

“Planners for Palestine” - Inside Bimkom's anti-Israel planning initiatives

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In May of 1999 a number of architects and intellectuals gathered together to form Bimkom, an organization that billed itself as "Planners for Planning Rights", ostensibly with the goal of aiding “underrepresented” communities in Israel by supporting their “planning rights.” By this they mean first and foremost Israeli Arabs.

This was all at the height of the Oslo peace process-dream when Israeli intellectuals and public figures were predicting an endless peace with a workable framework whereby Israeli and Palestinian states would coexist in perfect harmony side by side. Bimkom's objective was to provide free advice, planning and lobbying on behalf of those who were supposedly being ignored by the Israeli state, its planners and its architects. It bills itself as having the “vision of strengthening the connection between the planning system in Israel and human rights. Through its paid and volunteer staff of professionals in the areas of planning, society, and law, Bimkom works to promote equal rights and social justice in planning, development, and allocation of land resources. Bimkom also assists communities disadvantaged by economic, social or civil circumstances to exercise their planning rights.”¹

The Leadership and cultural milieu of Bimkom

The academic field of planning is an unlikely place to find extremist opinions and hard-core fundamentalist political views. However in Israel over the last thirty years it has been one of a number of departments that have become increasingly politicized. Marxist “planners,” calling themselves “critical planners,” can be found at several institutions, including the Technion. Given the socialist roots of the dominant Labour ethos in Israeli society that was paramount in the years 1948 to 1977 it is perhaps no surprise that the academic pursuit of planning became an important one in a country in which 93% of the land was held in one way or another by the government.²

Among the most radical luminaries in the field of planning have been Professor Hubert Law-Yone of the Architecture department of the Technion in Haifa and Professor Oren Yiftachel of the department of Geography at Ben-Gurion University. Dr. Law-Yone was born in Burma in the 1930s came to Israel in 1961. Although Israel has given him refuge from the military government of Myanmar, where he is unwelcome because of his leftist thoughts and because of his father's rightist thoughts, he has not found that Israel has lived up to his standards.³ “The scornful attitude annoyed me. The same stupid people I'd see everywhere in the world, I saw here too... This was not the cosmopolitan people I had heard about, but rather a Third World country.”⁴ Law-Yone became increasingly involved in left-wing

¹ 'Under the Guise of Security', December 2005, page 2, Bimkom publication.

² Either through the Jewish National Fund (JNF) or the Israel Lands Administration (ILA).

³ 'The Scornful Attitude annoyed me' by Esther Zandberg, *Haaretz*, June 28th, 2005.

⁴ Ibid.

activism, serving on the Committee for Solidarity with Bir Zeit University, the Yesh Gvul movement, B'Tselem-The Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, the Adva Center. When he was not heaping hate upon his own University " My teachers were beneath criticism. They simply did not know anything...[it was] a petrified and obsolete place. For decades now they have been paging through the same materials" he was challenging the field of planning" They create an imperialism of knowledge that has no connection to the culture and the place. This enables them to be cut off from people - from the Palestinians, from the Mizrahim (Jews with origins in the Muslim countries), from all the 'others.' They are connected only to the power centers."⁵ He was a great signer of petitions. He signed one to "express our appreciation and support for those of our students and lecturers who refuse to serve as soldiers in the occupied territories."⁶ Another in April of 2003 was posted on the Jerusalem.org Palestinian website and entitled "an urgent appeal to...Save Palestine.' It accused Israel of having an " addiction to territorial expansion.... backward-looking ultra-nationalistic ideologies are taking firm hold on the social and political scene... The ongoing devastation of Palestine must be stopped."⁷ On June 14th, 2007 he joined some 80 of his friends and colleagues in supporting the proposal by British academics to boycott Israeli universities.⁸

