential to complicate regional stability and the peace process.

The purpose of this report is to describe the events that took place in Akka, to explore the historical background underlying them and to recommend the actions necessary to prevent future turmoil. The first step to regional peace in the Middle East is communal harmony within Israel. Accordingly, if there is to be any hope for a lasting and just solution to the conflicts in the Middle East, the unequal status of the Palestinian Arab population of Israel must be examined and remedied.

Each of the conflicts in the Middle East can directly and incrementally affect one another. Internal tension and instability inside Israel have the potential to derail the peace process and disrupt regional stability. Peace must therefore be cemented at the grassroots level, between Israel's Arab and Jewish communities, to provide the foundation for wider, sustainable peace. As citizens of Israel and part of the wider Palestinian people, the Arab citizens of Israel are uniquely positioned to contribute to a just, sustainable human rights-based resolution to the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians and the wider Arab world².

1 Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel 2007, Table 2.1, available at <<http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/>>.

2 The Mossawa Centre (2006) *The Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel: Status, Opportunities and Challenges for an Israeli-Palestinian Peace*, published in Haifa, Israel by the Mossawa Centre pp. 5.

1.1 Context of the confrontation

In October 2000, 13 Arab citizens were killed by Israeli police during peaceful demonstrations following the start of the second intifada. The Israeli government established the Or Commission to investigate the underlying causes of the events of October 2000 and to evaluate the police response. The Official Summation of the Or Commission Report concluded that the State of Israel “must work to wipe out the stain of discrimination against its Arab citizens, in its various forms and expressions.”³

Few of the Or Commission’s recommendations have been implemented. In January 2008, Attorney General Menachem Mazuz dismissed all the cases against the police officers involved in the October 2000 killings, leaving the deaths of the 13 unarmed civilians engaged in peaceful civil demonstrations unresolved by the state.

The conflict in Akka has further revealed the striking lack of real progress in remedying the enduring discrimination against the Arab minority and the persistence of incitement, harassment and systematic (direct and indirect) socio-economic discrimination in housing, education and public services. Including the deaths of Arab citizens during October 2000, in the last eight years, 42 Arab citizens have been killed by Israeli police and Jewish civilians. Few have been prosecuted for these murders.

The tensions in Akka are not new, but previous manifestations of the systematic discrimination against the Arab minority in Akka have gone largely unreported. Since 1948, the state has not approved any new Arab housing projects. Plans have been authorized with budget allocations for new housing in only Jewish neighborhoods of Akka, restricting Arab citizens to poorer areas of the city with inadequate public amenities. Kavkazi, Russian and Mizrahi immigrants — often poorer than Israel’s Ashkenazi elite — have moved into

3 The Official Summation of the Or Commission Report (2003), paragraph 24, published by Haaretz on 2 September, available at <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=335594>>.

neglected housing projects in the city⁴. These predominately working class groups, like their Arab neighbors, also endure socioeconomic disadvantages and discrimination, which exacerbate their cultural marginalization. Pushed to the margins of Israeli society and acting as a buffer against the Arab population for wealthier Israeli cities like Tel Aviv, Netanya and Caesarea, these partially disenfranchised Jewish groups have become the primary constituency for extremist, often overtly racist parties⁵. In recent years, many of Akka's more affluent Jewish residents have chosen to move out of the city to other areas and surrounding satellite kibbutzim, leaving the vacuum to be filled with poorer Arabs, who do not have the same alternatives. The fact that 11 different Jewish parties and four Arab parties are running in the 2008 Akka local elections is indicative of the fragmented social and political makeup of this relatively small city.

There appears to be a strong connection between the deteriorating relations between long-term Akka residents and the influx of predominantly young, religious Jews associated with the settler movement in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). This began in 1997, when a major yeshiva was developed in Akka, attracting many young, religious Jews to the city. Many Jewish extremists from the West Bank and Gaza settlements that were dismantled in 2005 have been resettled in Akka, and, following the Israeli "disengagement" from Gaza, the political group Kcomenouter, or "Uprising" in Hebrew, headed by Yossi Stern, a rabbi from the militant West Bank settlement of Elon Moreh, was established to secure settler interests in the city. Stern also heads the Yeshiva Hesder-Akko⁶, a pro-settler, national religious school founded in 2001 in Wolfson, a majority Arab neighbourhood. Stern is vocal advocate of various projects encouraging Jews to settle in Akka, including a 350-unit housing complex designated for Jewish military families and proposals to build another yeshiva⁷. Many websites, including that of Yeshiva Hesder-Akko,

4 Abunimah, Ali (2008) "The Arab-Jewish Clashes in Akka", available at <<http://www.hicmena.org/pNewsId.asp?Id=755>>.

5 Ibid.

6 A hesder yeshiva is a school for Jewish men that combines army service with religious study.

7 Wilson, S. (2007) 'Israel's Arab Citizens, Isolation and Exclusion', The Washington Post, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/19/AR2007121902681_pf.html>.

explicitly endorse efforts to strengthen the Jewish character of the city⁸.

Some of the youth who live near these yeshivas have been known to aggressively patrol these neighborhoods. Baruch Marzel, a settler leader from near Hebron in the West Bank, visited Akka during the recent tensions and vowed to help Jews in the city to set up a “defense organization”⁹. Marzel was a leader of the banned Kach party¹⁰ founded by the late Meir Kahane, which supports the expulsion of all Palestinians, and remains a prominent leader of racist settler groups¹¹.

