

Last update - 10:12 08/01/2008

## Israeli Arab leaders slam boycott of visiting Jewish donors

By [Yoav Stern](#) and Anshel Pfeffer, Haaretz Correspondent



Representatives of the American and European donors on Monday in Umm al-Fahm. (Itzik Ben-Malkhi)

Israeli Arab leaders have condemned a partially successful Arab boycott of Jewish philanthropists who are visiting the country to learn more about the problems facing Israeli Arabs.

The task force, comprised of members of about 70 Jewish organizations from North America and Europe, was set up two years ago to advance social projects and strengthen local Israeli Arab leadership.

It hopes to increase Jewish philanthropists' awareness of majority-minority relations in Israel and help them understand the problems faced by Israeli Arabs, who constitute 20 percent of the Israeli population, said task force director Jessica Balaban.

But the group has been spurned by some of the Israeli Arabs to whom it is trying to reach out.

Ameer Makhoul, who heads Ittijah, an umbrella organization for Arab nongovernmental organizations in Israel, asked Arab officials to cancel planned meetings with the group because Diaspora Jewry advocates the idea of Israel as a Jewish state, he said.

He also asked for help from Islamic Movement head Sheikh Ra'ad Salah, who pushed for the cancellation of the delegation's planned visit to an Islamic Movement pharmacy in Umm al-Fahm. In addition, other groups are also reconsidering planned meetings with the delegates, but most of the participants ignored the call to boycott the mission.

"Meeting with them means legitimizing and accepting their agenda and the framework of the State of Israel as a Jewish state," said Makhoul. "This is a multipurpose and diverse group that is trying to dictate our future."

But not all Israeli Arabs agree with Makhoul's rejection of the delegation's efforts. The delegates still have meetings and workshops scheduled to take place in the Galilee and the heavily Arab Triangle region, and are due to tour the Negev tomorrow to learn more about the Bedouin and their problems.

Shweiki Khatib, chairman of the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, met with the delegates Sunday.

"We have met and will continue to meet with Jewish figures in the past, present and future," said Khatib. "We have our red lines, but we are obligated to say what we think and explain our situation to whoever wants to hear."

Amnon Be'eri-Sulitzeanu, director general of the Abraham Fund, which aims to improve coexistence between Jews and Arabs, said the boycott was self-destructive.

"If there is discrimination and inequality and a situation that needs to be fixed, then the establishment is volunteering to take real action," he said. "To oppose that is simply shooting oneself in the foot."