Law-Yone's colleague Oren Yiftachel has been even more extremist in his opposition to the policies of his own country. In 1991 and 1992 he co-authored two books on planning and minority rights with Law-Yone. *Public and Minority Response: Israel's Planning Policies in the Galilee and the Attitudes of Local Arab Leaders* and *Goal Ambiguity and Adhocism: The New Settlement Program in the Galilee* both emphasized the Arab attachment to the land of the Galilee and cast scorn on Jewish life in the same area, casting the Jews as 'settlers' dispossessing the indigenous people. Yiftachel was also a signer of the petition giving support to students who chose to break the law by refusing to serve in the army so long as they might serve in the 'occupied territories'. In one of Yiftachel's articles posted on his university homepage he writes of "the illusion that they [Israeli or Zionists] have a 'Jewish democracy,' despite the apartheid reality that is created by Jewish rule before their very eyes."⁹ In an article he published in *Haaretz* in 2002 he forecasted the coming expulsion of the Palestinians from the West Bank; " A 'small' transfer now is likely to sanction more extensive expulsions in the future,"¹⁰ Yiftachel's lectures focus on such topics as 'Ethnocracy: Judaizing Israel', 'The Dark Side of planning', 'homeland nationalism' and 'Palestinian Arabs: deprivation and resistance'.¹¹

When Bimkom was founded its leaders such as Tovi Fenster and Haim Jacobi drew their inspiration from the roads already paved by Law-Yone and Yiftachel.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ http://seruv.org.il/english/academic_supporters.asp

⁷ <http://www.jerusalem.org/appeal/7.htm>

⁸ <http://www.labournet.net/world/0706/israelet1.html>

⁹ 'Jewish truce or colonialism', July 31st, 2005, by Oren Yiftachel.

<http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/shorts.html>

¹⁰ 'The Lurking Shadow of Expulsion' by Oren Yiftachel and Neve Gordon, *Haaretz*, February 26th, 2002. The story involves the 'expulsion' of some 750 'cave dwellers' who live in the South Hebron Hills. The cave dwellers were not exactly expelled from the West Bank but apparently removed from squatting on State Land, a normal practice throughout the world.

¹¹ <http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/lectures.html>

Their terminology and outlook was part of this cultural milieu of a certain segment of the university environment and the planning faculties they found themselves in. The leaders of the NGO hail from the most prestigious Universities in the country. Prof. Tovi Fenster, one of the founders, is a senior lecturer at the Department of Geography at Tel Aviv University. Dr. Erez Tzfidia is a lecturer in planning at Sapir College and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Dr. Haim Jacobi is in the Dept. of Architecture at Bezalel. The relationship of Israeli academia to Bimkom is not a coincidence. In fact many of the members of Bimkom have their degrees from these institutions and have been groomed for membership by the professors who hold positions within the organization. Bimkom's leadership is also connected to a veritable who's who of Israeli leftist NGOs including the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the JDC, SPNI, Bat Shalom, Center for the Rights of the Unemployed, B'Tselem and the Minerva Center for Human Rights at the Faculty of Law at Tel Aviv University.

Bimkom's mission of "equality"

According to its website it does the following:

"Produces reports and position papers on planning rights..Provides professional consultancy services to communities on how to exercise equal rights and equal opportunities in planning processes; Submits professional opinions in legal proceedings with regard to discriminatory planning policies and practices and provides assistance in submitting planning objections; Initiates and promotes legislation on matters concerning human rights and planning; Organizes workshops for residents of neighborhoods, villages, and cities who are having to deal with planning processes. The workshops familiarize participants with planning jargon, teach them how planning impacts on their daily lives, and demonstrate what their rights are; Runs training programs and seminars on planning rights for professionals; Disseminates information to professionals, decision-makers, and the general public and raises awareness of planning rights as basic human rights; Promotes public activities with the goal of impacting on decision-making processes; and Participates in coalitions of social, environmental, and human rights' organizations, with the aim of promoting transparency, equality, and social justice in planning."