The events in Akka coincide with an increase in settler violence targeting West Bank Palestinians¹². Moreover, soldiers have been encouraged to move to Akka due to a new housing project developed exclusively for military servicemen and their families, increasing tensions in the city. Within the Arab community, there is concern that soldiers returning from service in the occupied territories will view their Arab neighbours at home as they do the Palestinians in the oPt and act violently towards them, adding to Akka’s already volatile social dynamic.

Following the events of October 2000, elements of the Jewish community undertook a series of de facto attempts to Judaize Akka, including a two-year economic boycott of the Old City, an economic hub of the Arab community, designed to squeeze Arabs out of the area.

8 Klein Leichman, A. (2006) «Back from Akko to help hesder yeshiva», The New Jersey Jewish Standard, available at <<http://www.jstandard.com/index.php/content/item/2302>>.

9 Roffe-Ofir, S. (2008) “Peres visits Akko, urges side to exercise tolerance”, Ynet available at <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3608389,00.html>>.

10 Banned in 1994, this party has been listed by the EU and US State Department as a terrorist organization.

11 Abunimah. Ali (2008), *Supra*, note 4.

12 At-Tuwani: Report (2008) “A Dangerous Journey: Settler violence against Palestinian schoolchildren under Israeli military escort”, Christian Peacemaker Teams and Operation Dove available at <<http://www.cpt.org/>>.

Image 1: “Jews, Buy From Your Brothers”



“Jews, Buy From your Brothers!”

reads the sign displayed on the Simchat Torah holiday in Akka. The sign was allowed to remain for a days even when the city was under heavy police presence. Image by the Mossawa Center, 20-10-08.

Community-level conflicts are frequent, and the victims of violence and discrimination often have no recourse to justice. Many Arab families in predominately Jewish neighbourhoods have been exposed to severe hostility. Many, for example, recall chants of “Death to Arabs!” on Jewish holidays such as Yom Kippur or after terror attacks take place in Israel. Other examples include a 10-year-old from the Rammal family (see 3.1 below) who was beaten by Jewish youths in his Wolfsen neighbourhood in 2000. His sister’s car has also been burned by her neighbours. This family alone reports four separate attacks on the family home, including twice this year. Additionally, in April 2007, a mosque in the Old City was attacked and damaged.

Racial incitement by religious and political leaders and the media permeates the community. Prominent member of the Knesset and former Vice Prime Minister of Israel, Avigdor Lieberman, for example, advocates the transfer of the Arab population of Israel to the West Bank or to Arab states and has even called for Jews to take up arms against Arabs¹³. Such incitement feeds and legitimizes discrimination and attacks against the Arab minority. The events in Akka can be manipulated to raise support for policies such as Lieberman's to remove Arabs from Israel. The attorney general and police continue to neglect to act against racist statements by both political figures and civilians¹⁴, resulting in increased hatred and racist attitudes among the population. Incitement from above mobilizes violence and discrimination at the local level.

Akka serves as a strong example of the political agenda to Judaize towns and cities across Israel. For example, a similar hesder-yeshiva was recently founded in Arab Ajami, a part of Jaffa (Yafo), south of Tel Aviv, with students coming from the West Bank¹⁵. The situation in Akka is an early-warning signal of a potentially explosive country-wide conflict between Arabs and Jews and further highlights the need for implementation of the Or Commission's recommendations.

13 Azraa, H. (2008) "Ate Etam: Anti-Semitic Pogrom in Israel", Arotz 7, available at <<http://www.inn.co.il/>>.

14 See The Mossawa Centre (2008) Racism 2008 Report, available at <<http://www.mossawacenter.org/default.php?lng=3&pg=7&dp=2&fl=2>>.

15 Senyor, E (2008) "Jaffa: Yeshiva to be built in heart of Arab neighbourhood", Ynet available at <<http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3601062,00.html>>.

2. The 2008 Yom Kippur Events in Akka

October 2008 has seen some of the worst inter-community violence that has taken place in the northern city of Akka since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000. Akka has a population of approximately 52,000, of which 27 percent are Arab. Most of the Arab population lives in the Old City, while the Jewish population lives primarily in the eastern and outer sections, though there are several mixed areas. New neighborhoods have been designed as Jewish areas with Jewish community services. The city council encourages Jews to settle there, and makes it difficult for Arabs to receive the same level of service afforded the Jewish community. Arab families who move to these neighborhoods face harassment and other forms of racism.

2.1 Timeline of events

8 October

The violence in Akka ignited when Taufik Jamal, an Arab resident, drove into a predominantly Jewish housing project in an east Akka neighborhood with his son to pick up his daughter from her fiancé's home just before midnight on the eve of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is one of Judaism's most important observances. Through fasting and prayer, Jews seek forgiveness from God for sins committed during the previous year. In Israel, businesses and public transportation are closed, but it remains legal to drive. Arab citizens are not obliged observe the same practices as their Jewish neighbors.

Jewish youths attacked the car, and then the home of the daughter's fiancé. They threw stones and chanted "Death to Arabs." A rumor quickly circulated among the Arab community in the Old City that the Jewish mob had killed Taufik. This provoked groups of predominantly young Arab men from the Old City to spill out onto the streets of Akka that same night. At 4 a.m. the police evacuated three Arab families from Alkalai Street, in the Shikon neighbourhood.

