

NEW  
PROFILE

Movement for the Demilitarization of Israeli Society

2018

New Profile's Annual Report

## Preface

As the Israeli government increases its efforts to silence political voices and to reinforce militarism, we continue to work together with our partners towards a more just and peaceful society. Through our work we create spaces for young people and educators to learn, discuss and become part of our anti-militarist movement. We are happy and proud to share with you our work in 2018 and are deeply thankful for the support of our friends and partners.

## Background

Militarism is deeply rooted in Israeli society. Militarism as an ideology glorifies the military and participation in it, dominating civil society and the lives of people. Israeli militarism is also embedded in and built on the continued marginalization and oppression of certain groups, based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. The prevalence of militarism in every aspect of Israeli life is even more worrying as Israel's far-right government is undermining democratic norms at every turn. The passing of the "Nation Law" in July 2018, which gives Jews in Israel the exclusive right to national self-determination and strips Arabic of its designation as an official language, is an important step in the wrong direction. Considering this and other laws in their wider context, we can see how democratic structures in Israel are crumbling, while strong militaristic, patriarchal and racist elements are becoming stronger and bolder.

In July 2018 a new law was approved by the Knesset, which was given the unofficial name "[Breaking the Silence Law](#)" (after an anti-occupation group that publishes testimonies by former IDF combat soldiers about their service in the West Bank and Gaza and which is constantly de-legitimized by right wing politicians). The law enables the Education Minister to prevent lectures in schools by organizations that are in contradiction with "The 12 principles of the Education system". This broad definition provides the Minister with means to block many organizations that are critical of the government's policies. For example, one of the 12 principles, "Loyalty to the State", can be widely interpreted. Another principle is to promote "meaningful military service". Since the law was passed, we have felt its impact when reaching out to schools and offering our workshops and guides. We have received many negative responses from schools and the main reason that was given to us was their fear of angry responses from parents and of sanctions from the Education Ministry.

In November 2018, the Knesset voted for the "[Loyalty in Culture](#)" Law initiated by Minister of Culture and Sports Miri Regev (though two additional votes are still required for the law to take effect). The purpose of the law is to deny funding to artists and cultural institutions who "undermine" the values and symbols of the state. The law is consistent with the ongoing attempts of the government to silence critical voices. In July an Arab-Palestinian citizen of Israel, [Dareen Tatour](#), was sentenced for 5 months in jail for publicizing an online poem about Palestinian resistance. In another attempt to silence opposing political voices, Science and Technology Minister Ofir Akunis [blocked the appointment of leading Israeli brain researcher](#) Prof. Yael Amitai to an Israeli-German scientific committee, because a decade ago she had signed a petition in support of soldiers who refused to serve in the occupied West Bank.

Additional alarming developments took place in the fields of education and legislation that further reinforce militarism in Israel:

- [Education Minister Naftali Bennett](#) initiated in January 2018 a new plan to ‘increase motivation’ for enlistment into combat units in the military among high school students. The plan includes combat bases ‘adopting’ schools, combat officers lecturing at schools, and students taking tours at military bases. The ministry allocates NIS 80 million to the project, which significantly increases militarization in Israel’s school system even beyond its current level.
- [The Lockheed Martin](#) company, which among other things manufactures F-35 fighter jets, announced in May 2018 that it will establish three new kindergartens in Jerusalem with the support of the Ministry of Education. Similar kindergartens already operate in the south of the country.
- University and college [students who serve in the military reserves](#) will now receive academic credits for their reserves service. The bill was approved as a law in July 2018, giving preference to students who served in the military, while discriminating those who got exempted or were not called up (which includes almost all Palestinian citizens of Israel, and several other marginalized groups).
- Four law proposals were approved by the Constitution, Law and Justice Knesset Committee in late June 2018, which aim to give preference to candidates who served in the military to be hired in civil servant positions. Candidates that did not serve in the military would be effectively discriminated from entering public service employment, thus violating their right for equal opportunity. The committee is now to prepare the proposals for a first vote in the Knesset assembly.

