

Israel's new far-right government to lift ban on parliamentary candidates inciting racism



Far-right Israeli lawmaker Itamar Ben-Gvir—who was convicted in 2007 of inciting racism—delivers a speech (Photo: Ilia Yefimovich/Picture Alliance via Getty Images)

Tel Aviv, December 27 (RHC)-- The agreement establishing the most right-wing government in Israel's history contains a provision lifting a ban on parliamentary candidates who incite racism—an offense for which the incoming national security minister was once convicted, Israeli media has reported.

The right-wing Likud party—led by Benjamin Netanyahu, who is set to serve a historic sixth term as Israeli prime minister—and far-right Otzma Yehudit (Jewish Power) agreed to revoke Clause 7A of the Basic Law on the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

According to the provision, "negation of the state of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state" as well as "incitement to racism" and "support for an armed struggle by a hostile state or terrorist organization against the state of Israel" disqualify Knesset aspirants and candidates lists from running.

Likud and Otzma Yehudit agreed to strike the "incitement to racism" clause, which critics say is routinely violated by Israeli lawmakers, like incoming Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir, who was convicted in 2007 of incitement to racism and supporting a terrorist organization after he advocated ethnic cleansing.

The Religious Zionism Party -- whose leader is a self-described "proud homophobe" who believes Israel's founders "didn't finish the job" of ethnically cleansing all Arabs from Palestine == holds seven Knesset seats and has been tapped to run the agency in charge of construction and security in the illegally occupied West Bank. Outgoing Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked once amplified a call for genocide against Palestinians.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel condemned the Likud-Otzma Yehudit agreement in a statement asserting that the deal "to cancel only the criteria of incitement to racism as grounds for preventing participation in the elections and leave the other criteria intact indicates their intention to turn the mechanism of disqualification of the lists into one that will only lead to the disqualification of Arab parties and candidates."

Israel's Central Elections Committee typically prohibits a number of parties and politicians from running during each Knesset electoral cycle based on Clause 7A, including extreme-right Jewish politicians and the Arab-Israeli party Balad. However, the Israeli Supreme Court often overturns the bans on appeal.

Earlier, Netanyahu announced the formation of a government described by the Times of Israel as the country's "most hard-line ever."

According to the site:

Israel's largest party and a right-wing powerhouse, Likud will be on the left flank of the prime minister-designate's incoming coalition. Far-right Otzma Yehudit, Religious Zionism, and Noam, as well as Netanyahu's longtime ultra-Orthodox partners Shas and United Torah Judaism, round out the 64-seat majority coalition in Israel's 120-member Knesset.

Netanyahu -- who just this month denied the existence of the Palestinian people, calling them "southern Syrians" -- assured NPR last week that the extreme right would not be setting the coalition's policy tone.

"They are joining me. I'm not joining them," Netanyahu said. "I'll have two hands firmly on the steering wheel. I won't let anybody do anything to LGBT [people] or to deny our Arab citizens their rights or anything like that, it just won't happen. And the test of time will prove that."

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