Furthermore;

"Bimkom's point of departure is that spatial planning impacts on the community, society, and basic human rights...It is precisely for this reason that it is important to stress to residents and citizens of Israel that they do have rights when it comes to planning processes and they are liable to suffer when spatial planning does not take their needs and aspirations into account...Bimkom strives to achieve **the right to equality and social justice** in matters of planning, development, and the allocation of land resources, and assists communities and minorities affected by social and economic disadvantage and by civil

rights' discriminations to exercise their rights in this area...Flawed planning and the unequal distribution of resources are liable to impact negatively on the most basic values: human dignity, equal opportunity and access to public resources, and the right to a home, an adequate standard of living, and satisfactory infrastructure.[highlights in the original]"

Note the absence of self-defense against terrorism among the "rights" that interest Bimkom. Bimkom claims to struggle so "that the public should be included in planning processes...[for] the right to information..Transparency in the planning process, dissemination of information to the public, and public participation in the planning process" which it describes as "basic rights that need to be strengthened and implemented."

Supposedly Bimkom is open to all:

"Bimkom works in partnership with communities and minorities affected by social and economic disadvantage and by civil rights' discriminations to further their struggle to achieve equality in planning. Organizations and communities experiencing difficulties with planning issues can refer directly to Bimkom for help. Bimkom works with these groups to determine the type of intervention required and provides professional planning expertise in support of the community's activities."¹²

According to an article in the *Wagner Planner*, the newsletter of the NYU Urban Planning Student Association in May of 2006, Becca Nagorsky described what Bimkom does.

"[It] looks at social justice issues in Israel through the lens of urban planning and strives to ameliorate inequalities through incisive planning...*Bimkom* strives to enhance equity in decisions regarding resource allocation and development, ensure transparency in the planning process, and promote public participation. Neighborhoods and villages turn to *Bimkom* for planning support against unjust municipal policies and to provide viable alternatives...*Bimkom* began its work in Isawiyya [sic] in 2004 by meeting with community and business leaders to get a sense of the community's needs and the way they felt about their neighborhood." Becca claims that Bimkom "introduced the idea of community-based planning to Israelis and Palestinians."¹³

¹² <http://www.bimkom.org/aboutEng.asp>

¹³ <http://wagner.nyu.edu/urbanplanning/news/upnewsletter0605.pdf>. In reality it introduced this concept only to Palestinians on a pro-bono basis. There was no similar activity to plan new public areas for Mae-Sharim in Jerusalem or Florentine in Tel Aviv.

When Bimkom offers people jobs it does not say exactly what it does but notes “If you have a commitment to human rights, fluent Hebrew and an expertise in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Bimkom has a job for you.”¹⁴

Bimkom's record of discrimination

But like so many organizations such as the Abraham Fund, that bill themselves as being devoted to 'peace', 'coexistence' and 'human rights' and 'civil rights' the activities of Bimkom over the years have been on the behalf of one community.

Gender

Bimkom's conference 'Where Planning meets Gender' which included four meetings between the 19th of October and February 1st 2005 was not so much about women as it was about Palestinian women and their opposition to the security fence. It included lectures and discussions on the Berlin Wall, Machsom Watch, 'The Separation Wall from Palestinian women perspective', 'Palestinian women in Israeli Space', 'the Separation wall: examples from Bimkom's activities' and screening the film *Behind the Veil*. One would not know from Bimkom activities that the security wall exists because of Palestinian terrorist atrocities. There was one topic on Haredi women but in this lecture by Prof. Yossef Shelhav the word Haredi was put in quotes as in 'Haredi' and it was one of the few lectures given by a man and had the subtitle “between two worlds” implying that unlike the Palestinian woman, the Haredi woman's existence is not genuine.

Lifta

When it came to the ruined village of Lifta on the outskirts of Jerusalem Bimkom was there to make sure Palestinian history was preserved. An article by Esther Zandberg:

“Yet this is physical preservation - merely architectural and aesthetic - that caters to aficionados of Oriental exotica. ‘The plan does not offer a proper solution to the inclusion of memory elements of Palestinian history, which have in effect been almost totally expunged,’ notes urban planner Nili Baruch of Bimkom... ‘The planning must relate to the attributes of the community that lived on the site for hundreds of years,’ states the association's objection, which asks that the plan be reassessed. Bimkom also requests that a detailed historical survey of Lifta take place, including the taking of testimony from former residents...Bimkom, in differing emphases, view the preservation of the mosque and the cemetery, and the preservation of Palestinian memory at Lifta in general, as a focus for reconciliation between the peoples instead of a focus of latent conflict still humming under the surface...Bimkom notes that ‘the right to memory’ is conceived by the

¹⁴ <http://www.jgenisrael.org/s534.html?rsID=214> as retrieved on 12 Mar 2008 08:48:30 GMT.

governmental, planning and cultural establishments in Israel as the exclusive right of the Jewish nation.”