The prevalence of militarism from a very young age and at all spheres of life in Israeli society can be clearly seen in an advertisement for a maternity ward in one of Israel’s main hospitals, published in the right-wing newspaper Makor Rishon. The ad shows a fetus wearing a military beret, with a caption reading: “Recipient of the Presidential Award of Excellence, 2038.” The pervasiveness of militarism in Israeli society and education, is clearly shown in the use of such imagery. The ad received a lot of attention and [criticism on social media](#). As a result, the hospital took down the add.



In the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Education, a famous photo of the Israeli soldiers that took over the Western Wall in Jerusalem in the 1967 war was photo-edited to depict young children. This demonstrates how the current Ministry of Education encourages militaristic indoctrination from a very young age.

## New Profile's Projects in 2018

### The Counseling Network

The work of the Counselling Network is to provide assistance and support to individuals wishing to refuse, avoid or discontinue military service in Israel. Individuals from all walks of life who are conscripted by law approach the Counselling Network asking for support. They receive individual assistance to navigate an increasingly complicated process until their exemption. **In 2018, at least 926 draft resisters received assistance and support from our counseling network. 18 new volunteers joined the network, which now includes 29 volunteers who are providing regular counseling.** In addition to the counseling and assistance provided through the Network, counsellors are also approached individually. New Profile does not record requests for support that are not specifically channeled through the Network.

It needs to be mentioned that offering individual support became more time-consuming due to the toughening of the exemption process.

Network Coordinator, Daniel Birger, organized four meetings for volunteers to learn more about anti-militarism. They met activists and experts, watched critical films and engaged in discussions about militarism in Israel. They also discussed the various challenges of the counselling work and ways to address them.

**New profile delivered legal aid to 14 people that faced more complex situations in their struggle.** Most of the cases are of enlisted soldiers who went absent without official leave, or of people who did not report on their enlistment date. Their reasons for deciding not to serve in the military are diverse, including, among others, economic hardship, mental and physical health conditions and conscientious objection.

In 2018, exemption procedures on mental health grounds have been toughened:

The military has a special policy regarding exemption on mental health grounds when it comes to the so-called 'Academic Reserve' (Atuda) soldiers. The Academic Atuda is a program of the IDF which enables high school graduates to defer most of their military service and allows them to attend university first. Their tuition payments are often partially covered. After their graduation, the Atuda'im are required to serve in a professional position as soldiers for three years on top of the two or three years of mandatory military service. The military views them as valuable assets and is very reluctant to let them go, even when their mental situation is grave. Unlike other soldiers, besides a psychiatric diagnosis, they have to present their case in front of a special committee.

In general, it is becoming increasingly difficult for a soldier to meet a military mental health officer who is not in his/her unit. Young recruits have to be very assertive and determined to reach exemption, which is usually very difficult for people struggling with mental health issues.

The Knesset approved the establishment of a special committee for revoking an exemption from the military for Jewish women on religious grounds. Previously, a conviction in court was required for revoking this type of exemption. According to the IDF, many women receive exemptions from conscription every year based on false religious declarations. With the newly approved committee, the procedure to gain exemption from conscription for women will become significantly more difficult.

In 2018 **our cooperation with sister organizations** Mesarvot and Yesh Gvul has become smoother and more efficient. We referred reserve soldiers that refuse to serve for political and conscientious reasons, to Yesh Gvul, who opened a support group for such soldiers. Mesarvot continued referring to New Profile draft resisters who will not take the path of publicly declaring their refusal to serve. We invited Yesh Gvul and Mesarvot volunteers to meetings of our counseling network so they can deepen their understanding of anti-militarism and learn more about the procedural aspects of exemption from military service.

Our **social media presence** also increased in 2018. Currently we count 1,455 followers on our Facebook page. In 2018, 50 new discussions were opened in the Network's forum. Forums are generally becoming an obsolete tool for direct communication nowadays, but we know that a much larger number of people uses past threads on our forum (going back more than 15 years and covering a very broad variety of situations) to obtain useful information for their own exemption processes.

