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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mossawa Center, Kufur Qasem Local Council and the Kufur Qasem Local Committee hold press conference commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Kufur Qasem massacre

Kufur Qasem, Israel, October 22, 2006 – This Sunday, the Kufur Qasem Memorial Committee and Local Council, in cooperation with the Mossawa Center, held a press conference in the Arab village of Kufur Qasem to present the demands of the Arab community, fifty years after the massacre of 49 villagers by the Israeli military. Shawki Khatib, Chairperson of the Committee for the Heads of Arab Local Councils and Head of the Follow-up Committee, Sami Issa, Head of the Kufur Qasem Local Council, Adel B'deir, President of the Public Committee for the 50th Anniversary and Jafar Farah, Director of the Mossawa Center, spoke at the event to both bring to light to the consequences of the tragedy and to voice the demands of the Arab community to the Israeli government fifty years after the massacre.

On October 29, 1956, Israeli border police, then under the authority of the Israeli military, killed 49 Arab civilians of Kufur Qasem. Due to its proximity to the Green Line, Kufur Qasem, as well as the other villages of the Triangle region, was considered to be in a strategically “weak” area by the Israeli military during the Sinai War, leading to an increased military presence in the region. On October 29, 1956, Colonel Ishkar Shadmi declared a new curfew and ordered troops to “shoot on sight” any Arab out past 5 p.m., regardless of the fact that villagers working in the fields outside the town were not aware of the consequences of the new curfew. This was a direct violation of the agreements signed by Israel in Rhodes that protected inhabitants of the Triangle region, and has been interpreted by many as a cruel message meant to intimidate and encourage the Arab community of the Triangle to flee the country.

In total 49 villagers were slain, including women and children. Family members watched as the dead and wounded were piled into trucks and driven away — powerless to help the wounded for fear of being shot. The dead were unceremoniously buried in a mass grave. Upon discovering the events of October 29, the Israeli government did its best to play down the massacre, keeping the area around Kufur Qasem blockaded for days. The guilty parties were eventually tried, but served minimal, to no time in prison, while Colonel Shadmi, the officer who ordered the killings, was fined just one cent.

Despite the fifty years that have passed since the tragedy, the government has not officially recognized the massacre, nor do government representatives attend any memorial events. The Kufur Qasem massacre is not a mandatory part of the curriculum in schools. Meanwhile Avigdor Liberman and his party Yesrael Betino call again for the transfer of the Arab community and have recently been invited to join the government. 34 Arab civilians have been killed by Israeli police forces in the past six years, while the recommendations of the Or Commission remain unimplemented.

The Arab community and families of the slain present the following demands to the government of Israel:

1. Take responsibility for the massacre in Kufur Qasem and the events of October 29, 1956.
2. Make the Kufur Qasem massacre a mandatory part of the history curriculum in schools.
3. Uproot calls for the transfer of the Arab community by Israeli politicians, and end the violence against Arab citizens by police forces.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the massacre, the Kufur Qasem Memorial Committee and Local Council will hold a public memorial on Sunday, October 29 in the football grounds of Kufur Qasem, beginning at 5 p.m.

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