

NEW PROFILE

Movement for the Civil-ization of Israeli Society

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations
United Nations
New York
NY 10017

28 January 2010

Dear Secretary-General,

We write you on behalf of New Profile, a feminist movement working to end the militarization of state and society in Israel (and noted on pages 33 and 373–374 of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission Report on the Gaza Conflict as one of the dissenting voices inside Israel repressed by Israel's authorities). We wish to strongly urge the international community, as represented by the United Nations, to hold Israel accountable, through the mechanisms of international justice, for violations of international humanitarian law, possible war crimes and crimes against humanity.

On 5 November 2009 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 64/10, which endorses the recommendations of the Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict and justly called on Israel "within a period of three months, to undertake investigations that are independent, credible and in conformity with international standards into the serious violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law reported by the Fact-Finding Mission, towards ensuring accountability and justice."

While New Profile fully endorses this call, our long years of fact-based, oppositional praxis compel us to bear witness to Israel's unwillingness and structural incapacity to comply with such a call. Our work has afforded us extensive insights into the underlying militarization of every aspect of the Israeli state, belying the claim to a democracy in which civil society through its elected representatives governs and deploys a military. That these insights are viewed by Israel's state authorities as sufficiently dangerous to merit New Profile's attempted criminalization, in fact testifies to their validity.⁽¹⁾ Accordingly, we consider it our responsibility and duty to highlight Israel's extreme militarization as a main factor enabling the disproportionate use of violence against the people of Gaza and disqualifying the Israeli military, government, parliament and judicial system from independently and credibly investigating the alleged violations of international law contained in the report of the Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict.

Corroborating these claims, attached below are central findings of New Profile's years of activist research and first-hand information on recent silencing measures encountered by the movement.

Israel's law of mandatory conscription, and repeated policy choices by Israel's leaders that result in warfare, work in concert to shore up the impunity of the military and to justify Israel's militarized government to civil society. Due to ostensible "security considerations" the Israeli military operates every year, by law, through the conscripted labor of thousands of male and female eighteen-year-olds. These young people are ordered by successive governments and generals to carry out illegal actions in demonstrable violation of human rights.(2) Widespread (though shrinking) acquiescence with the conscription law among youth, their parents, educators, media and indeed most of civil society creates a forced consensus and a self-perpetrating cycle of militarization. Under these circumstances it is extremely difficult for any critical organizations or individuals to judge the deeds of the Israeli military and find them illegal. Furthermore, taking a principled stance in opposition to the militarization of Israeli society results in isolation and exclusion that is sometimes violently enforced by the state.

Israel's state education system has been designed to perpetuate obedience to the conscription law and produces and maintains the systemic militarization of state and society as it aggressively channels minors from a very young age towards enlistment.(3) The end result – a population of young people with little critical capacity to make informed choices about conscription -- is largely achieved by integrating a polarized, militarized world view into almost every aspect of school curricula. The system imbues youngsters with military-centered views, effectively entrenching paranoia and the "culture of demonization and dehumanization" correctly identified in the report of the Fact Finding Mission. Such effects are complemented by presenting the army as attractive and exciting; most pronouncedly, students and teachers are commonly required to participate in lessons offered on school premises by *uniformed officers* and to visit a variety of military units in programs designed to naturalize armed conflict and enthuse future candidates for conscription. Enormous pressures both convince and oblige teachers to legitimize and normalize the militarized policy choices of warfare and to justify mandatory conscription. This precludes the encouragement of critical thinking among the minors they teach and, in effect, means that Israeli youth are being educated as executors of the ongoing occupation of Palestine.

Quite recently, these educational policies were intensified even further when Israel's Minister of Education declared plans to remunerate schools based on graduates' enlistment statistics.(4) That this "carrot" is being offered to a school system impoverished by two decades of repeated funding slashes is itself symptomatic of leadership decisions which prioritize military spending over development concerns such as improving education. That schools are rewarded for staffing combat units, clarifies the fundamental approach of this education system and alerts us to its basic incapacity to allow and nurture non-militarized views on human security and peaceful solutions to conflicts.

Notably, on 1 December 2009 hundreds of high school principals were summoned to hear Israel's Chief of Staff expounding his views on the significance of education for enlistment. A peaceful attempt by New Profile activists to offer participants leaflets questioning the militarization of Israeli education was forcibly blocked by security guards and then police.(5) Soon after, Hebrew media channels reported a directive from the Minister of Education barring high schools from hosting New Profile speakers (see Appendix No. 1: New Profile Press Release, Dec. 13 2009). This led to the cancellation of New Profile participation in a series of high school events discussing human rights and civic freedoms, including freedom of expression, which was to have been organized by the highly respected Association for Civil Rights in Israel. This move is symptomatic of the militarized considerations which

increasingly constrict the space for free debate and intentionally feed future conscripts' propensity for the kind of uncritical, blind obedience that can produce behaviors such as those seen in Gaza in Operation Cast Lead.

Along with many similar mechanisms, ongoing now for decades, such militarized policies have seriously compromised the capacity of civil society in Israel for independent and credible judgment, and for holding its elected leaders accountable not only to Israeli but also to international law.

As we have laid out in this letter, the militarized system in place in Israel renders the State of Israel incapable of conducting its own implementation of the Fact Finding Mission. In order to ensure justice and stop Israel's continued and escalating violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, we call on the UN General Assembly and Security Council to intervene and ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict. If the United Nations and wider international community are to meet their responsibilities in upholding the rule of law, then concerted, effective and prompt action must be taken at the highest level to end the impunity and ensure the accountability of the State of Israel.