Klil, a woman who was exempt from military service on conscientious grounds eight years ago, with the help of New Profile, is now a volunteer in our Counseling Network and shares a success story from 2018:

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*Among the young women that I accompanied in the process of draft resistance was Mia, a Jerusalemite who was not willing to enlist because of her pacifist worldview, her opposition to the use of violence by the army, as well as the impact it has on civil society. I referred her first to our conscience refusal kit and explained to her the principles according to which the army recognizes pacifists. We had many discussions that helped her in the process of writing a letter to the army, in which she explained her reasons for refusing to serve. Finally, I helped her to prepare for the interview by the army's conscience committee (a standard procedure that every pacifist needs to undergo [in order to receive exemption as a conscientious objector]). I prepared her for the different questions she might be asked by the committee, some of which are tricky and aim to confuse and thwart the interviewees. Indeed, she was asked such questions by the committee but as she was well prepared, she managed to get the exemption.*

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### Anti-Militarist Educational and Outreach Work

Militarism is deeply rooted in Israeli society. One of its manifestations – as well as its sources, is the highly-militarized education system, which is geared towards promoting enlistment of each young Israeli after graduation. Since kindergarten, children receive the message that the military, weapons and violence are an integral part of our lives. They learn to believe that the most significant role of an 18-year old is to be a soldier and fight. A critical attitude towards the military presence in the school system is sidelined and oppressed. Active criticism of the militarized education system is strongly discouraged by administrators and senior officials in the Ministry of Education.

Another aspect that is rarely discussed publicly is that conscription involves risks for youth, both economically and psychologically, and often results in imprisonment and other forms of trauma. An article published in [Haaretz](#) in July 2018 states that some 70 percent of conscript soldiers who are serving time in military prisons come from poverty-stricken homes. Based on army sources, "deserters" were jailed after fleeing the army in order to help their families make a living. Most of them were later exempted

from the military based on their "incompatibility". This is the reality of many youth from low socio-economic backgrounds, while [soldiers from wealthier families](#) make up a disproportionate percent of those in elite and high-tech units, ensuring them a well-paid positions after they finish their military service.

Through our educational work with youth, educators and social workers we bring a critical discourse, countering militarization. In 2018, the following activities took place:

- **Two workshops with 15 young Israelis exempted from military service** took place. The workshops offered participants a safe space where they could freely discuss issues related to militarism in Israel and their own decision to refuse conscription. Participants learned about opportunities that they can benefit from as civilians, without military service as a prerequisite. In addition, an important topic of discussion was the significance of legitimizing the decision to refuse military service and addressing the stigma that accompanies this decision.
- **Meetings with 37 educators, teachers, social workers and staff members of seven education and welfare institutions**, who work with hundreds of youth, mostly from marginalized communities. Through these meetings, we were able to raise these professionals' awareness of the risk factors that military service presents to at-risk and marginalized youths. We introduced the Counselling Network as well as our Outreach and Education Program and provided information on exemption-related issues. We also provided information, guidance and printed materials to professionals and youth.
- As we continue our efforts to reach out to youth, we are excited about our **anti-militarist teachers' groups**. Besides the ongoing group in Tel Aviv, we organized a new group in Haifa and several meeting with teachers took place also in Jerusalem. In the meetings, teachers share their difficulties in the current political climate, talking about fears, self-censorship and on how they are able to hold critical discussions with their students in spite of it. The yearly Memorial Day for the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in November 2018 brought up frustration among teachers as they felt isolated in their schools and unable to discuss the political aspects of the assassination. Such taboo topics can be openly discussed in the Teachers' Forum, which offers a much-needed safe space for dissenters. Teachers in the groups are enthusiastic to work together, share ideas and materials. Participants come up with initiatives, such as developing together a critical curriculum about militarism and sharing it widely with other teachers.



