

Press release
Dec. 21, 2012

Knesset Elections Committee disqualifies MK Haneen Zoabi from running in the Israeli elections

On December 19, the Central Elections Committee voted to disqualify MK Haneen Zoabi, of the National Democratic Assembly party (NDA-also known as Balad), from running for the Knesset in next month's Israeli elections. The committee voted narrowly against disqualifying the whole NDA list, but approved by a majority of 19-9 the motion to bar MK Zoabi from standing for the Knesset.

The motion had been submitted by MK Offir Akunis, of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party. NDA representatives refused to attend the Elections Committee hearing on the grounds that the committee's decision is politically driven. The committee is dominated by representatives of the Zionist parties, whose aim is to silence the voice of Israel's Arab-Palestinian minority as represented by MK Zoabi.

The disqualification comes in the context of an increasingly hostile climate towards the Arab minority among the Jewish Israeli public. The move can also be seen as a continuation of measures over the past four years that include 20 discriminatory and/or racist laws enacted by the Netanyahu-Lieberman government against Israel's Arab citizens and their elected representatives.

Following the vote, MK Haneen Zoabi called the decision "anti-democratic and illegitimate", a form of political revenge that reflected the tyranny of the majority. "No one will determine for the Arab minority who represents it other than Arab citizens themselves," she said. "I was elected to represent my people and, through their support, I have a legitimacy that the committee cannot take from me."

According to Israeli law, the disqualification of a candidate is not final until approved by the Israeli Supreme Court. MK Jamal Zahalka, head of the NDA-Balad parliamentary bloc, said it would be an extremely dangerous precedent if the court approved the decision of the Elections Committee. "Disqualifying Zoabi is like disqualifying the whole party. It

means changing the rules of the game and it will result in our boycotting the elections,” he said.

The NDA wholeheartedly condemns this decision, which is designed to delegitimise the party’s platform and silence a democratic movement representing the Arab-Palestinian public. Such a move is a clear example of political persecution aimed at excluding Arab representatives from the Knesset and, more generally, at instilling fear in the Arab electorate.

It is undemocratic for the majority to exclude minority representatives from the parliamentary process. It is therefore crucial that prior to the Supreme Court hearing expected on December 27 international civil society organisations, activists, parliamentarians and others make their voices heard protesting against such restrictions on minority rights in Israel. The disqualification of MK Zoabi should be publicly denounced and Israel called upon to guarantee the rights of the Arab-Palestinian minority to free and effective participation in the general elections.

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