9 October

Clashes between the Jewish and Arab communities recommenced at the end of Yom Kippur on the evening of 9 October. The clashes resulted in damage and destruction to more than 100 Arab and Jewish shops and properties, mainly along Ben-Ami Street, the city's commercial center, and in the mixed neighborhoods of Shikon, Wolfson and Ben A'mi. Police responded with tear gas and water cannons, but their slow and ineffective response allowed for wider destruction of public and private property. Four people were hospitalized, and 14 Arab families, 72 people in total, including many children, had their homes seriously damaged, and were forced to evacuate. Three homes were burned to the ground, leaving those families with nothing.

The police offered to evacuate the families from their homes in the Shikon neighborhood, and established checkpoints at all entrances to the city. The city council provided temporary housing at two hotels.

Confrontation between police and residents continued until about midnight on 9 October, the end of Kippur. The intervention of Jewish and Arab political and religious leaders led the police chief to send more than 600 officers to Akka from around the country.

Image Set 2: Destroyed Homes



One of the homes destroyed by Jewish extremists in the Shikon and Ben A'mi neighbourhoods.

Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.



One of the homes destroyed by Jewish extremists in the Shikon and Ben A'mi neighbourhoods.

Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

10 October

While the subsequent talks between local leaders from both communities led to a brief pause in the violence, it began again Friday, 10 October, when hundreds of Jewish residents threw stones at Arab properties in the Shikon and Wolfson neighbourhoods.

As many as 300 Jewish youths attacked Arab residents of Akka. Sixteen houses belonging to Arabs were attacked in total. Fifty-four people, about equal numbers of Jews and Arabs were arrested. Jamal Taufik, the Arab man who sparked the violence, was placed on house arrest on “suspicion of harming religious sensitivities and reckless endangerment,”¹⁶ despite the fact that many secular Jews continue to drive on Yom Kippur and it is not illegal to do so.

16 Khoury, J. (2008) “Driver who sparked Acre riots freed to house arrest, has license suspended”, available at <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1028978.html>>.

Israeli leaders, including outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and President Shimon Peres came to Akka to call for peace. None of them, however, met with the Arab families made homeless by the attacks. Only Knesset member Rabbi Michael Malchior (Labor-Meimad) did so.

President Shimon Peres met with both Arab and Jewish local leaders including Akka Mayor Shimon Lankri to discuss restoration of the peace. During a meeting with the Internal Affairs Committee,¹⁷ and at the home of the mayor, Arab members of the city council apologized on behalf of their community for the damage that resulted from the Arab community's reaction to the Jewish attacks. The yeshiva leaders rejected the apology.

The Ministry of Interior offered one million NIS to restore the city, but gave no details or a timeframe with the proposal, and offered no compensation for the 14 families rendered homeless by the events. Prior experience has shown that such promises by the government are slow to be realized, if they are at all¹⁸.

13 October

The following Monday, the 14 evacuated families tried to plead their case to the local municipality for a safe relocation, but the police prevented them from entering the building. Local leaders were meeting there at the time to assess the situation.

14 October

Two buses of Jews arrived in the city on Tuesday, 14 October, to express their solidarity with the Arab community and encourage a return to peaceful relations. The police initially resisted their arrival, but eventually cleared their entry. Youth groups from Kibbutz Hashomer Hatza'ir erected a peace sukkah, or tent, adjacent to the entrance of the Old City. Among the visitors to the sukkah were local religious leaders, MK Rabbi Michael Malchior, and Sheikh Abdallah Nimr Darwish, the founder of the Islamic Movement in Israel.

17 See <http://www.knesset.gov.il/committees/eng/committee_eng.asp?c_id=5>.

18 e.g. Following the Christian-Druze conflict in Mughar village in 2005, government-promised funds took several years to be allocated.

15 October

David Hammerstein-Mintz, a member of the European Parliament from Spain, visited the affected families and their homes. He was accompanied by journalists and the Mossawa Center. The families testified to Hammerstein-Mintz that both the police and their Jewish neighbors did nothing to stop the attacks. Hammerstein-Mintz also met with Akka's Jewish Knesset member David Azoulay, of the religious party Shas, and Abbas Zakour, an Arab member of the Knesset, to discuss the situation.

Mayor Lankri confirmed during his meeting with Hammerstein-Mintz and Mossawa staff that the police had received warnings that extreme right-wing groups were planning to use the Simchat Torah festival to initiate more confrontations with Akka's Arabs. He asked the evacuated Arab families to wait until Tuesday, 21 October, the end of the holiday, before returning to their homes. City leaders and the police commander agreed celebrations should be kept out of the Old City. Due to a heavy police presence, Simchat Torah came and went without incident.

19 October

On Sunday, 19 October, Mayor Lankri announced the city would petition the High Court of Justice should the government delay compensation for the families.

At a press conference, Mayor Lankri announced that the city had received \$200,000 from non-government sources — \$150,000 from The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews and \$50,000 from the Jewish Agency. Mayor Lankri said if the government refused to declare the events as “hostile activities,” the city would assist in a class-action lawsuit against the insurance companies. Additionally, Members of Knesset David Azoulay and Rabbi Melchior said they would lobby for state compensation for the victims

22 October

Except for the families whose homes were completely destroyed, 14 Arab families returned to Akka on 22 October, when the city council demanded

they leave the hotels they had been staying in on a day-to-day basis. The Mossawa Center accompanied three of the families to their homes, and the police assured them they would be protected.

24 October

Just two days after returning to their home, Roza Ramal, a 53-year-old mother of four, was attacked by her 25-year-old neighbour and required hospital treatment (see 3.1 below). This attack demonstrates the depth of hatred and resentment that has characterized the recent tensions and which continues to contribute to the insecurity of the Arab community living in Jewish areas.

