

Selective Enforcement and Over-Policing of Minority Groups

The Need for Comprehensive Legislative Reform

In recent days, another case has been revealed of police discrimination against an Israeli of Ethiopian descent. The man suffered a stroke while driving, but the police mistook him for being under the influence and arrested him instead of providing medical treatment. As a result of the delay, he suffered irreversible medical damage. Not an isolated incident, this case reflects a recurring pattern of discriminatory treatment by the Israel Police.

A comprehensive report on protest suppression published by Zulat devoted an entire chapter to police profiling of demonstrations by minority groups. **The report reveals how the police engage in selective enforcement and over-policing toward Israeli Ethiopians and other minorities**, whether through unjustified detentions or excessive and disproportionate responses to public protests.¹

Police Profiling and Violence Toward Minority Youth

Profiling has become an integral part of Israel Police's enforcement policy, deeply embedded in its daily practices. Article 66 of the Criminal Procedure Law-1996 (Enforcement Powers – Arrests) grants police officers the authority to detain a person if there is "reasonable suspicion" that they have committed a crime. In practice, as detailed in Zulat's report, this article is invoked selectively and disproportionately toward minority groups, particularly Israeli Ethiopians and young Palestinian citizens of Israel. This preemptive labeling not only violates the constitutional right to freedom of movement but also provokes feelings of humiliation and serious injustice in detainees. Young people who have committed no offense find themselves marked as suspects, and many arbitrary detentions are ultimately revealed devoid of any legal justification. The consequences of this over-policing extend beyond detentions and daily harassment to an increase in police violence toward members of minority groups.

* English-language reference. All other references in this document are in Hebrew.

¹ Eitay Mack, [*The Legal Infrastructure for the Suppression of Protests and Demonstrations in Israel](#), Zulat, 3 May 2024.

Profiling of Israeli Ethiopians

The report submitted in 2016 by the Palmor Committee, established to examine police relations with Israeli Ethiopians, found a clear tendency among officers to detain and demand identification without any justified reason. It notes that "a significant number of violent incidents begin with a police demand for identification when there is no apparent reason for such a request." The report also raises concerns that the authority to demand identification is exercised selectively, and its findings reinforce the conclusion that this is an institutionalized practice rather than a series of isolated incidents.²

However, the misuse of police powers against Israeli Ethiopian protesters persists. In January 2019, the police sought to keep in custody nine protesters who were arrested during a demonstration in Tel Aviv for another six days. Upon ordering their release, Judge Alaa Masarwa asserted that "there is no justification for their remand. These were minor incidents that occurred during a legitimate public protest." Nevertheless, their arrest served as a warning to potential future demonstrators and had a chilling effect on further protests by the community.³

Preemptive Labeling and Protest Suppression

Police profiling is not limited to random encounters with citizens but is also evident in the police's handling of minority group protests. Rallies staged by Israeli Ethiopians, as well as those by Israeli Palestinian citizens or left-wing activists, are crushed with disproportionate violence, while demonstrations by far-right groups are treated leniently and sometimes even enjoy police cooperation.

A striking example is the annual March of Flags in Jerusalem, where police consistently use force against Palestinian residents and left-wing protesters, while far-right demonstrators are allowed to do as they please, chant inciting slogans, and even commit physical assaults. This discriminatory reality is also evident in the treatment of other protests, such as in East Jerusalem, where the use of stun grenades, arbitrary arrests, and excessive force has become the norm.

² [Final Report of Team for Eradication of Racism Against Ethiopian Immigrants](#), Ministry of Justice, July 2016.

³ Bar Peleg, [Nine Demonstrators Arrested at Ethiopian Protest Set Free](#), Haaretz, 31 January 2019.

Impact of Over-Policing on Youth from Minority Groups

The effects of over-policing are particularly severe for minority youth. Incidents of police violence create total distrust between the community and the police and deter young people from seeing law enforcement as a protective force. As a result, there is an increasing tendency to avoid any contact with law enforcement, even when they need protection. Furthermore, the criminal record that comes with unjustified detentions and arrests can tarnish the prospects of young people and limit their employment and higher education opportunities.

Police Adherence to Principle of Equality

The Israel Police operates within the bounds of democracy and must adhere to the principles of equality before the law. However, recurring cases of selective enforcement toward Israeli Ethiopians, Palestinians, and protest activists indicate that the police fail to fulfill their duty to protect all citizens equally. Former Supreme Court President Aharon Barak addressed this issue, stating that "there is no more destructive force to a society than the feeling of its members that they are treated unequally. The sense of inequality is one of the most bitter emotions. It harms the unifying forces of society."⁴

Call for Immediate Police Policy Reforms

The solution to discriminatory policing lies not only in a shift in awareness but also in structural changes and explicit policies ensuring equal enforcement. Legislation should be advanced to restrict the use of police profiling, mandate full transparency of data on enforcement among minority groups, and enable effective oversight of the police's operations.

Conclusion

The Israel Police currently acts in a manner that contradicts principles of equality and democracy, systematically directing over-policing at minority groups. Preemptive labeling leads to severe violations of innocent citizens' rights and undermines trust in the entire

⁴ [Supreme Court Petition 953/87 Avraham Poraz v. Tel Aviv-Jaffa Mayor Shlomo Lahat, Nevo](#), 23 May 1988.

law enforcement system. It is time to put an end to this policy and ensure that all Israeli citizens receive equal treatment and fair and legitimate police services.

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