Bimkom and Zochrot worked together to thwart any government plans for Lifta.¹⁵

The Galilee

"On 21 July 2005, Adalah¹⁶ and Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights submitted a request to the Ministry of the Interior's Northern District Supervisor, Mr. Herzl Gedj, to include the western Al-Mal neighborhood of Wadi Salameh village within the master plan for the village. The request was submitted by Adalah Attorney Suhad Bishara, Adalah Urban and Regional Planner Hanna Hamdan, and Bimkom Urban and Regional Planner Nili Baruch."¹⁷ "Wadi Salameh, which is located in the Galilee in the north of Israel and falls under the jurisdiction of the Misgav Regional Council, has a population of approximately 3,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel, living in 11 neighborhoods...In the request, Adalah and Bimkom argued that the exclusion of Al-Mal from the master plan of Wadi Salameh prevents the neighborhood from developing effectively, and denies its inhabitants the ability to connect their homes to infrastructural services such as water or electricity. Adalah and Bimkom further argued in the request that the current planning situation severely harms the neighborhood's residents' constitutional right to property, as well as their rights to a home, adequate living conditions, and development."

The Security Fence

In December of 2005 Bimkom, in cooperation with B'Tselem, issued a report entitled 'under the guise of security: routing the separation barrier to enable the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West bank'. Typically, it denounced the impact of Israel's security fence on Palestinians without ever taking into consideration the reason for the fence in the first place, nor the thousands of murders committed by Palestinian terrorists that made the fence necessary.

The report was complete with high-quality aerial mapping of the sites in question and was authored by Yehezkel Lein and Alon Cohen-Lifshitz. One of those interviewed

¹⁵ By Esther Zandberg, 'Unofficial monument to a decisive time in history', Posted on November 25, 2004 <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Jerusalem/Lifta/Story1330.html> as retrieved on 16 Mar 2008 21:49:39 GMT.

¹⁶ On Land Day, May 29th, 2008, Adalah issued a statement regarding Israel that said ""This colonial regime has now been in existence for over 60 years, on the basis of a Zionist ideology to control the 'Land of Israel.' ...The Apartheid regime was overthrown in South Africa, despite all its strength and unyieldingness, as such regimes have no place in this century." Such is the company Bimkom keeps. See *The Jerusalem Post*, 'Thousands of Israeli-Arabs gather to mark Land Day' by Yaacov Lappin, March 30th, 2008.

¹⁷ <http://www.adalah.org/newsletter/eng/jul05/4.php> as retrieved on 26 Feb 2008 08:11:37 GMT.

was a Palestinian named Suliman Yassin who said he was being harmed by the barrier because his thirty dunams of land that he intended to use to build houses for his children: “When I bought the land, I built a five-room house and a bathroom because I have twelve children, the oldest being forty-three years old and the youngest twenty-two.” According to him the fence has harmed his quality of living: “Not only has the fence damaged our livelihood, it also destroyed our privacy.”

In all its time of existence Bimkom has never once lobbied on behalf of an ultra-orthodox family that has 12 children so that they might live a comfortable quiet existence on 30 dunams of land. There are not more than a handful of Israeli Jews in all of Israel that own as much as 30 dunams, yet in this case the non-profit organization devoted to helping ‘disadvantaged communities’ in fact helps the elite bourgeoisie members of society, so long as they are called ‘Palestinian’ to prevent the poorest members from having the simplest livelihood.