We are sending copies of this letter to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Security Council, Members of the Security Council, the President of the Human Rights Council and the Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We thank you sincerely and would be happy to provide you with further information upon request.

Respectfully yours, on behalf of New Profile,

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References:

- (1) Rela Mazali, "Investigation Terminated: A Recognition of New Profile," *NRG*, Nov. 2, 2009, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/961/419.html> (in Hebrew).
- (2) As demonstrated, for instance by the *Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* issued by the International Court of Justice.
- (3) See, for instance: *The New Profile Report on Child Recruitment in Israel*, July 29, 2004, http://www.newprofile.org/data/uploads/child_soldiers/english.pdf.

- (4) Or Kashti , "IDF Officers to Visit Schools in Bid to Boost Enlistment," *Haaretz*, Nov. 17th 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1128737.html> (in English).
Efrat Zemer, "Combat for Graduates, Money for Schools," *NRG*, Aug. 18, 2009, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/930/993.html> (in Hebrew).
- (5) *NRG Maariv*, "Security Guards Prevented Distribution of Leaflets against Militarism," *NRG*, Dec. 1, 2009, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/973/614.html> (in Hebrew).

Appendix No. 1:

December 13, 2009
New Profile Press Release

New Profile response to the Minister of Education's directive
banning New Profile speakers from high school debates on civil rights

NEW PROFILE WRITES THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION:
THE EDUCATION SYSTEM PROMOTES VENERATION OF THE USE OF FORCE,
RAMPANT FEAR AND DREAD OF A NEW HOLOCAUST

“The Minister's decision unveils the truth behind the government’s claim to defend the values of democracy and behind the claim of the Ministry of Education to educate for tolerance.”

New Profile, the feminist movement to civil-ize Israeli society, wrote Minister of Education, Gideon Saar, this morning, strongly condemning his recent instructions to prohibit its members' participation in high school debates convened by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) on questions of human rights and freedom of expression.

New Profile wrote the minister that his act had exposed the government's true stand on civil rights and freedom of expression, also belying the Education Ministry's professed respect for tolerance. “The minister's step was taken in tandem with the decision he took to send yet more military personnel into schools—a move designed to increase enthusiasm for fighting,” New Profile advised in its letter. “For over a decade now, our movement has been cautioning of the danger of ignoring the wishes of students, parents, and teachers to freely and openly discuss these subjects prior to the students' induction into the military at age 18. The Minister’s present steps increase the repression of voices seeking to frame and examine social responsibility in non-militarized terms.”

New Profile's letter explained that, “The perceptions transmitted by the present educational system generate an acceptance of warfare as a sound national strategy. They encourage veneration for the use of force and aggrandize Jewish nationalism, while devaluing the lives of Palestinians. At the same time, they sow rampant fear and dread of a new Holocaust. Ongoing endorsement of the use of force in combination with the consistent enhancement of nationalism and constantly fanned fears, maintain a state of war and, also, of severe social stratification and inequality. The military has long since become a normalized, daily aspect of Israeli education and upholds war as the apparent, sole solution to Israel’s political problems. The continuous state of warfare serves as a pretext for prolonging the military occupation and seemingly excuses the state of Israel from its accountability to the Palestinian

people but also, no less, its accountability to the young Israelis that it deploys to perform the occupying, policing, destruction, and terrorization.” New Profile sharply criticized the abuse of authority evident in the minister's ban, adding that his decision silences not only New Profile but also the voice of every individual striving for a free and open civil society discourse on relations of military and society.

New Profile members, the letter added—students, sisters, fathers, educators, citizens—welcome this moment of truth in Israeli education, clearly exposing it as an instrument of suppression, silencing independent thought and free expression among principals, teachers, and students, who are barred from open debate on issues affecting the individual life, health, and future of each and every student. All the above are officially forbidden to ask openly just who stands to gain or lose from compulsory conscription. New Profile, “stand[s] by the many educators, parents, and youngsters who are seriously troubled by the fact that 18-year old boys and girls have been conscripted, for sixty years now, into years of near-forced labor, with almost no remuneration and harsh working conditions, due to a decades old decision made in very different circumstances.”

Further, the letter notes that, “military obedience and civil obedience are not one and the same. The military is an inherently hierarchical system operated through military commands. To avoid blindly obeying blatantly illegal orders, those serving in the military are left to rely on universal moral values potentially imbibed from their families or civil education. Students, however, are first and foremost citizens who should be guided to independent critical thinking. How can the education system and the educators who staff it faithfully perform their responsibilities when the head of this system openly dismisses their judgment, sending army officers to instruct them in love of one's country, measured in force and bloodshed.

“Every instance of silencing stems from fear. A steadfast, confident position, a true respect for teachers and students, would allow these to listen, to discuss, and to choose their paths from the spectrum of available options. A Minister of Education who prohibits an open discussion of military and state by the very youths he designates to perform the orders of both, in fact impairs their ability to independent and complex thinking.

“New Profile has called consistently, for the past 10 years, for a thorough revision of Israel's system of education; we demand its transformation into a system providing a democratic and civil education, an education compatible with peace, with negotiating resolutions to conflict, rather than mobilizing for organized violence.”

New Profile expressly calls on the Minister to address this core question: Why has he denied New Profile the inalienable right of every citizen to a freely expressed opinion and why should he deny students the right to decide on the type of society they wish to live in.