

## Israeli Youth: 'We Believe There Is Another Way'

*The following letter from Shministim, the high schoolers' refusal organization (www.shministim.org), was delivered in March 2005 to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Minister of Defense Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, Chief of the General Staff Lt. Gen. Moshe Ya'alon, and Minister of Education Limor Livnat. Despite the fact that it has been signed by more than 300 youth who plan to refuse to serve in the armed forces when they finish high school and turn 18 years old, they have received no response from the government.*

We the undersigned, Israeli girls and boys, believing in the values of democracy, humanism, and pluralism, hereby declare that we shall refuse to take part in the occupation and repression policy adopted by the Government of Israel. Our backgrounds are diverse, but we are all agreed that these values are the bases of a just society. Every human being has the right to life, equality, dignity, and freedom. We are bound by our consciences and as citizens of Israel to act in defence of these rights, by refusing to participate in the occupation and repression policy.

The occupation leads to inhumanity and to a massive infringement of the right to life. It tramples on the basic rights of millions of people and inflicts daily carnage and suffering. It leads to the confiscation of lands, to mass destruction of homes and public buildings, to arrests and killings without trial, to victimization and murder of innocents, to hunger, to a denial of medical assistance, to collective punishment, and to the building and expansion of settlements and the negation of any chance of normal living both in the occupied territories and in Israel itself. This flagrant violation of human rights is opposed to our view

of the world, as well as being in contravention of international conventions signed and ratified by Israel.

The occupation contributes nothing to the security of the state and its citizens, but, on the contrary, it only aggravates it. It deepens the despair and fans the hatred among the Palestinians, feeds terrorism, and widens the river of blood between the two sides. True security will only be accomplished by ending the occupation, dismantling the wall of Apartheid around the Palestinians, and striving for a just peace agreement between the state of Israel and the leadership of the Palestinian people as well as the Arab world. The present policy is not a result of a military necessity, but the outcome of a nationalistic-Messianic fantasy.

The occupation has corrupted Israel, turning it into a militaristic, racist, chauvinistic, and violent society. Israel is wasting its resources on the perpetuation of the occupation and repression in the territories, while hundreds of thousands of Israelis live in shameful poverty. In recent years, Israeli citizens have experienced a deterioration of all public services. Education, medicine, welfare, pensions, everything to do with the well-being of the citizenry has been neglected and sacrificed for the continued existence of settlements which the majority of the population wishes to be evacuated. We cannot stand idly facing this situation, which amounts to a "targetted liquidation" of the principle of equality.

We wish to live in a society which pursues justice, upholding equal rights to every single citizen. The occupation and repression policy is an obstacle to the realization of this vision; therefore, we shall refuse to take part in it. We wish to contribute to society in an alternative way, which does not involve harming other human beings.

We call on all young people facing mobilization and on all members of the Israeli army to weigh again whether to risk their lives in the service of this repressive and destructive policy.

We believe that there is another way.

**Azouley:** I refused when I was 16 and a half. I sent a letter to the Army, which was basically similar to the Shministim letter, but more personal. And then, I had a hearing before an Army committee. It was eight months ago, maybe more. I was investigated by three men from the Army, and it was very short—there were two witnesses, my mother and her partner. And then, after a few months, I got a letter saying that they rejected my demand to be released for conscience reasons. And I appealed to have another hearing, and I said that they didn't give me the chance to express myself enough, because they asked questions that are not really connected, and they were trying to fail me. I'm still waiting for this second com-

mittee hearing.

I got a letter a few weeks ago, which said that they had rejected my request for an appeal, so I sent another letter. And now I'm waiting for either an answer or a second hearing.

The date I'm supposed to enroll in the Army is very close—at the end of July or the beginning of August. If they don't give me an answer, I'm supposed to go to [the IDF induction center at] Bakum, where you start your service. And then, I'm supposed to come there, and to tell them that I'm not going to the Army, and they will arrest me and hold me for a few days until I have a trial, or something. That's how it goes.