



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Israeli youth refuse compulsory military service, 2008-2009

2008

to:

2009

Country: Israel

Location Description: *Israel*

Goals:

To speak out against the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories and to protest the human rights violations carried out against the Palestinian people by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). They argue that peace with the Palestinians cannot come from military violence, domination, or repression.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 001. Public speeches › speaking tour
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 004. Signed public statements
- 011. Records, radio, and television › Web pages
- 061. Boycott of social affairs
- 062. Student strike
- 063. Social disobedience
- 064. Withdrawal from social institutions
- 139. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Peace

Group characterization:

- Israeli high school students known as the Shministim or “12th graders”

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Maya Wind, Netta Mishly, Yuval Ophir-Auron, Omer Goldman, Sahar Vardi, and Raz Bar David-Varon

Partners:

Jewish Voice for Peace, CODEPINK: Women for Peace

External allies:

American Friends Service Committee, Bay Area Women in Black, Faculty for

Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Global Exchange, Interfaith Peace Builders

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Shministim

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 2 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Israeli government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Protesters were repeatedly arrested and sentenced to jail terms ranging

from 21 days to three months. Once the objector had served that term, s/he was drafted again by the military, and the process began anew. The protester could be sent back to jail numerous times unless s/he received discharge papers.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Increasing numbers of Israeli students are refusing military conscription and/or signing the Shministim letters of opposition. The letter of refusal that was written by members of the Shministim class of 2010 has been signed by 88 young Israelis and by means of online social networks has garnered over 1,000 international supporters

Since its creation in 1948, the State of Israel has had to combat many hostile forces that have sought to bring about its destruction. Six wars, two intifadas

,
rocket attacks, and suicide bombings reflect the deep-seated tension between many Israelis and Arabs living in the contested territories.

In order to protect its citizens from such violent attacks, the Israeli government has put massive amounts of funding into its defense forces and has authorized its army to occupy the Palestinian territories. Under such policies, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have prevented Palestinian mobility by setting up roadblocks and requiring all Palestinians to pass through cumbersome checkpoints, denied Palestinian economic independence by confiscating farmland and restricting the number of Palestinian exports, hindered Palestinian political empowerment, and obstructed Palestinian access to many vital resources including food, water, hospitalization, and electricity. While it helps keep the majority of Palestinians in abject poverty and steadily removes Palestinians from their internationally recognized lands, the IDF protects Jewish settlers as they build new homes and apartment complexes in the West Bank. These government policies and military actions have been devised and implemented since 1967 in the name of Israeli defense.

A small group of Israeli youth, however, has spoken out against the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories, arguing that peace with the Palestinians will not come from military violence, domination, or repression. Known as the Shministim, or “12

th

graders” in Hebrew, these high schoolers have refused mandatory military service in order to protest the human rights violations carried out against the Palestinian people by the IDF. In their letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 2008, the Shministim criticized the policies and actions of the government and the military and refused to partake in an occupation that they felt was wrong and would not help to bring about peace.

The action of this group was not unprecedented. These young conscientious objectors were following a long tradition of Shministim letter-writing and military protest, as high school students in the early 1970s wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Golda Meir to warn of future conflicts that would result from Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories. Then as now, they refused military service to help shift public opinion on security and peace initiatives and to curb Israel’s growing militarism. Despite the government’s disregard for this letter, other groups of Israeli youth wrote letters in 1982 (in response to the Lebanon War), in 1991 (in response to the first intifada), and in 2001, 2002, and 2005 (in response to the second intifada). These various groups of Shministim garnered support by encouraging other high schoolers to sign their letters.

Since the 1970s, the Israeli government and army have responded to the students’ refusal to serve in the military by arresting them and sentencing them to various terms in jail. Protesters have been repetitively arrested and sentenced to jail terms ranging

from 21 days to three months. Once the objector had served that term, s/he would be drafted again by the military, and the process would begin anew. The protester could be sent back to jail numerous times unless s/he received discharge papers, which many protesters found difficult to obtain.

Because Israel has a strong culture of military service (formal and informal greeting remarks usually include an inquiry about one's military position or status), and because most Israeli citizens have family members and/or friends serving in the military or have served in the military themselves, the news that a few Israeli youth are refusing compulsory military service generated much media attention and gave the protesters a forum to speak their minds. Members of the 2008 Shministim, including Maya Wind, Netta Mishly, Yuval Ophir-Auron, Omer Goldman, Sahar Vardi, and Raz Bar David-Varon, were interviewed by various journalists and appeared on several television news programs. Between September 12 and October 10 of 2009, Maya Wind and Netta Mishly went on a college tour throughout the United States to spread their message and garner support. In addition, Yuval Ophir-Auron, Omer Goldman, and Sahar Vardi, went on tour in South Africa between October 2 and October 12 of that same year to spread awareness of their campaign. Their efforts were supported substantially by Jewish Voice for Peace and CODEPINK: Women for Peace, and they also received support from the American Friends Service Committee, Bay Area Women in Black, Faculty for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Global Exchange, and Interfaith Peace Builders.

Although the Israeli government did not end its military occupation of the Palestinian territories nor repeal its policy of youth military conscription by the end of this campaign, the efforts of this group of Shministim have contributed substantially to the movement towards peace and have helped disrupt the narrative that asserts that all Israelis support the military occupation. They have garnered both international attention and support, and have helped raise awareness (particularly in the United States) about Israel's human rights violations and the conditions under which Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip currently live. In addition, by continuing the tradition of Shministim letter-writing and military protest, these students have encouraged other students to protest in the same way, as illustrated by the newly formed Shministim class of 2010. Increasing numbers of Israeli students are refusing military conscription and/or signing the Shministim letters of opposition. The letter of refusal that was written by members of the Shministim class of 2010 has been signed by 88 young Israelis and by means of online social networks has garnered over 1,000 international supporters.

Research Notes

Influences:

These young conscientious objectors followed a long tradition of Shministim letter-writing and military protest, as high school students in the early 1970s wrote a letter to then Prime Minister Golda Meir to warn of future conflicts that would result from Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. Then, as in this case, they refused military service to help shift public opinion on security and peace initiatives and to curb Israel's growing militarism.

Additional Notes:

Visit the Shministim homepage at www.whywerefuse.org. For information on the Shministim class of 2008 visit www.december18th.org and for information on the Shministim class of 2010 visit <http://www.shministim.com/>. To read the Shministim class of 2008's refusal letter, visit <http://www.refusingtokill.net/Israel/ShministimLetter2008.htm>. To watch Maya Wind and Netta Mishly's interview on GRITtv, visit <http://www.freespeech.org/video/grittv-israeli-teenagers-take-stand-against-military-service>.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Aden Tedla, 21/04/2010

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[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-student-participants>