26 October

The offices of the yeshiva in the Wolfson neighbourhood were burned, an act all Arab political groups condemned. Three days later, three Arab youth were arrested and held until the conclusion of the criminal hearing. By court order, the arrest was withheld from publication, and the three were denied the right to meet with a lawyer.

2 November

The gag order was rescinded, and the police published the charges against the three Arab youth. Meanwhile, the police have taken little effort to find, arrest and prosecute those Jewish residents responsible for burning and attacking Arab homes and families. The justice system must be fairly applied to protect all citizens, public and private institutions and to prosecute all offenders.

Image Set 3: Destruction of property



The interior of a burned house (above); MEP David Hammerstein-Mintz inspects the remains of a family car (below). Images by the Mossawa Center; 15-10-08.

3. Reality on the Ground

More than 30 homes were damaged, three of which were burnt beyond recognition. 100 cars and 80 shops, both Jewish and Arab, were attacked over the two-week conflict. Akka Mayor Shimon Lankri estimated the total damage to the city from the riots, including the cancellation of the annual Festival of Alternative Theatre, at ten million NIS.

Image Set 4: Destroyed homes and belongings



The burned home of one of the Arab families overlooking a Jewish shop and Jewish neighbors

Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.



*Destruction of a home in the Shikon neighborhood.
Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.*

3.1 Personal cases

For several of the families of Akka, including one family whose home has been attacked four times since 2000, the violence surrounding Yom Kippur represents only the most recent phase in a consistent pattern of anti-Arab aggression directed against them.

The city council and government housing authority prefer those Arabs living in the predominately Jewish neighbourhood of Shikon to relocate to homes in the Arab parts of the city, a position the Mossawa Centre vehemently rejects. Neither these families, nor any other Arab resident, should be forcefully resettled outside of Jewish areas. Evacuation is not only illegal, but it sets a dangerous precedent that could lead to future Arab relocations.

The Rammal Family

This family of four, a mother and her three children, has lived on the eighth floor of an apartment building in the Shikon neighbourhood since 2000.

Three of the apartments in the building were inhabited by Arab families. The apartment has been damaged or burnt four times since 2000, and Jewish attackers torched the family's car in 2002. The home was burnt in both April and October of 2008¹⁹. The family concedes it can no longer live in this neighbourhood and continue to rebuild their home because of the costs. Family members also fear for the safety of their young grandchildren, nieces and nephews who they fear are at risk of attack. "If my Jewish neighbours say, 'Son of a Jew lives like a king and son of an Arab lives like a dog,' how can I live with them?" asked Wala Rammal, a 20-year-old sociology student at Haifa University.

Image Set 5: Salvaging the remains



The Rammal family salvages what they can from their home. Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

19 Photographs of past destruction of the family's home can be viewed at <<http://www.panet.co.il/online/articles/1/2/s-115972,1,2.htm>>.



Family pictures destroyed in the attack. Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

Rammal recounts her frustrations with the police response to her emergency call when her house came under attack. “The police just said they were not a taxi service when we called for help and then hung up.” Wala believes that most of the Arab families who live in rented houses will leave the Jewish neighbourhoods and that only those who own their properties will stay.

During an interview with the Mossawa Center, the family recounted past incidents of racial discrimination, including attacks from young children shouting “Death to Arabs” and finding cow and chicken heads left outside their home by hostile neighbours.

In 2000, the family’s 10-year-old son was attacked by a group of Jewish youths when a yeshiva opened in the neighbourhood near their apartment building. None of the incidents were properly investigated, and no investigation produced a conviction. For example, in April 2008, police investigated the most recent incident — a fire was set to the family home — but told the family that because of the water used to put out the fire, evidence could not be collected and, in any case, the perpetrators were minors and could not be tried. The family was left in the dark, never informed about the progress of the investigation nor given the names of those who attacked them.

The Rammals said one Jewish neighbor would warn them about an impending attack, but she feared for her and her family's safety in doing so. Rammal's other neighbours were reluctant to help.

The family was too afraid of further attacks to return for their belongings and experienced tremendous frustration by the lack of police cooperation. Only after a tedious discussion with the municipality was the family able to secure the money needed to pay for hotel accommodation in the Old City. The family returned home on 22 October. Just two days after returning, Roza Rammal, the 53-year-old mother of four, was physically assaulted by her 25-year-old neighbour who shouted, "We don't want Arabs in our building," and "I hate Arabs." Other Jewish neighbors rescued Rammal from the racist onslaught. When the police did not respond to the family's call for help, the family went to the station, where they found the attacker filing a complaint also. The police officer on duty said the entire family would need to be evacuated again, which prompted the Mossawa Center's legal adviser, Tamer Masalha, to phone the officer, informing him that an evacuation is, in fact, illegal. The Rammal family is now back in a hotel²⁰.

Image Set 6: Damaged by fire



A burned bathroom in one house; Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

20 The Mossawa Centre (2008) "Second Akka Attack", available at <<http://mossawacenter.org/default.php?lng=3&pg=1&dp=2&fl=5>>.



The destroyed living room in another home. Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

The Ali Family

The Ali family, a couple and their daughter, lived in a building divided into four homes. The family has lived on the second floor for over 30 years, close to where riots took place. The family has experienced hostility from Jewish groups, often on Yom Kippur and after suicide bombings in Israel.