On November 28th, 2006 Bimkom complained about the route of the barrier around five Palestinian villages north of Jerusalem including Qalandiyeh, Bir Nabala and Beit Hanina. According to Bimkom;

“Even assuming that these two roads are built, construction of the barrier around the Bir Nabala enclave will severely impair the human rights of its residents... Residents of the five villages in the Bir Nabala enclave rely on the hospitals in East Jerusalem for medical care and treatment.”¹⁸

This article appeared on a website that describes itself as supporting the “liberation of Palestine.”

Bimkom's opposition to the ‘separation barrier’ derives from its claim that “settlement expansion was the principal consideration in setting the route in many sections of the separation barrier.”¹⁹ An article in the anti-Israel extremist web site Kibush.co.il, the website of *Occupation Magazine*, proudly noted that “B’Tselem and Bimkom [are] fighting settlers at the stock market.” On the 30th of August, according to the report;²⁰ “Naot Hapisga Modi`in Ltd. postpones attempt to raise capital following B’Tselem`s and Bimkom`s letter to the Securities Authority.” Among other things Bimkom claimed that the development company's prospectus was inaccurate and that “the land on which the 138 units are planned belongs to Bil`in village. It has not been declared state land and has not been registered on the name of Israeli purchasers.” In short, a plan to build 138 houses for low income Jews was torpedoed so that wealthy Palestinian landowners would not have to live next to them. “B’Tselem and Bimkom again wrote to the Securities Authority, warning it that the company is blurring facts which indicate that expanding the settlement entails infringing Palestinians` human rights.”²¹

¹⁸ <http://noticeable.wordpress.com/2006/11/28/high-court-approves-bir-nabalah-enclave/#more-34>

¹⁹ <http://www.almubadara.org/new/edetails.php?id=774> as retrieved on 12 Mar 2008 22:27:03 GMT.

²⁰ http://www.kibush.co.il/show_file.asp?num=16125 as retrieved on 8 Jan 2008 11:51:25 GMT.

²¹ http://www.kibush.co.il/show_file.asp?num=16125 as retrieved on 8 Jan 2008 11:51:25 GMT.

“Arab” Jaffa

At a recent conference a commentator began by describing the goal of Bimkom: “a non-profit organization of Planners for Planning Rights with the goal of strengthening the connection between human rights and spatial planning in Israel,” and then went on to describe a conference²² it had hosted in Jaffa alongside the Arab Center for Alternative Planning at;

“Al Rabita and dedicated to the fight for affordable housing and against the demolitions and ethnic transfer of the Palestinians from Ajami and Jabaliya neighborhoods...Architect Busayna Dabit from Ramle put the discourse in its historical, political, cultural and spatial context, of house demolitions of former Palestinian property in Ramle, Lod and now in Jaffa...There is no doubt the municipality wants to turn Jaffa's Ajami and Jabaliyah into a Jewish neighborhoods...thereby wiping out Jaffa's proud cultural past and much of its current identity as a Palestinian city.”²³

The Negev Bedouin

At the Yahoo Group 'Action for Palestine' we learn that “Adalah and Bimkom demand recognition and a master plan for Unrecognized villages” This appeared in the Adalah (The legal center for Arab minority rights in Israel) newsletter in of November 2007.²⁴ The Bimkom petitioner was urban planner Cesar Yeudkin who;

“argues, inter alia, that the master plan for metropolitan Beer el-Sabe²⁵ does not include suitable housing solutions for the Arab Bedouin of the Naqab in general, and for the residents of Atir-Umm al-Hieran, in particular. Further, the plan violates the basic rights of the residents, constituting another layer of the state’s discriminatory resource allocation policy as regards the housing and settlement needs of the Arab Bedouin in the Naqab... According to the master plan, a new community designated exclusively for Jewish citizens will be constructed on most of the land on which Atir-Umm al-Hieran is currently located (in the Nahal Yatir area). The new community, named Hiran, is being planned for 7,000-10,000 inhabitants.... While planning to establish these three new Jewish communities (Carmit and Yatir), the state is seeking to evacuate all of the residents of Atir-Umm al-Hieran and to relocate them in the nearby government-planned Arab Bedouin town of Hura... Approximately 1,000 people live in Atir-Umm al-Hieran, all of whom belong to the Abu al-Qiqaan tribe. Until

²² <http://www.bimkom.org/eventView.asp?eventId=41>

²³ Yudit, Jaffa, yuditilany.blogspot.com/2007/05/bimkom-conference-in-jaffa.html

²⁴ *Adalah's newsletter*, Volume 42, November 2007.

