

How long was the AIC closed, and what changes, if any, were made after it reopened?

The center was ordered closed for six months. We then appealed to the district court, but the center was not allowed to reopen before the end of this six-month period. So for six months we were cut off from our center and our equipment. In addition, despite the court orders to return our equipment and our archives, most of our archives were destroyed, and our equipment was in such bad condition we could not use it. This had a big effect on our technical capacity, making it more difficult to renew our budget, our daily work and our publications. We had a daily information bulletin which we sent to press agencies in Israel and abroad by our facsimile machine which we never got back. On the other hand, the closure gave a lot of publicity to the center. In the beginning people were saying that this was not an information center, but a group of terrorists running a spy agency. However, soon after that not only the Israeli left and the progressive sector of Israeli society, but also some mainstream organizations, including the journalists' union in Jerusalem, writers and Knesset members, questioned the allegations against the center, and expressed support. They did not accept the closure of a center which had been providing accurate and important information.

The effects of the closure on work in the center stem from my release by the Supreme Court after one month in prison. One of the conditions of my release was that I would not be allowed to go back to the center as long as the legal procedure was going on, which somehow affected the center. Also, some of the workers were a little bit afraid after the closure and stopped working for our center. But the old team and the new employees decided to go on, whatever may happen, and not to stop doing what we believe is very important, both on the level of providing information and Israeli-Palestinian cooperation. The last thing, the trial itself, is costing a lot of money and time. We have had to allocate an important part of our resources to the trial, which is at the expense of other priorities. But I hope the trial will be over in the near future, and we'll be able to renew all our old projects and start new ones.

Can you explain the new amendment to the anti-terror ordinance?

The prevention of terrorism act makes any kind of contact, support or relations with any kind of Palestinian institution illegal. Under the old articles of this act, anything which could be understood as supporting or expressing solidarity with «terrorist organizations» is prohibited. This broadens the definition of «terrorist organizations» to include any organization which may have a link to the PLO. Like the interrogator from the Shin Bet said at my trial, «Any institution in the occupied territories - cultural, political, social, charity - is PLO.» This means, for example, anyone, whether Palestinian or Israeli, who has any kind of cultural contact with any one of these groups - like going to Al Hakawati theater - can be accused of supporting a terrorist organization. The second amendment which was adopted in 1985-86 prohibits any contacts with Palestinians who are officials of the PLO, even if these are public talks about

peace. In fact, four of our friends in the peace movement in Israel are now in jail, condemned to six months for having met a PLO representative at a public meeting in Romania.

Now there is a new amendment, the third one to the prevention of terrorism act, which is trying to outlaw and confiscate the money of any organization that is linked to the PLO or any «terrorist organization.» Although in the past getting money from the PLO or any illegal Palestinian organization would have been illegal, what is new in this amendment is that it can be an administrative measure used by the police, and not a matter to be put to trial. This includes not only money coming directly from the PLO but money coming from any institution in the world where you cannot prove the money was not from a «terrorist organization.» Tomorrow if there is a center that gets money from a church group in Italy, for example, they would have to prove that the money of this organization is not coming from the PLO. And if you prove the money of this organization is coming from another one, say, in the US, the center would have to prove that this US organization is not getting money from the PLO. In other words, the burden of proof is on us, not the authorities, making it a very arbitrary measure. This will cut financing to institutions that need money from any kind of charity organization.

How do the authorities justify closing the AIC within the framework of Israeli democracy?

It is as I told you before, by way of connection. As this interrogator told me, this happens when you are working with the Palestinians, supporting their cause. This has been my political line for 20 years. I've never hidden my support for the Palestinian struggle, nor my solidarity. So, there is a stage at which the authorities say: Okay. The law exists, and it is not written into the law that only Palestinian institutions can be closed, but they can also close the AIC. They hadn't done it until now. This was a political decision to say: You are too close to the Palestinians, so we would have to treat you as we are treating the Palestinians.

We are very angry about the closure, but somehow we are proud to be put together with the Palestinians because we are accused of something we are proud to have done. We say it is not illegal. We express our solidarity and support to the Palestinians in struggle within the limits of the law, because we want to keep our action legal. They say it is not legal. Okay. For that, we will go to trial and we'll see whether we win or not. We want to be legal. We want it in our statutes that we will print material for any progressive organization. We'll not ask who they are, except if there will be a clear law which forces us to do so. Then we'll have to decide what to do, because we want to keep our legality. The principle is to help as much as is legally possible.

What repercussions did closing the center have on Israeli public opinion? You mentioned this, but can you elaborate?

Yes. I want to elaborate because this is a big failure for the authorities, in my opinion. One of the aims of this step ►