During the recent unrest, Jewish youths stoned the Ali family's home, smashing windows and causing severe damage. Mr. Ali suffered a heart attack during the confrontation, provoked by the stressful situation. When the family called an ambulance, paramedics said it was impossible to reach the family and that they would have to travel to the hospital on their own. But the Ali family's home was surrounded by a large group chanting "Death to Arabs" and the family was unable to leave. An ambulance finally arrived three hours later, but the police were unresponsive, wanting to know if the home belonged to Jews or Arabs.

4. Response of the Mossawa Center

4.1 Community response

The Mossawa Center has fully supported the affected families, meeting with them nearly every day since the violence began. The Mossawa Center has been very active on the ground, assuming responsibility for the families when local authorities failed to intervene. The Mossawa Center has, for example, helped facilitate the move back to some of the families' homes, donating beds and furniture. Mossawa has activated local civil society groups, including its partner NGOs and the Jewish solidarity groups who came to Akka, to encourage peaceful normalization in the city. The Center has provided short term financial assistance for the families, and coordinated with Mobadara, the Arab emergency center, to hold a community therapy day for the children of the affected families. That event took place in Nazareth on 24 October.

Mobadara, an organization established by Arab community leaders and the Committee for Arab Mayors, along with Mossawa organized psychological counselling for the families, as well as community level peace-building programs that aim to address the underlying causes of the violence and help prevent another outbreak.

Image 7: "Stop Racism Now"



Two girls wear shirts designed by the Mossawa Center with the slogan "Stop Racism Now!" printed in Arabic and Hebrew. Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

4.2 Legal advocacy

The Mossawa Center tried to gain access to the municipality meeting on 14 October to discuss the fallout of the crisis and reach an equitable solution for the lost homes. After the police prevented Mossawa and the families from doing so, Mossawa staged a protest outside the municipality on 16 October. Mossawa Center legal adviser, Tamer Masalha, requested the minister of finance declare the events in Akka a political confrontation, and to compensate all the families accordingly. The Mossawa Center has launched a legal case to ensure this compensation is realized.

Mossawa's legal unit also kept a close eye on the police investigation. Following the Center's intervention, the finance minister declared that he would request the Knesset approve the declaration that Akka was a site of hostile confrontations, and ensure the tax authority would properly compensate the victims. The Mossawa Center financed the damage assessment.

Meanwhile, Mossawa submitted official complaints against websites inciting racially motivated violence against the Arab community, including one site that called for a boycott against the Arab market in Akka.

Image 8: MK Rabbi Michael Malchior



MK Rabbi Michael Malchior, head of the Knesset Education Committee, meets with families in the peace sukkah erected at the entrance to the Old City by Jewish groups. Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

4.3 Media advocacy

The Mossawa Center visited the homes that were attacked, documented the families' testimonies and photographed and filmed the damage. Photographs and press releases detailing the events are available on the Mossawa Center website's special section on Akka²¹. Mossawa has alerted, updated and liaised with both national and international media, including Ynet, Haaretz, the BBC and CNN. Mossawa Center Director Jafar Farah gave an interview with Al Jazeera as well. Mossawa will continue to publish releases in the Hebrew and Arabic media and document cases of incitement and racism circulating in the press.

Additionally, Mossawa calls upon the attorney general to end the incitement against the Arab community on mainstream Israeli television and in other media outlets.

4.4 International advocacy

The Mossawa Center mobilised its contacts in the international community and raised awareness and updated them on developments in Akka. The Mossawa Center worked with MEP David Hammerstein-Mintz, a vocal supporter of the Arab minority and Mossawa's work, who traveled from within the region to speak out against the violence against the Arab community.

Mossawa's desk in Brussels composed a policy paper on the situation and presented the issues to key contacts in relevant European institutions prior to the EU-Israel political dialogue sub-committee meeting on 28 October.

Mossawa's international unit distributed information to all foreign embassies in Israel. Several of them used Mossawa's reporting for their own assessments of the situation, which were then forwarded to their respective governments.

21 Available at <<http://www.mossawacenter.org/default.php?lng=3&pg=11&dp=1&fl=25>>.

Image 9: International advocacy



MEP David Hammerstein-Mintz meets with affected families during his visit to Akka with the Mossawa Center. Image by the Mossawa Center, 15-10-08.

5. Consequences of this conflict for the Arab community in Israel and national and regional stability

The Arab community within Israel is likely to feel even more marginalized and isolated from the state in light of the Akka conflict. The slow and reluctant response from local authorities, including the police and the city council, is likely to galvanize the feelings of frustration and insecurity already felt by the Arab community and further damage already fragile relations between the Arab and Jewish communities. The economic boycott of the Old City is likely to aggravate the economic insecurities of the Arab community and push the community further to find ways of protecting itself.

Flashpoints of violence in Akka could inflame tensions in other mixed cities in Israel such as Nazareth, Illit, Carmiel City, Beer-Sheva, Lod and Ramleh. For example, on Friday, 17 October, the weekend following the initial riots in Akka, Jews attacked Arabs in both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Six Jews have so far been arrested.

Internal tension and instability between the two communities at a grassroots level inside the borders of Israel sets a dangerous precedent for relations between Israel and Palestinians in the oPt, with negative ramifications for the wider peace process, which in turn can affect regional stability. Coexistence and peace horizontally, within the country, are essential to lay the foundation for wider peace both vertically, between Israel and Palestinians in the oPt, and diagonally, between Israel and neighboring states.

Events such as those in Akka are likely to spur political extremists, fomenting support for extremist views and laying the groundwork for further inter-community strife. Local council elections will take place on 11 November throughout the country, and could lead to violence if leaders and law enforcement do not act against anti-Arab incitement. There is a danger that the events in Akka could be manipulated as political capital to rouse support

for extremist, anti-Arab policies and as ammunition for continued racial incitement.

