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'World's largest Arabic lesson': A rebuke to the Jewish Nation-State law

Thousands of Israelis attend the event, billed as the world's largest Arabic lesson, in protest of a new nationalist law that excludes Palestinian citizens of Israel from the national identity and demotes Arabic from its status as an official language.



Maria Miguel De Pina, an Arabic teacher from Haifa, gives a basic Arabic lesson to thousands of Israelis in Habima Square, Tel Aviv, July 30, 2018. (Oren Ziv/Activestills.org)

Thousands of Jewish and Palestinian Israelis took part in what was billed as the “biggest Arabic lesson in the world” in Tel Aviv’s Habima Square Monday evening, an event organized to protest Israel’s new [Jewish Nation-State Law](#), which [stripped Arabic of its status as an official language](#) in the country.

The event, organized by a number of coexistence and peace organizations, included a 15-minute Arabic lesson, as well number of musical performances, speeches, and spoken word poetry. The organizations set up booths where they handed out flyers for Arabic lessons, with one booth selling t-shirts that read “I speak Arabic” in both Arabic and Hebrew.

“The idea was to combine Arabic lessons with a large Palestinian cultural event in the streets of Tel Aviv as a response to the Jewish Nation-State Law,” +972 Magazine writer [Samah Salaime](#), one of the organizers of the event, said before the event. “Eventually we settled on a huge Arabic lesson.”

“It is obvious that Arabic won’t disappear, regardless of the law,” Salaime added. “The law is symbolic, but this struggle is about building a shared country and a shared future in this land.”



Thousands of Israelis gather for what was billed as ‘the world’s largest Arabic lesson’ in protest of the Jewish Nation-State Law, Tel Aviv’s HaBima Square, July 30, 2018. (Oren Ziv/Activestills.org)

After a few introductory speeches and a short Arabic musical performance by singer Miriam Tuqan, Salaime took the stage to deliver a fiery speech against the government’s attempts to “destroy the light at the end of the tunnel.”

“We are the binationalists, the bilingualists, we are the dream of the future...we have room for the Palestinian next to the Jews, for the Arab and the Israeli, and for anyone who defines himself as part of this country,” Salaime told the crowd. “We are proud and are well aware of the price we pay for joining together. We do not stand behind a destructive coalition in the Knesset that takes our money for its institutions, its settlements, and its messianism.”

Later, using a playful call and response, Maria Miguel De Pina, an Arabic teacher from Haifa, taught the overwhelmingly Jewish crowd a few useful Arabic phrases such as “I am very happy” and “I love you,” as well as body parts and animal names.

The event also featured performances by famed Arab singer Mira Awad and spoken word poetry by Mizrahi poets Almog Behar and Yossi Zabari. Behar, of Iraqi Jewish descent, told the crowd that following the Jewish Nation-State Law, Israelis must begin demanding that all schools teach Arabic

— both spoken and written — “to begin to free ourselves from the shackles and the separation that the state has surrounded us with.”



Singer Mira Awad (right) performs at the ‘World’s Largest Arabic Lesson’ in central Tel Aviv, July 30, 2018. (Oren Ziv/Activestills.org)

“We must learn that only Arab-Jewish partnership can change life in this country, put an end to oppression and the occupation, and work toward equality, democracy, and a solution to the conflict,” Behar told the crowd.

Speaking to +972 Magazine before his performance, Zabari, a Mizrahi Jew who made headlines two years ago when Culture Minister Miri Regev walked on his performance alongside Palestinian hip hop artist Tamer Nafar, said that he believes it is necessary to stand with Israel’s minorities against the whims of those in power. “Especially these days, anyone whose eyes are open can see

the segregation, the separation, and the fear-mongering against minorities, whether they are refugees, Arabs, or LGBTQ. We must make our position clear.”

The event was sponsored by bi-lingual educational organization Hand in Hand, Givat Haviva, The Abraham Fund, and Sikkuy.