HAARETZ.com

Tue, October 19, 2010 Cheshvan 11, 5771

- Published 00:41 19.10.10
- Latest update 00:41 19.10.10

Loyalty oath isn't racist, but it will destroy Israel

An amendment to the Basic Law on the Knesset that keeps the Arabs out will be very harmful to Israel's image and will do unimaginable damage to the state.

By Yehuda Ben Meir

The amendment to the citizenship law upon which the government has decided is not a racist law; there is not an iota of racism in it. Lord Balfour, who promised to establish a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel - a commitment that was included in the Mandate of the League of Nations - was not a racist. The United Nations did not act out of racism when it decided on the establishment of a Jewish state and an Arab state in the Land of Israel. David Ben-Gurion, who on May 14, 1948, declared "the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, to be known as the State of Israel," was not a racist, nor is U.S. President Barack Obama, who has declared from the UN podium that Israel is "the historic homeland of the Jewish people," a racist.

The meaning of the term "a Jewish state," in the context of the current debate, is not religious but rather national - the signatories of the Declaration of Independence included even absolute atheists. This term says a Jewish people exists, Judaism is not only a religion but also a people and the Jewish people has the full right to establish its nation state in its historic homeland.

Contrary to the opinions prevailing among circles of the extreme left and radical liberalism, the nation-state is not vanishing from the earth; the opposite is the case. I have never been able to understand why there are people who are prepared to fight for the "Palestinian people's" right to self-definition, whereas the Jewish people's desire for self-definition appears racist to them.

None of this, however, detracts from the stupidity in the government's decision. This is an unnecessary, damaging and above all dangerous amendment, and that is because there is no need or point for the State of Israel - which is facing many fronts and many enemies - to open up yet another front, this time against 20 percent of its citizens. The government has entered onto a slippery slope with its decision, and there is no knowing where it will end.

Clearly the aim of those behind the amendment to the law is not the amendment itself; it is just a harbinger of things to come. The amendment in fact has no practical significance. It is not relevant to the 1.5 million Arab citizens of Israel or their descendants, or to Jews; it will have application, perhaps, in 10 cases every year.

The real intention is to change the Basic Law on the Knesset, so that to the oath of office sworn by every Knesset member upon his or her entry to the position - "to be loyal to the State of Israel" - will be added the following words: "as a Jewish and democratic state." This, in order to prevent Arab Knesset members, most or all of whom will refuse to swear such an oath, from serving in the legislature.

There will no doubt be a few Jews who will be happy to see a Knesset without Arab representatives. It is perhaps be possible to understand them, since the Arab MKs have honestly earned the sense of disgust large parts of the Jewish population feel toward them. However, for the State of Israel, this would be a grave development, and for that reason, the decision is disastrous. After all, MK Hanin Zuabi of the Balad party does not represent the Arab public in Israel.

A healthy, life-seeking society does not intentionally create conflict with 20 percent of its members; it acts to integrate them into the society and to increase their identification with the state, and not to isolate them and create among them feelings of alienation and hatred.

Israel's image as a democratic country is of vital importance to it. An amendment to the Basic Law on the Knesset that keeps the Arabs out will be very harmful to this image and will do unimaginable damage to the state. It is to be hoped the prime minister will come to his senses before it is too late.

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