Israel has suffered from a crisis in governance for the last 15 years. One prime minister has been assassinated, another fell into a coma and another resigned after charges of corruption were filed against him.

Kadima candidate and Foreign Affairs Minister Tzipi Livni has failed to create a governing coalition, opening the country to yet another round of national elections in the spring. Israel's internal conflicts will be at the core of the campaign.

6. Recommendations

In light of the consequences of the tensions in Akka, the Mossawa Center recommends the following actions:

1. The victims of racism and violence be provided for. This includes direct support for the families and victims of the tensions by way of full compensation for their losses through the allocation governmental funding.
2. The development of conflict prevention strategies designed to tackle the root causes of inter-community tensions, as well as the development of a responsive and responsible conflict management and transformation strategy to deal with future outbreaks.
3. Ensuring that the Israeli government is held accountable for its failure to implement the recommendations of the Or Commission and tackle the fundamental causes of the conflict in Akka. The government of Israel must take the following actions to fulfill its responsibility:
 - a. An investigation by the attorney general of the failure of the police to protect the Arab victims;
 - b. The implementation of laws against racial discrimination;
 - c. Utilization of governmental instruments, such as the state budget, to allocate compensatory funds for home renovations and rehabilitation of families by the Ministry of Finance;
 - d. Implementation of projects by the Ministry of Education designed to foster dialogue and fight racism between Arab and Jewish children;
 - e. Provision by the Ministry of Housing of housing projects for the Arab community in Akka and temporary housing for the families whose homes were damaged.
4. Ensuring the media's responsibility to report the situation in a fair way so as not to feed or inflame the conflict.
5. The official recognition of the suffering of the Arab community as part of the reconciliation process.
6. Increased international efforts to reach just and sustainable peace agreements in the region.

Annex A: Interview with Ezziya Abu Ali and Dalia Majdoub

Name: Ezziya Abu Ali
Dalia Majdoub (daughter of Ezziya Abu Ali)

Dalia Majdoub: My husband, Tayseer Ali, I and my daughter live in a house with four apartments. We live on the second floor. It's in an area that lies ten minutes walking distance from the building where the "siege" happened.

Ezziya Abu Ali: Last Wednesday night, the night of Yom Kippur, my daughter called me several times to check on us because she had heard rumours that there was tension in our area, Shikoun Shalosh.

Dalia Majdoub: Later, at 12 a.m., my husband received a phone call from his friend Mohammad who lived in the besieged apartment, calling for help. He [Mohammad] said there were no police to help. He was panicking. Mohammad is a reasonable man in his late twenties. He doesn't panic easily. My husband called the police. They were asking him who he was, whether he could see the action, etc. He told them that he had received an urgent call for help. He felt they didn't feel inclined to act at all.

He then started calling other people for help. He first called a friend who owns a coffee shop, who suggested to call local leaders in Akka, which he did. We understand that three members of the local council and Knesset [MK Sheikh Abas Zakkour, Adham Jamal and Ahmed Odeh] went to the scene on their own initiative, thinking they could mediate. They were attacked by the Jewish crowds, their cars stoned. We don't know the exact details. We understand that one of them got stuck in the apartment. What is clear is that they couldn't help.

Meanwhile the news spread. Arabs from the Old City started flocking to the scene.

Ezziya Abu Ali: I've been living in the same place for the past 30 years. During Yom Kippur we always stay put at home, close everything. We're

used to hearing anti-Arab chanting that day. Groups of Jewish radicals get together that day in a particular place, and start trouble. The same applies whenever there is any tension elsewhere, such as suicide attacks.

That night, I stayed at home, afraid. I heard the familiar shouting “Death to Arabs” from a distance. After my daughter started receiving the calls, we were under high tension. I tried to catch the news throughout. The next day I stayed at home. My son stayed with his fiancée in the Old City. When the events started I had called him not to come. During the day he tried to come home. He took a taxi, which only agreed to drop him at a juncture where the police was standing, and refused to go further. He talked to the police, who told him he could walk on, but on his own risk.

He called us, his parents. My husband drove and picked him up. In the evening he went back to the Old City, luckily. At around 8 p.m. I heard that Jewish groups were gathering at the juncture of the Shikoun. It was not clear where they wanted to go. The police stopped them. They went back to the Shikoun. One group went where the Arabs live on Bustan St. and Kibbutz Galluiot St. And another group went to our area. We are the only two Arab families in our area. I believe they came for us.

When the groups arrived they were chanting “Death to Arabs.” My daughter at that time was visiting our friends, the second Arab family [in our area]. I was at home with my husband. I peeked out of the window and saw someone I didn’t know pointing out where Arabs — we and the other family — live. It all happened within seconds. I was about to close the window, but within seconds the entire room was full of stones thrown by the crowds on the street. The windows were smashed. I think they were around 300 to 400 people or so. My husband was shouting, panicking. He was paralyzed, couldn’t even call anyone. He had a heart surgery four years ago. Two months ago he had a sentour [heart bypass]. He collapsed. So I had a husband on the floor, stones in the apartments, and my daughter away in the other place. My other daughter [Dalia] called. I asked her to call an ambulance. They told her that we would have to bring my husband to their center [Magen David], ten minutes from our place. We told them that it’s impossible, with 400 people downstairs shouting “Death to Arabs” and throwing stones.