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*A teacher from our teachers` forum in Haifa: "It was great to hear and know that there are other teachers who think like me and that there is solidarity between us. It is important for me that there are these meetings, since there is a need for political organizing of critical teachers on a national and local level."*

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- 1,000 copies of the **booklet “The Day after Exemption”** were distributed in Hebrew and 200 copies in Russian in 2018. The manual outlines social and economic resources available to people who did not serve in the military. We also translated the manual into Arabic.
- We continued working on a booklet for social workers and educators working with youth at risk, discussing military service as a risk factor, including statistics on suicide of soldiers and mental health problems following military service.

As a **feminist organization**, we bring feminist values and methods to all our activities. Gender issues are always brought up in discussions and the connection between patriarchy and militarism is raised. In every workshop and meeting we discuss how the military reinforces and perpetuates stereotypical roles of men and women and promotes gender inequality within military ranks and in society at large. In addition, we address the issue of gender-based violence in the military. Our facilitators are trained to be mindful and maintain a safe space for various gender identities.

### Closing of Civic Space in Israel

With the opening of the school year in September 2018, our Education Coordinators, Tal Berglas and Roni Slonim, invested significant efforts in contacting schools and gap year programs. As in previous years, we offered workshops for youth on militarism in the Israeli society and information on military service and its impact on youth, especially from underprivileged communities. Although we also contacted schools and programs with a liberal or leftist reputation, all responses were negative. The main reason given was their fear of angry responses from parents and sanctions by the Education Ministry.

In light of such developments, **New Profile adapted its approach** as follows:

- Our education team completed a **modular anti-militarist educational curriculum**. It includes different components that can be used at workshops based on the audience and institution approached. This gives our team more flexibility to address different types of institutions (schools, non-formal educational institutions, teachers’ colleges, etc.) and audiences (youth at risk, high schools, future teachers, educators and social workers, etc.). Topics included in the modules are: militarism, refusal to enlist, women in the military, social gaps in education and in the military, desertion due to economic hardship, imprisonment, mental health issues, trauma and suicide, sexual assault, and others. The curriculum was constructed using vivid and interactive materials, which includes films, articles, statistical data, and more. Alternatively, the curriculum can be provided to teachers and educators to use on their own in their classrooms.
- In addition, New Profile has recently initiated a **Forum of Education Coordinators** with organizations that work to end the occupation and promote human rights organizations (including Breaking the Silence, Sadaka-Reut, Combatants for Peace, The Association for Civil Rights, and Zochrot). The purpose of the forum is to work together against the silencing of politically critical voices, especially those speaking against the occupation and militarism in the education system and to support each other’s work in these difficult times.

## Sustainability: The Feminist Fundraisers' Forum (FFF)

The Feminist Fundraisers' Forum is the result of a process that New Profile and the Coalition of Women for Peace initiated in 2017. After an initial meeting that took place on 2 November 2017 with 16 feminist organizations and activists, eight organizations got together to explore new joint fundraising possibilities. The organizations are: Politically Correct, Gun Free Kitchen Tables, Altufula, Sidreh (Bedouin women organization), Coalition of Women for Peace, New Profile, Kayan and Isha L'Isha. These organizations met on four occasions in 2018 and decided to establish the Feminist Fundraisers' Forum to discuss alternative opportunities to building resilience and flexibility in the philanthropic arena, towards becoming more sustainable. We aim to work together in what we believe is important and bring about the social change that is much needed in our communities by focusing on the communities we serve and not on the funders that support our work.



Besides our commitment to feminist values and social justice, we value the diversity of the organizations we represent and believe that we are part of something larger than the individual units. We are connected through a set of values that allows us to work together and complement each other's work. As such, we do not need to compete for funding. On the contrary, we need to get together to raise the funds and other resources that we need to do our work. By getting together we aim to challenge the existing power relations between funders and civil society organizations (especially small, grassroots organizations) and shift the power to the latter in an attempt to make our work more relevant and sustainable.

Furthermore, as part of the feminist movement, we aim to break the misconception that gender is a small niche. We will challenge the idea that promoting gender equality and social justice is done at the expense of other groups. Gender is not a stand-alone issue, but an issue that affects us all. Therefore, we want to expand the conversation and the impact of our work by bringing a gender lens into all the different issues that each of our organizations works on.

