

Main points of the Meretz Platform for the seventeenth Knesset

Meretz on the left...The individual – at the center

Meretz is the pioneer marching before the camp, providing it with guidance and direction.

Meretz has shown how right were the struggles it conducted: for Palestinian-Israeli peace, for negotiations with the PLO and a two-state solution, for a social policy within which the weak and under-privileged sections of the population can also live in dignity, for separation of religion and state, and for human rights. In many areas of Israel's political life, we are the only ones offering incisive and clear solutions to the issues on the agenda.

The platform which we present expresses the basic belief that the Declaration of Independence will only be realized if Israel becomes a normal state, if the emergency regulations dating back to 1948 are abolished, if we invest more in education than in security, if we understand that the price of peace is much lower than the price of ruling over another people, if we close the frightening social gaps, if we guarantee our citizens freedom of religion and freedom from religion, if we enable each every single citizen to realize her or his aspirations, if we ensure equality between Jews and Arabs. If we meet these and other challenges successfully, we will achieve our goals. We hope we can count on your support.

The political process, security and international relations

The Israeli interest was, and remains, to end the occupation and implement the partition of the country. This must be accomplished in the coming session of the Knesset through an agreement on the basis of the Clinton parameters and the Geneva Accords. The victory of the Hamas in the Palestinian Authority does not change this Israeli interest.

* Creating conditions which will facilitate the resumption of negotiations between the Government of Israel on the one hand, and on the other, the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority and the elected representatives of the Palestinian people. The results of the negotiations will be honored by the two peoples following their confirmation by an internal process which will be decided upon. Speaking to any Palestinian government which will recognize Israel, reject terror and recognize agreements which have been signed by the PLO and Israel.

Should it become clear that it will not be possible to reach an agreement, we should consider other ways to end the occupation, including unilateral steps which will be coordinated directly or indirectly with a third party. An international presence will be part of the bilateral agreement and this can be also requested if related to steps which are not the result of an agreement.

* Changing the security concept and promoting efficiency in the Israeli army in face of the present threats against Israel.

* Reducing compulsory military service to two years, professionalizing the army and granting release from conscription on grounds of religion or conscience.

* Creating a clear separation between the military and the state, the civilianization of the Council for National Security, and ensuring a cooling-off period of three years between army service and standing for any elected political office.

Social and economic affairs

Respecting the equality of human life, the principles of social justice and a just distribution of society's resources require an economic policy which will promote economic growth. At the same time this policy must assure that the fruits of development will be fairly and equally divided, that socio-economic gaps will be narrowed and that the principles of the welfare state be affirmed

* An immediate program for reducing poverty – among other things by raising the minimum wage, linking monetary grants to the average wage, subsidizing pre-school education and investing in infrastructure.

* Providing a social security net to the entire population, including health, education, pension, welfare, and appropriate housing.

* Every pensioner will be entitled to a pension at the rate of the minimum wage'.

* Initiating a compulsory pension for all workers.

* Introducing flexibility in determining retirement age, including the possibility of receiving a portion of the pension in mid-life as sabbatical leave.

* Stop undermining the National Health Law. Instead, implement it in its whole content and spirit.

* Decreasing the disparity in the provision of medical care, preventing the erosion of health service and lowering the price paid for it by the individual.

* Encouraging the long-term construction, with government financing, of rental housing and the reinstatement of the Public Housing Law.

* Assuring an overall system of individual reporting of all sources of income to the income tax authorities.

* Abolishing the employment of workers in the public sector through manpower contractors, which enable the state both to use cheap labor at the expense of the workers and to avoid paying the minimum wage and social benefits.

Education and culture

Education is the central foundation in the creation of a healthy democratic society and a developed and egalitarian economy.

* We will work for the benefit of all, for humane policies, for human solidarity and for

pluralism. We will strive to foster intellectual curiosity and tolerance, to broaden the horizons of knowledge and culture, and to encourage every type of Israeli creativity.

- * Free education from two years old to the end of high school
- * Putting into practice the long school day in education, including hot meals.
- * Educational budgeting per pupil along with corrective measures to close educational gaps.
- * Assuring the core curriculum for education in civics, mathematics, Hebrew, Arabic and English in all budgeted educational institutions in Israel.
- * Raising teachers' salaries and the quality of the educational system through the supervision of teacher training by the Council for Higher Education.
- * Cutting university tuition fees by half.
- * Establishing a National Public Council for supporting artists and artistic endeavor in Israel.
- * Introducing legislation assuring the rights of creative artists, the defense of their spiritual assets and appropriate payment for their work.

