

Israeli Sociological Society (registration no. 580016954)

Statement by the Board of the Israeli Sociological Society

January 18, 2023

The Israeli Sociological Society (ISS) expresses deep concern about the atmosphere of intolerance, enmity, racism and violent coercion that have been worsening in recent years, reaching new peaks in recent weeks. The ISS is committed to the principles of peace and equality between all human beings, to freedom of expression and academic freedom, and to the protection of all its members against intolerance, oppression and silencing. Sociology as a discipline is committed to the society in which it operates. It aims to contribute the systematic knowledge that researchers painstakingly collect and to strengthen the public dialogue based on this accumulated knowledge, as an alternative to silencing, exclusion, obstruction and violence. Such a dialogue is essential for the development of democratic principles and for an informed critique of inequality, deprivation, discrimination, and oppression. The current atmosphere is dangerous not only for society as a whole but also for academic life, academic freedom, freedom of research and freedom of expression, which are the lifeblood of science in general, and of the social sciences and the humanities in particular. Under conditions of threat, dependence, and authoritarianism, scientific inquiry cannot thrive.

The social commitment of sociology does not allow us to ignore what is happening around us. The atmosphere of intolerance towards sociological and social research in general has already received disturbing and ugly expressions, including attempts at silencing. Feminist researchers from the social sciences have been blacklisted by Avi Maoz, deputy minister in the Ministry of Education, who is creating a hostile atmosphere causing concern for gender studies, an important and developing field of sociology. Of grave concern, too, is the IDF's attempts to silence criticism against it, which we unequivocally condemn. In particular, we highlight an article by Lieutenant Colonel Eran Ortal, in an opinion piece in Haaretz newspaper published on December 18, 2022. In the article, Lt. Col. Ortal personally attacked our colleague, Professor Yagil Levy, and attempted to delegitimize and even deny the very right to investigate the military. The study of society-military relations is one of the central areas of political sociology and the study of democracy. Professor Levy, former president of the European Association for Military-Society Research, is Israel's most senior researcher in this field and internationally renowned. The ISS is steadfast in its criticism of this attack on democratic freedoms and has already warned against the conduct of the security system and the harm to Palestinian civil society by the government's outlawing of six Palestinian human and civil rights organizations and classifying them as terror organizations. The article against Professor Levy is not an attempt to open a dialogue and shows that the army seeks ways to establish its authority in dangerous ways even within Israeli society. We call on the army's leadership, as well as the leadership of

Israeli Sociological Society

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, P.O.B. 653 Beer-Sheva 8499000 Israel
ISS Secretary: Eliav Gutman, secretary@israel-sociology.com

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other political and social institutions, to listen to independent sociological research, and to enter a dialogue with researchers for the benefit of joint critical thinking. Such a dialogue will contribute to curbing the general atmosphere of bickering and recrimination.

The atmosphere of intolerance, incitement and racism also permeates the campuses, endangers the existing social fabric between students from different social and political backgrounds, and threatens the freedom of research. For several years now, the "Im Tirtzu" (If You Will) organization has been operating on campuses, striving to limit the activities of Arab students. University administrations have not successfully dealt with the violent threats of this organization thus far, and have sometimes given in to them (see the ISS statement of 7.11.22). Now, the Noam party is trying to enter campus life to incite and delegitimize the LGBTQ community and feminist action in the field of gender violence and partner violence. We call on the administrations of all academic institutions to stand up to the pressures of any group that seeks to deny the legitimacy of another group of students, and to preserve the democratic values of equality, freedom of expression and organization, peace, and tolerance of difference. Without a firm stand on these values, campus life could deteriorate following the violent escalation outside the university walls. The ISS will encourage and support the activities of its members on the various campuses in strengthening communities that are threatened these very days, standing by the side of the victims of the homophobic, misogynistic and racist campaigns. The ISS will also distribute information to clarify the problematic nature of the claims made by fanatical organizations and explain the serious consequences of the incitement and harassment on community life on campuses, where there is a delicate balance between all sectors of Israeli society.

We once again declare the commitment of the Israeli Sociological Society and its members to contribute to society through our research. We are also committed by sharing with the public our professional knowledge on society's predicaments and by offering new ways of thinking to examine options for overcoming the current crisis. To this end, we stand for the protection of principles of freedom of expression and freedom of academic research and categorically reject any attempt to harm them.