

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

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RESPONSE

1. Are there any reports of harm by the Israeli authorities of members or associates of Shalom Achshav?

No reports were found to indicate that Israeli authorities, including the police and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), harm members or associates of the Shalom Achshav organisation. The Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) organisation, founded in 1978, describes itself as the “largest extra-parliamentary movement in Israel and the only peace group to have a broad public support”. The organisation has led large demonstrations since forming, attracting up to 400 000 people in one instance in the 1980s (‘About Peace Now’ (undated), Peace Now website <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=43> – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 1). Its main purpose lies in the promotion of peace with Palestinians, which includes advocating for the creation of an independent Palestinian state and public campaigns against Israeli government policies which it sees as further alienating Palestinians. One of the organisation’s main activities is a monitoring service of the building of settlements by Israel, an activity which at times involves its members in protests with settler communities and requires intervention by the Israeli Defence Forces. It believes illegal settlements are a major obstacle to peace with the Palestinians. Other activities include continued dialogue and joint activities with Palestinians in the occupied territories (‘About Peace Now’ (undated), Peace Now website <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=43> – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 1).

Low level harassment against Peace Now members has been recorded in some recent reports, committed by fellow Israeli citizens. In June 2007, approximately 200 Peace Now members demonstrated in the town of Hebron against the presence of Jewish settlements in the city. They were opposed by some thirty “counter protestors” who labelled the Peace Now activists

as “traitors”. The IDF had initially sought to ban the Peace Now protest, fearing “it would lead to a breach of the peace by settlers, which could endanger the lives of demonstrators, local Palestinian residents, IDF soldiers and police”. A High Court of Justice ruling allowed the protest to proceed (‘Peace Now protesters in Hebron call for removal of settlers’, 2007, *Haaretz* website, 5 June <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/867356.html> – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 2; Yoaz, Y. 2007 ‘High Court: Peace Now demonstration can go ahead in Hebron’, *Haaretz* website, 4 June <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/866903.html> – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 3). In February 2007, Peace Now activists were evicted by local police from a meeting of contractors who had been invited by the Ma’ale local council to pursue investment in new settlement constructions (‘Peace Now Protest at Settlement Contractors Meeting’, 2007, Peace Now website, 7 February <http://www.peacenow.org/shalom/news.asp?rid=0&cid=3446> – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 4). In October 2006, the settlement of Ateret in the Binyamin region hung posters of the image of the General Director of Peace Now, Yariv Oppenheimer, on its community notice board, with the words “a PLO spy is amongst us, and we have to remove him from this settlement in any way necessary” written beside the image. Mr Oppenheimer filed a complaint with police for “harassment and incitement” (‘Peace Now General Director: Posters Inciting Against me were Hung in the Settlement I was Guarding’ (undated), Peace Now website, <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=66&docid=1970&pos=62> – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 5).

In June 2004, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada undertook research into whether Shalom Achshav members or sympathizers suffered abuse. The research includes one example of the head of a Peace Now Settlement Watch team, Dror Etkes, who in 2002 feared for his life while visiting the Yitzhar settlement. Etkes’ car was surrounded by settlers, who removed film from his camera and threatened to kill him if he returned to their settlement. Etkes indicated at the time that this was not representative of his treatment by settlers in communities which he visited for his work with Peace Now (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2004, *ISR42760.FE – Israel: Update to ISR19847.E of 20 February 1995 on the Shalom Achshav movement and on possible abuses suffered by its members or sympathizers (2002-June 2004)*, 16 June – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 6).

An older report, from 1983, indicated that Shalom Achshav “militants” have been injured and murdered by extreme right-wing elements within Israeli society. This took place during Peace Now protests directed at the Prime Minister’s Office in Jerusalem:

Shalom Achshav was launched in July 1977 by a letter signed by 300 IDF reserve officers. The letter urged Prime Minister Menachem Begin to hand back the West Bank and Gaza Strip in order to advance the chances of peace agreements. Its slogan was: “Peace (shalom) is better than the whole (shelema) Land of Israel.”

A striking feature of the movement is its independence from the political parties, and its effective publicity methods. The existence of grass-roots (mainly middle-class plus liberal and intellectual circles) support for its outlook was corroborated by a turnover of 20,000 to 30,000 at its first demonstration.

Shalom Achshav warmly welcomed the Camp David Agreements in March 1979. Its members have since protested against every government measure which they consider to be a stumbling block to peace, such as the proposal to expand existing West Bank settlements, or to add new ones.

Shalom Achshav was very active during the Gulf War. It contributed to the groundswell of popular feeling which in October 1982 brought 400,000 people to Tel Aviv's biggest square to protest against the dramatic events at Sabra and Shatilla.

In February 1983, a demonstration by Shalom Achshav militants making for the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem was attacked by extreme right-wing elements; one of the Shalom Achshav leaders, Emil Grunzweig, was murdered, and nine others were injured when a grenade was thrown at the throng.

As early as 1988, Shalom Achshav called for direct negotiations with the PLO. The movement expressed support for the current government in the peace process, while showing itself to be slightly more radical on the problem of disbanding settlements in the territories. **However, Shalom Achshav is now finding it difficult to survive as a protest movement, because on the whole its ideas have been adopted by consensus on the part of most of the population. It may therefore be said to be a victim of its own success** ('Shalom Achshav – Peace Now' (undated), The Jewish Agency for Israel website, <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/festivls/zkatz/atz/etzion8.html> – Accessed 19 June 2007 – Attachment 7).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources:

International News & Politics

Haaretz website <http://www.haaretz.com/>

Region Specific Links

The Jewish Agency for Israel website <http://www.jafi.org.il/>

Topic Specific Links

Peace Now website <http://www.peacenow.org.il/>

Search Engines

Google search engine <http://www.google.com.au/>

Online Subscription Services

Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. About "Peace Now" (undated), Peace Now website <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=43> – Accessed 19 June 2007.
2. 'Peace Now protesters in Hebron call for removal of settlers', 2007, *Haaretz* website, 5 June <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/867356.html> – Accessed 19 June 2007.
3. Yoaz, Y. 2007 'High Court: Peace Now demonstration can go ahead in Hebron', *Haaretz* website, 4 June <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/866903.html> – Accessed 19 June 2007.

4. 'Peace Now Protest at Settlement Contractors Meeting', 2007, Peace Now website, 7 February <http://www.peacenow.org/shalom/news.asp?rid=0&cid=3446> – Accessed 19 June 2007.
5. 'Peace Now General Director: Posters Inciting Against me were Hung in the Settlement I was Guarding' (undated), Peace Now website, <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=66&docid=1970&pos=62> – Accessed 19 June 2007.
6. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2004, *ISR42760.FE – Israel: Update to ISR19847.E of 20 February 1995 on the Shalom Achshav movement and on possible abuses suffered by its members or sympathizers (2002-June 2004)*, 16 June – Accessed 19 June 2007.
7. 'Shalom Achshav – Peace Now' (undated), The Jewish Agency for Israel website, <http://www.jafi.org.il/education/festivls/zkatz/atz/etzion8.html> – Accessed 19 June 2007.