## Reflection

### **1. Promoting the social legitimization of the choice to avoid enlistment to the military:**

In 2018 we invested important efforts and resources into addressing youth from marginalized communities, who pay a significant personal price for living in a militaristic society. Struggling already with a life at the margins, youths at risk and from the periphery do not have the same opportunity to openly refuse serving in the army, even if that means facing higher risks than other population groups. Therefore, in addition to providing support to youths that decide not to serve in the army, we also work towards legitimizing their choice and challenging the stigma and social pressure they face. This is a long-term process, but in recent years we have observed a slow change around the refusal discourse. Refusers have been presented as 'heroes' in some progressive media and on social platforms. Also, women are increasingly presented as 'heroic' for their decision to refuse and serve time in prison for their beliefs. Even though we are very critical to this chauvinist portrayal of people not serving in the army as 'heroes', we acknowledge the change in the attitude towards this decision, presenting it as beneficial to society and thus making it more legitimate.



New Profile has contributed to such developments. Besides the provision of valuable assistance to youth and their families, we are effectively challenging the myth that only those that participate in the armed forces are legitimate members of Israeli society. Through our work we are exposing the relationship between ethnic, gender and class oppression and inequality and militarism.

**2. Contributing toward preventing the cycle of desertion from military services and the resulting imprisonment of young adults from low socio-economic background and underprivileged families.**

New Profile decided a few years ago to change its strategy and focus its support on underprivileged youth instead of targeting a segment of society that is already politically and socially active (mainly from the Tel Aviv area, from well-educated middle class families). While our counseling network has always been receiving calls for help from people belonging to all walks of life, we started deliberately reaching out to marginalized and at-risk youth. We started targeting educators and social workers and bringing an antimilitarist discourse, while raising awareness to military service as a risk factor to these communities. Through our work we have provided direct support and tools that would assist these young people with navigating the military bureaucracy, especially in the process of obtaining an exemption from military service without spending time in military prison, as well as outlining civilian alternatives and resources available to them.

**3. As a movement, we aim to create a 'critical mass' significantly challenging militarization in Israel. We are also part of the feminist movement in Israel.**

In 2018, New Profile celebrated its 20th anniversary. Since our establishment, we have re-shaped Israel's antimilitarist movement, which is not limited to refusing conscription, by bringing new radical and alternative models to change the profile of Israeli society (thus our name: New Profile). The refusal movement became a very significant voice within Israeli political discourse. We have offered and continue to offer assistance to thousands of individuals to materialize their right to choose avoiding or discontinuing military service for more than 17 years through our Counselling Network. As we initiate a forum of education coordinators from different organizations and increase our partnership with sister organizations in the provision of support to refusers, we aim to reach a larger audience. As part of the feminist movement, New Profile is leading initiatives that bring feminist organizations together to bring significant and sustainable change in our communities through the Feminist Fundraisers' Forum.

## Challenges

We encounter growing difficulties to conduct our workshops in schools, due to sentiments of fear and opposition held by teachers and principals, cultivated by the right wing and the non-tolerant government in Israel. Being a radical-feminist grassroots movement that brings a critical voice into Israeli public discourse is particularly challenging nowadays.

An additional challenge stems from our political-strategic decision to target youth from populations and localities which are generally outside the traditional reach of the Israeli left. Given the above, we are conducting a long and difficult learning process of finding our path, off the beaten track, while constantly trying to reshape it according to the changing reality, through trial and error. All this, in order to enable anti-militarist discussion and access to information on military-free resources and opportunities for youth, in wider circles, to which were not exposed as much in the past.

We are Grateful to our Donors (in alphabetical order):

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*American Friends Service Committee*

*Bread for the World*

*British Shalom-Salaam Trust*

*Karibu Foundation*

*Lush Charity Pot*

*Mennonite Central Committee*

*Palästina—Friedensstiftung Rachel Corrie*

*Radley Trust*

*Refuser Solidarity Network*

*Women for Peace Switzerland*

*Women World Day of Prayer*

*As well as to an anonymous private donor and individual donations.*

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