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English Edition

Someone would rather burn my son's school than let Jews and Arabs coexist

The graffiti on the Jerusalem school will be washed away, and classes will go on; the students' own message will live on: We refuse to be enemies.

By Ilene Prusher | Nov. 30, 2014

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Firefighters inspect a burned classroom at the Max Rayne Hand in Hand Jerusalem School, Nov. 29, 2014. Photo by Tali Meir

Someone didn't want my son to go to school this morning.

Someone would rather my child stay home than be a Jew learning in a classroom with Arabs.

Someone – some group, in fact – hates the idea of Israeli-Palestinian coexistence so profoundly that they would prefer to [set my son's pre-school classroom on fire](#), sending the kids' artwork, books and

toys up in smoke, destroying their home away from home – and destroying their parents’ sense of security about where they send their children every day. If someone has no qualms about trying to burn down a school on a Saturday night, what would stop someone from attacking it in broad daylight?

Like other parents of the 600-plus children who attend the Max Rayne Hand in Hand School, we registered our son hoping that he would be part of a generation of kids for whom Arab-Jewish coexistence would be second nature. Kids who would be bilingual, and would be less likely to fear and hate “the other,” because this other would be the very friends and teachers they have come to know under normal circumstances, as part of their everyday lives – as equals.

But someone, it turns out, very much wants me and my children to fear and hate. Someone not only tried to burn down the school from the inside – they ultimately got the first-grade classrooms and not the pre-school – but they also left behind clear messages on the walls. “There is no coexistence with cancer,” one read. And then two that we’ve been accustomed to seeing in the places of these anti-Arab attacks: “Death to Arabs” and “Kahane was right.”

Kahane’s party Kach, to refresh memories, was banned by the Israeli government in 1988 as racist and anti-democratic. Among other things, he suggested that Arabs be encouraged to emigrate and be compensated for their property, or stay in Israel without voting rights. If they refused both options, they would eventually be removed by force. The euphemism of the day was transfer, but in reality, it was a plan for state-sponsored ethnic cleansing.

More than 25 years later, it is not a fringe political party making similar suggestions, but Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman. On Friday, he published an updated platform for his party, Yisrael Beiteinu. It included a [“peace plan”](#) which calls on the government to encourage the gradual transfer of Israeli Arabs to a Palestinian state by offering them “economic incentives.” For several years now, Lieberman has been suggesting that Arab towns near the Green Line, such as Umm el-Fahm, be transferred to the Palestinian Authority in any peace agreement.

All of this is building in a common direction. Politicians don’t need to light small fires in schools; they’re busy lighting much bigger ones. The government’s attempts to pass some version of a “Jewish nation-state law” have only added to an already-acrid atmosphere. It is a movement which serves as a slap in the face to people who have for years been working towards Arab-Jewish equality. The slap says, you’re wasting your time – you’re even part of the problem.

In an equally stunning development Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked his Likud party’s faction chairman, Yariv Levin, to come up with an action plan on terrorism following the horrific terror attack in a Jerusalem synagogue on Nov. 18. His [eight-point proposal](#) includes the following: “Anyone convicted of throwing Molotov cocktails or fireworks will have their citizenship or residency automatically revoked.” An Arab’s citizenship in this country, we are clearly being told, is not only worth less, but can be stripped overnight.

I have to admit that the attack on my son's school has me stunned – but not entirely surprised. Since the war between Israel and Hamas this summer, since the deaths of four innocent teenagers whose faces none of us can forget, I have started to worry about our decision to sign our child up for the bilingual school, simply out of fear that it could become a target.

But the graffiti will be washed away, and classes will go on. The message that will stay up, the one that I pass every day, is on a banner the students made this summer, and which you can see from the main road. Their message in Hebrew and Arabic, inspired by a [popular Facebook campaign](#), is bigger than this one school, or this one troubling event: “We refuse to be enemies.”

After we dropped our son off at school this morning, there was a demonstration next door called by Tag Meir, the umbrella organization that holds gatherings in opposition to Tag Mechir –anti-Arab attacks by right-wing extremists. Labor MKs Erel Margalit and Nachman Shai were there, as were many local Jerusalem city council members. Justice Minister Tzipi Livni (Hatnua) showed up as well, and was the only member of the government to do so. It would have been reassuring if the same politicians pushing for this Jewish nation-state law were to come out to in person to condemn the attack on our children's school. But they were nowhere to be found.