

## Please Implement Properly

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One year has passed since the Border Committee of the Ministry of Interior started to investigate the jurisdiction of local authorities in the south of Israel. Following several comprehensive discussions and examinations, the committee has decided to grant additional revenues to 14 local authorities, beginning next year. Among these 14 localities are Arab-Bedouin local authorities in the Negev.

One should not be mistaken, however, in thinking that there has been any fundamental change in the balance of powers and in the unequal distribution revenues. For example, while the population ratio between the Arab town of Ksaifie and the Jewish town of Dimona is 1:2, the future planned revenues distribution is 1:3. Nonetheless, it was a wise and proper decision on the part of the Minister of Interior to redistribute revenues and, provided that it is indeed properly implemented, this could be a good starting point that will lead to increased budgets for Arab-Bedouin local authorities in the Negev, enabling processes of socio-economic development for the region. Such a wise decision sets a worthy example to be followed in other areas of the county.

Furthermore, 99% of industrial and business property taxes in Israel are collected by Jewish local authorities, while the remaining insignificant 1% is collected by Arab local authorities. In addition, Arab local authorities throughout the country enjoy neither taxes paid by government institutions, nor taxes paid by commercial and industrial zones. Take the city of Nazareth, for example, the only Arab town in which there is a government institution (court): the building is supposedly in Nazareth, however, in actual fact, the building is located in the Jewish jurisdiction of Nazareth Elite.

The decision to grant millions of shekels of non-residential property taxes to Arab-Bedouin local authorities in the south is a significant milestone towards compensating for the historical discrimination against Arab citizens, and therefore it is advisable to apply this in other areas around the country as well. In order to comprehend the extent of the difference that these additional revenues could make for Arab local authorities, one only need examine the increase of the income rates in these local authorities. Whereas an additional 13 million shekels will increase Dimona's income rate by only 20% and an additional 10.5 million shekels will increase Arad's income rate similarly by 20%; **an addition of only 3.5 million shekels to Navi Midbar's revenues will increase its income rate by 280% and an addition of only 4.5 million shekels to Ksaifie's revenues will increase its income rate by 92.5%**. This highlights the great inequality of treatment towards Arab local authorities in terms of budgets allocations.

The only thing that remains is the hope that, unlike in past experience, this program will be successfully implemented and will not fall victim to legal and political hindrances by other stronger, more well-endowed local authorities. This step could create a solid basis for Arab local authorities, especially for Bedouins, which are characterized by significantly low socio-economic status. However, this should not remain the only step, but rather set off a sequence of actions to alter the reality of these local authorities'. This includes granting increased

budgets to Arab local authorities, while providing Arab leadership with the proper skills and tools to manage the budgets efficiently, and optimize their work with central government institutions, enabling social and economic growth for their citizens.

Injaz, along with other civic organizations, has accompanied the meetings with the Border Committee. Unfortunately, what we have witnessed is that the weakness of Arab local authorities is in their inadequate ability to present their needs before Jewish local authority lawyers. The Minister of Interior has recently declared that the issue of "just revenue distribution" is a highly-prioritized issue on the agenda of his ministry. It is essential for the country to continue taking responsibility regarding such issues. However, it is even more essential that Arab leadership draw conclusions from this process, demand the establishment of more Border Committees to operate in their regions, and focus greater attention on this issue.