



**The Mossawa Center:
The Advocacy Center for the Arab
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PRESS RELEASE

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Lenient sentence for policeman who killed Arab citizen

September 9th 2009 - The Central District Court on Thursday September 3rd sentenced policeman Shahar Mizrahi to just 15 months in jail and a 15-month suspended sentence, after he was convicted of manslaughter for shooting Mahmud Gnayem, an Arab citizen in Pardes Hanna, in the head at close range, claiming he had been suspected of car theft, a version of the story that the police officer later changed. Despite the inconsistencies in the policeman's report of the occurrence, and the exposure that the victim's father was in fact the owner of the aforesaid car, the police department continuously and blindly supported Mizrahi in court. Police national commander rejected the Mossawa Center's and the family's demand to suspend the police officer from his duties during the trial hearing and even after the conviction.

The Mossawa Center contends that this hearing is the latest in a series of cases since 2000 where unjustified violence and unlawful killing by policemen and Israeli citizens against Arab citizens remains unchecked. Jafar Farah, Director of the Mossawa Center states that the reason for the lenient sentencing is "the political legitimization of police violence against Arab citizens since October 2000, where 44 Arab citizens have been killed by security personnel or civilians in the last 9 years, while no Jewish citizens have been killed in demonstrations or during criminal activities or arrests". This phenomenon should be understood in the light of the 13 Arab citizens that were killed during the October 2000 demonstrations while no Jewish civilian were killed while violently resisting the Gaza disengagement in 2005 or during the demonstrations of the Haredi community in the past few weeks in Jerusalem.

September 1st marked yet another incident of this sort where a security guard shot and killed an Arab citizen and is not expected to be punished. After only an initial interrogation by the police, it was hastily determined that the security guard that shot and killed Hussein Al-Atrash, had acted according to procedure and that his actions were justified, a conclusion reached based on the security guard's own account of the event.

Additionally, in July 2009 Shai Dromi, a farmer in the Negev, was acquitted of manslaughter and aggravated assault after shooting and killing Khaled Al-Atrash, suspected of trespassing, and is now expected to be sentenced to only 5 months of community service for an illegal possession and use of a weapon. Dromi's acquittal of manslaughter was despite of the fact that he had shot Al-Atrash 5 times in the back while not being under an immediate threat to his life. This case further supports the pattern of impunity for Jewish citizens in cases related to the death of Arab citizens. It is important to note that these are only a few of the 44 unlawful killings of Arab citizens since 2000, with little or no justice for the victim's families.

Mossawa warns that this pattern of impunity for killing of Arab citizens further delegitimizes Israel's 1.5 million Arab citizens inside Israel as equal citizens and destabilizes the rule of law, which could lead to the law of the jungle in which justice and avengement would be taken outside the courts into the hands of civilians.

On September 7th police simulated major riots of both Jews and Arabs and clashes between them. The training was held nine years after the 2000 demonstrations and a year after the October 2008 riots in Acre. Among the scenarios officers were asked to respond to was the possibility of riots over the planned construction of a city for the Haredic-religious community in Nachal Eeron, south of Haifa, known as Wadi Ara to the present predominantly Arab population.

These trainings contribute to the atmosphere of fear and intolerance cultivated in Israel and intensified during protests of the war in Gaze earlier this year. Trainings such as this provoke fear across the country, which has serious implications for the exercise of freedom of speech and association and the right.

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The Mossawa Center, the Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that works to promote equality for the Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel. Established in 1997, the Mossawa Center strives to improve the social, economic and political status of the Arab citizens of Israel, while preserving their national and cultural rights as Palestinians.