Human rights

The universal protection of human rights is a basic element of a just society and includes the defense of civic rights, political rights, social rights and group rights. Meretz will work on:

- * Establishing a Human Rights Commission which will supervise civil rights in Israel and assist in promoting human rights.
- * Collating all basic rights in a Human Rights Charter for Israel.
- * Abolishing the state of emergency.
- * Passing a Basic Law for Human Rights including the right to health, education, housing and a dignified existence.
- * Full legal recognition of the right of lesbians and homosexuals to establish a family, and promoting legislation enabling them to adopt children from Israel or abroad.
- * Free public transportation for senior citizens.

The rights of Arab citizens as a national minority

Israel is the state of the Jewish people and of all its citizens. The Right of Return gives Jews an advantage only in their entrance into Israel; it does not provide preferential treatment over any other citizen of the state. The Arab minority in Israel must be granted collective rights which will enable it to practice and express their unique culture. This demands special investment and affirmative action measures to

correct many years of discrimination against the Arab citizens of Israel. The Arab public will participate in all important decision-making in the state.

- * Revising the state calendar to include Muslim, Druze and Christian holidays.
Extending the use and instruction of the Arabic language.
- * Implementing an overall plan for developing the infrastructure and the rehabilitation of Arab communities.
- * Preferential discrimination in granting public services
- * Assuring appropriate representation of Arabs in the public sector.
- * Representation of Arab Local Councils in regional and national Planning Councils.
- * Acceleration of confirmation for zonal planning in Arab settlements and their extension in order to facilitate housing solutions.
- * Recognition of the unrecognized Arab settlements.
- * An immediate and fair settlement of the problem of land and settlement for the Beduins of the Negev, and the recognition in this agreement of unrecognized settlements.
- * An establish a separate educational stream for the Arab sector within the framework of the state education

Women's rights

Meretz-Yahad is committed to the struggle for the achievement of full equality between women and men. The gender perspective must be included in all the major issues on the national agenda. Cooperation between women and men is essential in defining priorities and establishing operational measures for their implementation, such as affirmative action in appointments and budgetary allocations.

- * Assuring appropriate representation for women in all sectors.
- * Implementing the law assuring equal pay for equal work for women and men alike.
- * Preventing discrimination in employment, promotions, work conditions, and retirement benefits.
- * Broadening the network of day care centers, including in the workplace and recognizing childcare costs for tax purposes.
- * Recognizing work in the home for the purposes of social and pension rights.
- * Promote Arab women in all the fields

Religion and state

Separation of Religion and State. Legislating a basic law for freedom of religion,

aiming to secure freedom of religion and freedom from religion for all Israeli citizens, including the granting of full and equal legal status for all streams in Judaism.

- * The state of Israel will provide every Israeli with the right to marry as she/he chooses in a religious or a civil marriage.
- * The adoption of civil marriage and divorce, including couples of the same sex.
- * The Sabbath will be preserved as a general day of rest in Israel.
- * The operation of public transport and cultural or recreational activities on Shabbat in accordance with the character of the local population.
- * In registering the population of the state of Israel, anyone honestly declaring that he/she is a Jew will be considered to be a Jew and willing to tie their future to that of the Jewish people to be a Jew.
- * The state of Israel will assure the provision of religious services on an equal basis for all streams in Judaism according to their ratio in the population.

An enduring socio-ecologic environment

Environmental problems are social and political issues whose solution is intrinsically linked to issues of social justice.

- * The establishment of a National Council for a Sustainable Socio-ecological Environment, including representatives of the public, green organizations, social change movements and development authorities.
- * Developing varied forms of public transport, including the light railway, as an essential means of reducing the gap between the center and the periphery, reducing pollution and assuring land preservation.
- * Encouraging the production of electricity through alternative energy sources such as solar energy, and the implementation of the government decision on the establishment of a solar energy station in the Negev.
- * Implementing the law on the prevention of cruelty to animals, and increased supervision over academic institutions, private companies and security institutions in everything concerned with experiments on animals.
- * Sterilization and castration under state supervision and financing in order to reduce the stray animal population.
- * A vigorous struggle against the use of drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, using the relevant British model: placing emphasis less on users of the cannabis type of drugs and more on catching and punishing the drug dealers.
- * Increasing the taxation on cigarettes and confirmation of the UN charter on the war against smoking

Good government and good administration.

- * Requiring political parties to publish their financial balance sheet, including details of donations and donors.
- * Bringing disciplinary charges against elected officials and civil servants charged with corruption alongside criminal charges.
- * Restricting the right to maintain silence by public officials suspected of corruption or abuse of office.
- * Reforming the public administration so as to improve its efficiency, including decreasing the number of government ministries to fifteen.
- * Strengthening Israel's parliamentary democracy and preventing the introduction of a presidential system in Israel.