²⁵ The Arab name for Beersheba used by Jews who do not recognize it as having any connection to a historical Jewish state, but recognize only its Arab history, which is ironic considering the fact that it was re-founded by the Ottoman Turkish regime in 1900 after being deserted. No archeologist seriously challenges the fact that modern Beersheba is located on the same spot as Biblical Beersheba.

1948, members of the Abu al-Qiān tribe lived in the Wadi Zuballa region, where they had resided and farmed for many decades... In the objection, Adalah and Bimkom argue that Plan 23/14/4 fails to address one of its main objectives to resolve the issue of Arab Bedouin settlement in the unrecognized villages located within its purview.”²⁶

Isawiya

At Isawiya;

“according to Efrat Cohen-Bar, an architect who coordinates activities in east Jerusalem for the human rights organization Bimkom, the [Bimkom] plan provides for the expansion of the neighborhood from 12,000 to 18,000 residents²⁷ ...According to Cohen-Bar, Bimkom decided to prepare the outline plan after looking for a way to honor Sarah Kaminker, a town planner who served as a municipal councilwoman and was one of the founders of Bimkom...Bimkom had thought of building a community center in Isawiya, where Kaminker was especially active, in her honor, but discovered that according to the existing outline plan it could not erect a large building there...the planning committee had ordered Bimkom to give back all the land that the Nature and Parks Authority had conceded to it, she said....[Aryeh King of Moledet] said the Bimkom planners had relied on the heads of Isawiya's *hamulot* (extended families) to determine who owned what land. None of the Jews, whom, King said, own at least 90 out of the plan's 1,800 dunams, had been consulted, nor had many Arab landowners.”

Funding

According to their website: “Bimkom's activities are made possible thanks to the following: The Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the New Israel Fund, the Arthur Goldreich Fund, the Green Environment Fund, the Porter Foundation, the Naomi & Nehemia Cohen Foundation, and to individual donors.” But further research reveals a deep and dark secret: Bimkom's funding comes from foreign countries who hope to influence Israeli policy.

In December of 2006 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark announced that it had; “allocated 1,132,000 DKK to a new project by the Israeli NGO Bimkom–Planners for Planning Rights in December 2006. Under the project a planning survey for a Palestinian neighborhood in East Jerusalem will be conducted. The survey will

²⁶ groups.yahoo.com/group/Action4Palestine/message/1933.

²⁷ Dec 24, 2007 22:40, Updated Dec 25, 2007, ‘Jerusalem Arab housing expansion plan hits snag’ by Dan Izenberg.

be used as a model for other Palestinian neighborhoods.”²⁸ This, despite the fact that Bimkom claims on its webpage that “in order to preserve its independence, Bimkom does not receive funding from the government or political parties; its only income is from donations.”

The *Jerusalem Post* described the foreign funding of lobby groups in Israel this way:

“Nevertheless, the recent discovery that the British Embassy in Tel Aviv is funding an Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO) known as ‘Bimkom- Planners for Planning Rights’ - is not surprising. The ostensible focus of the ‘research’ is on the impact of the security barrier on Palestinian villages caught in the middle, and since Bimkom is a political organization, the outcome is a forgone conclusion. In this way, the British government will receive an analysis from an Israeli group that supports London's position against the route of the barrier. The same information could have been obtained through official government channels, (i.e., intelligence) but without the important political dimension.”²⁹

That is not all the money it received from governments. In a debate in the House of Commons between MPs Dismore and McCartney in the U.K it was revealed that;

