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"Arab Political Parties in Knesset Elections", a Letter from Ilyas Kusa to William Zuckerman, April 1957

Dated April 1957, this printed letter in English was sent from Ilyas Kusa to William Zuckerman in response to the claim that there are three Arab political parties with members in the Knesset, namely, the Progressive Work Party, the Israel-Arab Democratic List, the Agrarian and Development List. Kusa argues that these parties are not Arab parties but rather were founded by the Mapai party to further advance its interests. The letter includes a list of candidates from each party with information that brings their credibility into question.

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18th April, 1957.

Mr. William Zuckerman,
Post Office Box, 117,
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Dear Mr. Zuckerman,

I have your letter of the 10th instant, together with the issue of the Newsletter for which I thank you. I have sent you under a separate cover a copy of "Al-Rabitah" containing the translation of your article "What next?", and hope you will receive it in due course.

As regards the three Arab political parties mentioned in your letter, they are non-existent. The only Arab political party registered and recognised as such in Israel is the Arab Israel Party of which I am the Secretary. Unfortunately, this party is of little influence, its members are few and its activities are limited and ineffective inspite of the fact that it has been working for about three years. Two main factors contribute to this fruitlessness: the military rule and lack of funds. The first prevents the Party from free movement in the military areas where the predominance of the Arab minority live, and, consequently, they are unable to hold public meetings to explain to the Arab villagers the aims of the Party, the need for Arab unity and solidarity within the framework of the State to safeguard their rights, protect their interests and ensure for them equality of treatment and citizenship. Financially, the Party is not in a position to publish a paper, whether daily or weekly, and without such a publication it is not possible to bring home to the Arabs of Israel the Party's aims. Add to these obstacles the belief generally held in Arab midst that the Government considers the Party an undesirable, if not an inimical, organization, and you will realize the overwhelming disadvantages against which the few Arabs who have *fringe* it are struggling.

The official representative of the Israeli Consulate at your end who claimed the existence of the Israel-Arab Democratic Party, the Progressive Work Party and the Agrarian and Development Party as independent Arab political parties was deliberately distorting facts and intentionally concealing the truth. These three grandiose names designate and stand for three separate election lists for the Knesset affiliated to Mapai only. They are not political parties in any sense. The lists contained the names of Arab candidates who were nominated by Mapai and have no independent political aims, nor, indeed, any ideological goal or party membership. They were gathered together by Mapai to serve Mapai interests and to be Mapai satellites. They were elected by Arab votes under the influence, intimidation and promises of the Military Governors and their stooges as well as by a campaign of terror and menace by the Histadruth. A study of the history, character, education and qualifications of each of the candidates mentioned in the three lists would disclose a queer conglomeration of mediocrity and incongruity.

When Miss Thompson was here a few months ago, I explained to her the matter, and her Secretary took notes of these facts: the names of the Arab Knesset members of the three election lists, their educational qualifications and social positions. The following information might meet requirements:-

Yours

1. The Israel- Arab Democratic List.

(a) Mas'ad Qassis, Greek Catholic of M'ilya Village, Western Galilee, graduate of Kaddoorie Agricultural School in Tul-Karm, during the Mandate.

(b) Sheikh Jabr Al Dahesh Al Mu'ady, a Druze of Yarka Village, Western Galilee, with three year elementary schooling.

2. The Progressive Work Party.

(a) Sheikh Saleh Hasan Khneifes, a Druze of Sehfa-Amr, almost illiterate.

(b) Saleh Al-Saleem of Saffouriyeh Village, Nazareth district, the Arab inhabitants of which were driven away and Jewish immigrants installed in their place. The villagers are now scattered in Nazareth and adjacent villages. He is illiterate. He accepted to work for and with Mapai because Mapai spokesmen promised to grant the Saffouriyeh villagers land in substitute for the land which was usurped from them for the benefit and comfort of Jewish immigrants. The promise has not yet been fulfilled, and it is highly doubtful whether it will ever be fulfilled.

3. The Agrarian and Development List.

Fares Hamdan, a Moslem of Baqa-al-Gharbiyeh, in the Little Triangle, a landlord whose land was taken by the Government and now obtains from the Custodian of Absentee Property leases of large agricultural land, subletting the same to Arab farmers against one-third part of the produce. He was educated in the Secondary School in Nablus, but did not complete the school.

To appreciate the respect and importance these Arab members attach to Knesset membership, one has only to consider the resignation of Mr. Seif-ul-Din Al Z'uby, who headed the Israel-Arab Democratic List, and its concomitant circumstances including the consideration, to enable Sheikh Jabr Al-Dahesh Al Mu'ady to be seated in the Knesset.

Yours faithfully,

ENC.

E.N.KOUSSA.