Dalia Majdoub: I called the police. They asked me all those identification

questions. I told them my family was under attack. The woman on the line asked me if I was a Jew or an Arab. Then I realized that there is nothing to do and hung up the line. I panicked and called my neighbor, an Arab. She called again the police and the police took its time asking who she was.

Ezziya Abu Ali: At 8:30 p.m. the events happened. Between 11:00 p.m. and 11:30 p.m. the ambulance arrived. At the time, when my daughter, who lives with us but was at her friend's place that was also under attack, saw the ambulance coming, she came running and screaming. The ambulance took my husband. I called my daughter [Dalia] who lives in the center of town to follow her father to the hospital, while I stayed at home with my daughter.

15 minutes later the police arrived and took me and my daughter to my daughter [Dalia]. Our car was attacked and broken.

Three days later, I went to check on our apartment. They broke into our apartment and our things were scattered on the floor, some of our furniture broken and the windows smashed.

- Interviews courtesy of World Trade Institute (WTI) Advisors LTD, Geneva Switzerland

Annex B: Interview with Walaa Rammal

Name: Walaa Rammal

Age: 20

We are four people in the family, living at our home in Shikoun, my mother, two brothers and I. We had been living in our apartment since 2000 before our evacuation last Thursday. There are 32 apartments in our building, three of which are, or were, inhabited by Arabs. We lived on the eighth floor. There is no separate way out. Torching our apartment thus means trying to kill us.

This is not the first incident. Between 2000 and today there were several attempts to burn our apartment. Every time a suicide bomb happened in Israel, our apartment was subject to attack. Our entrance was torched four times in the past eight years. My sister's car was burned completely in 2002. She was a law student at the time, and all her books and study materials burned in the car. I still remember the alarm of the car — it kept sounding for a long while the car burned down. These events always happened in the early morning hours while we were sleeping.

In April 2008 in the early morning hours I heard the sound of burning wood and called the police, who broke open the door to let us escape. The police told us to keep the door as it was to allow for the criminal investigation to proceed. It remained as such — that means open — for two weeks. In the end, the investigators told us that because of the water used to extinguish the flames they could not find any clues relating to the arsonists.

As far as we know, there was never any result to the investigations. We were told that the perpetrators were likely kids, ten to 15 years old. We don't know whether that was a guess or the result of the investigation. We were never told any names. We believe, though, that the attacks were organized. On one occasion, our neighbors celebrated the first birthday of their twins. Suddenly stones were thrown from the roof. We could not identify who did it. It's quite possible that these were minors, but they were certainly doing it with the backing of their elders.

In early 2000, my ten-year-old brother came home crying, saying that a

group of Jewish youngsters had attacked him, shouting “Death to Arabs”. This happened when a yeshiva was opened in the neighbourhood, next to our building. He was passing by when he was attacked.

My two older sisters, who were living with us at the time, went down, grabbed the attacker and asked him how he could attack a little boy. A soldier who was sitting there with his rifle — we don’t know whether on or off duty — hit my sister with his rifle. The investigation later claimed that he was “crazy.” Nothing happened to him.

The apartment belongs to Amidar [social housing society]. Every time our door was damaged, they restored it, but without any reinforcements.

Throughout the years we felt that no one ever really believed us. Not the police, not the politicians. Every time we said that the attacks may have been ethnically motivated, we were told that no, these were just isolated incidents of settling personal accounts.

Last week, the evening before Yom Kippur, the following happened. Every year on Yom Kippur we stay at home, don’t move at all. This year I was at my neighbor’s place, helping her with wedding preparations. At around 11 p.m. we heard a scream from the street, looked out and saw a car being attacked with stones and wooden supports for trees. The driver was still in the car. The attackers were Jews, not only neighbors, but also passers-by — people walk in the streets at that time of Yom Kippur.

The claim that he was speeding is not credible. There are a number of speed bumps in our street, and people walk on the streets. It seemed that he was attacked when he parked the car.

The driver and his son, who had been in the car, too, ran away and took refuge at a neighbor’s place, the people he was going to anyway. That’s where I was, too. He was bleeding all over.

I called the police. There were around 200 people, my guess, downstairs, chanting “Death to Arabs.” When I called the police, telling them that there was a serious situation and acute danger and that people were getting hurt, they reacted very slowly. They asked me all kinds of questions — Who are

you? What's your phone number? — all kinds of irrelevant stuff, while danger was rising.

Meanwhile there was panic in the apartment. A young girl cut herself on broken glass. The neighbour whose son was getting married, an old woman, had an eye operation and was panicking because she suddenly couldn't see anymore. We all were panicking. One of her sons, 21 years old, swallowed his tongue.

When the police came, maybe half an hour after I called, maybe more, only five policemen came, even though I had told them on the phone that there were hundreds downstairs. Two of them were in plain clothes, apparently just volunteers.

We also called an ambulance. When it arrived, before the police, the driver and his two colleagues — they seemed like volunteers, youngsters — first refused to come up because they were afraid of the crowd. They asked us to come down. When the medics finally came up to the apartment with the police, one of us was shouting at them in panic, asking why they didn't come up earlier. They were upset, said that we couldn't talk to them like that, and simply left and went down, together with the police. This was at around 11:30 p.m., I think.

Nothing much happened between then and 1 a.m., but more and more people — Jews — were arriving downstairs, hitting our cars, shouting.

Someone called friends and family for help. First the father of the driver's friend came to check on his son, not aware of the scale of the situation. He managed to get through, but was attacked, in view of the police.