“In 2005, we [the UK government and the EU] agreed to fund Bimkom’s study into the effects of the barrier in the West Bank. In 2007, we agreed to grant Bimkom £80,300 in order to provide comprehensive information concerning the planning situation of Palestinian villages and land in area C which would then be used as a basis to prevent house demolitions and press for the development of appropriate plans for these villages with the aim of significantly improving the situation” In addition the debate reveals that “According to the European Parliament’s project listings, the European Commission is providing €295,799 for a two year project which started in 2006.” (It also reveals that “The European Commission has provided the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions with 472,786 Euros for a two year project which started in 2005. The project aims to act as a means of raising political consciousness in Israel about the peace process by bringing Israelis into direct contact with Palestinians and the Occupation through house rebuilding and other political activities.”)³⁰

²⁸ 'Danish Assistance to Regional Project Activities in the Middle East' <http://www.ambtelaviv.um.dk/nr/exeres/f4c3c7a7-6b5e-4c97-8b98-8b73f6e8a58b.htm> as retrieved on 12 Mar 2008 18:24:06 GMT.

²⁹ The Danish government provided Bimkom with \$200,000 for a project on "Palestinian neighborhoods." 'Manipulating Civil Society' by Gerald Steinberg, February 20th, 2007.

³⁰ 23 Apr 2007 : Column 914W—continued
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070423/text/70423w0011.htm> as retrieved on 26 Feb 2008 22:42:11 GMT.

At the website of the New Israel Fund which funds Bimkom the organization's reason for existence is described as owing to the fact that the;

“Land in Israel is a scarce and valuable resource and the way land zoning is planned has become an important instrument in dividing resources among various populations. Zoning is a complex process from which large sectors of the population are excluded. Bimkom is run by a group of planners and architects who are seeking to promote alternative planning models that reflect the true needs of different populations.”

Its strategy is said to be include;

“Professional assistance to disempowered communities; disseminating information on planning rights; initiating and promoting policy on issues related to planning rights as basic civil rights.”

The activities listed are more enlightening:

“Activities focusing on the separation fence: litigation regarding its route, position papers on the harm caused by the fence to local residents, etc. Helping the Bedouin in the Abu Basma Regional Council with outlines drafted for their localities, participating in a campaign for the unrecognized Bedouin villages and supplying a position paper to be submitted to the Supreme Court on the issue. Assisting Jewish disadvantaged communities in planning issues. Working with Arab localities in Northern and Central Israel where there are no approved building plans for various localities. Working with residents in East Jerusalem neighborhoods against demolition of houses. Workshops for professional planners, lectures and publications.”³¹

Planning for Palestine

On Bimkom's webpage it claims that “Bimkom takes position on the professional, ethical and social dimensions of projects and planning processes initiated by the planning authorities. It advocates these positions to decision-makers, and raises the issue on the public agenda through the media, in cooperation with organizations in Israel and abroad.” The truth is much darker.

The fact is that despite its claim to help all the disadvantaged groups of Israel, who include poor Sephardim and Haredim, Bimkom is devoted only to one group; Palestinians and Arab-Israelis, rich or poor. In fact in a strange ironic twist Bimkom frequently gives free aid to wealthy Palestinians, even planning homes for them in Isawiya, while fighting to keep ultra-Orthodox 'settlements' crowded and small. In fact Bimkom serves as a conduit for wealthy leftist-Ashkenazi sympathy to right wing wealthy Palestinians. Those who might benefit the most from planning rights and

³¹ <http://www.nif.org/about/grantees/bimkom.html> as retrieved on 15 Mar 2008 17:00:16 GMT.

who are desperately in need of the kind of free lobbying and architectural assistance of Bimkom, the ultra-Orthodox, are left behind. Bimkom is Hebrew for 'in place of' and one might wonder if the real goal behind the organization is planning for the creation of Palestine in place of Israel. Its track record in this respect is indisputable: there is no evidence it has ever provided 'equal' assistance to all the minority communities in Israel. Social justice is sadly lacking from a list of Bimkom activities. There is no justice for the poorest people in Israel, the residents of development towns such as Sderot or Kiryat Malaki. Despite the fact that those residents were forced to flee Arab countries with little more than the clothes on their backs after 1948 and were subsequently dumped in these impoverished communities the likes of Bimkom has never lifted a finger for them.