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Fathers file petition against Israel in UNHRC

By RUTH EGLASH
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The five divorced fathers detail years of court rulings and decisions by the authorities to deny or limit the own access to their children.

Five fathers who feel they have been systematically denied their basic human rights by the Israeli authorities and the justice system during long and drawn-out custody battles with the mothers of their children filed a petition with the United Nations Human Rights Council on Monday against the State of Israel.

The five individual complaints, which all detail years of court rulings and decisions by the authorities to deny or limit the fathers' access to their children, were filed collectively by the Coalition for Children and Family Israel (CCF), a non-profit organization that unites several bodies engaged in fighting for father's rights.

Collectively, the petitions allege that Israel's family laws and practices violate international conventions, deny men involved in divorce cases their basic human rights and accuse state-run authorities and courts of purposely disengaging fathers from their children.

"The status of a man in divorce proceedings in Israel is subject to institutionalized torture and denial of civil rights," read the opening paragraphs of each five petitions, which also highlight the details of each individual case.

"The state refused to recognize my rights to fatherhood, family life and contact with children. The state officially interprets the right to family life as dependent on the concept of 'mother's consent,' a concept which the ECHR (European Court of Human Rights) discarded long ago."

In addition, the five petitions outline a series of what they describe as "discriminatory and unequal statutory presumptions" such as the Tender Years Presumption Law, which grants automatic custody of children under six to mothers and the central role of social workers, which the fathers accused of acting as "personal criminal Probation Officers" that cancel visitations at whim.

"We hope that this will change the law in Israel and I will be able to see my son," commented Daniel Zer, a father who has not seen his son for more than two years.

"A lot of divorced fathers are in this position and they have to rely on the mercy of social workers to see their son or daughter."

In a press release sent out by the CCF, the organization wrote: "It is widely believed that all those United Nations experts are anti-Semitic and only care about Palestinians' rights. Five proud Israeli citizens have lodged human rights complaints with the UN's Human Rights Council hoping that relief from an incredible oppression may come only from the international community, since the ears of the family court judges, and the ministers of Justice and Welfare, Yaakov Neeman and Moshe Kahlon, are deaf.

"We are fathers in divorce, but we are treated like second-class citizens."

According to the NGO, the plight of divorced or divorcing men is gaining recognition in Israel.

Recently, MK Yulia Shamolov Berkovich (Kadima) sponsored two conferences in parliament addressing “equality of the sexes” and a petition (“Adam Zer, a minor v. Ministry of Welfare”) was submitted to the High Court of Justice by Daniel Zer, who said the practice of forcing men to prove it is in the best interest of the child to see the father violates basic and natural human rights.

In addition, fathers’ rights groups have held a series of demonstrations and are currently in the process of compiling a report on the estimated 200 divorced men who commit suicide each year. Legislation is also being drafted, which the CCF said will “bring Israel in line with the rest of the world” in regards to the rights of fathers.

In June 2007, the UN Human Rights Council adopted new complaint procedures aimed at addressing “consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested violations of all human rights and all fundamental freedoms occurring in any part of the world and under any circumstances.”



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