The driver himself called his brother, who came with his friends in two cars. Again they were attacked, but managed to get up to us. Soon thereafter an Arab MK arrived, Abbas Zakkour, thinking he could solve the situation. He was also beaten and attacked. Soon more Arabs arrived, who had been alarmed by telephone or mosque loudspeakers.

When the police understood that what was happening, they left the scene, apparently to stop more people — Arabs — from coming in. The Jewish crowd also started to disperse. The Arabs on the street then called us and the

other Arabs living there to come down, come with them to the Old City.

At some point I felt it was getting safer, so went upstairs to join my mother. Two neighbors' girls were alone at home. They came to stay with us.

I heard that later one policeman arrived in a car to pick up the driver, his father and the boy who swallowed his tongue to take them to the hospital. When he took them down, the Jewish crowd started noticing what was happening and attacked them. The policeman tried to start the car, but panicked, couldn't start the car, and told the three men to run to save their lives.

Later another police car arrived, together with an Arab council member [Adham Jamal]. They picked up the other Arab families, but forgot us. We turned off the lights, and called the police again. I had a man on the phone called Gabi, and told him that we were four women alone, stranded. He told us that he could not send anyone, and hung up.

I then called Adham, the council member. He came back in the police car, and we were evacuated. My mother even took off her veil in the car so that we would not be recognized as Arabs. This is how we got out.

We slept for two nights at my uncle's place in the Old City, and then moved for another two nights to my sister's small apartment in the New City. We left our homes without anything, so lived on the hospitality of the people.

We then moved to the hotel. The municipality covered one night, then another. Jafar [Farah] told us that we could stay for another ten nights, he would cover the rest, if need be.

We meanwhile wanted to get things from our homes. We got in contact with members of the council. From them we got the impression that the police would escort us to our homes, from a Magen David Adom base [Israeli Red Cross]. We went there, but were told by the police that they are not a taxi service, and would not bring us there.

On the fourth day, we eventually went with the police, who told us to take as many things as possible because we may not have the opportunity to go to our home to pick up more things any time soon. Three police cars, a fourth

car with a police driver and us five as well as another two police cars with the other families went. When the first two police cars arrived with the families, they were received by the neighbours shouting at them while we were waiting at the beginning of the street. A short while later, we saw the police car with the first two families come back. The people were crying. We were told that one of the apartments that belongs to one of the families had its door burned and had been looted. They had just taken a few things that were left. The second family found their apartment intact and took their things. The police then told us to go back and that we couldn't go to our apartment after all. At that occasion, our neighbor, originally an immigrant from Russia, passed by and started shouting at us, told us to "go back to the Arab countries." We had to leave without our things.

All this happened in the middle of the street, in plain view of the neighbors, and in the presence of a TV crew [Israel's Channel 10]. I believe they shot the entire scene, including the Russian woman and a neighbor who took out his car jack to attack us. An Arab member of the municipality was also there. We went straight to the municipality and called the mayor to get out but he did not. No one came out to talk to us, only the Arab members of the Council were with us. We shouted and claimed support and only after a long while all we got was one night at the hotel, with breakfast, but no lunch or dinner.

Arab organizations are jumping by, but so far we have no idea how we'll make it further. The small families were brought to this hotel [Accotel]. When they wanted to bring the bigger families to the Palm Beach Hotel, the only family hotel in Akka, on the beach, the owner refused to accept them, claiming that he did not want Arabs there. They are now in Naharia.

Our stay at the hotel is extended day by day after fights and long hours of standing in front of the municipality. In one of our encounters with the municipality, an official at the municipality called Israel Ben Izzra told us that the treatment we get is not matched anywhere in the Arab world and that we should not behave in the hotel as we usually misbehave.

Annex C: Table of Arab families who have been forced to leave their homes

Number of people in family	Property type	Current Status	Family Name
4	Public	Evacuated to Akkotel. The apartment is an Amedar-owned home. The family has asked for a home swap under Amedar.	Rammal
5	Public	Evacuated to Akkotel. The apartment is an Amedar-owned home. The family has asked for a home swap under Amedar.	Sha'aban
8	Private	Evacuated to Akkotel. The apartment was burned and the family wants to renovate and return.	Waleed Ali
5	Public	Evacuated to Shevi Tzion.	Khalayle
6	Private	Evacuated to Shevi Tzion. The house was heavily damaged. The family asks to renovate and return.	Qondoos
7	Private	The house is heavily damaged and the family wants to renovate and return.	Barghouti
7	Public	Evacuated to Shevi Tzion. Amedar owned the 5-room home. The family has asked for a home swap under Amedar.	Hawa

4	Private	Evacuated to Akkotel. The house is completely burned but the family wants to return and renovate.	Morsi
7	Private	The family has been evacuated to Homi Tzion Hotel. The house is burnt but the family wants to renovate and return.	Ahmad
7	Public	Evacuated from their home, the family is asking for an alternative apartment from the same letting agent.	Abeed
4	Public	The family is currently living in their seriously damaged home. The family wants to move apartments.	Aghbaria
7	Public	The family are still living in their home and have received death threats if they remain.	Samri
7	Public	Currently at Shevi Tzion The family has received threats and therefore has evacuated their home.	Sarhan
4	Private	Evacuated to Akkotel. Serious damage to the property. The family wishes to return.	Tayseer Abu-Ali
5	Private	Evacuated to Akkotel. Serious damage to the property. The family wishes to return.	Hana Saadi
4	Private	Evacuated to Akkotel. The family have been threatened if they continue to pay the mortgage.	Bilal Ali

