

Major General (retired) Ami Ayalon has been serving as Chairperson of Akim Israel since March 2010



Chairman's Statement:

The Akim Association was established in 1951 by a group of parents of intellectually disabled children who united around their common vision to improve the lives of their children, by way of changing the perception of both the establishment and Israeli society vis-à-vis people suffering from mental retardation; to develop a service array and improve the treatment offered to them. Years of determination and unyielding toil have

transformed Akim into the largest and leading entity in Israel, which acts towards these objectives and placed its people at the forefront.

Currently, after great advances have been gained in this sphere, and after intellectually disabled individuals have made irreversible achievements, the question to be asked is: Where are we going? What will the place of the intellectually disabled and their families be in Israeli society a decade in the future, or in simple words – where will we be in the year 2020?

The discussion of this question requires a study of worldwide trends.

The United Nations Convention Of The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities, was ratified in 2006. The Convention defines a vision and standards for civic and social rights which intellectually disabled persons are entitled - wherever they may be. The vision works to integrate them into all walks of life – Education, employment and housing. The basic assumption is that integration will lead to living the full potential of their abilities and create a better society which accepts the other.

When translating the vision of the convention into reality in Israel, we must start from the assumption that if until now, we emphasized the rights of intellectually disabled persons to integrate into society, from now on we must add that in the future, it will be the right of every child to meet with intellectually disabled children on a daily basis in school and at the youth center, as well as the right of every citizen to meet the intellectually disabled person during work and recreation.

Daily meetings and interaction will be expressed in better education, thereby transforming us into part of an open society which accepts the other. The convention aspires to achieve a reality wherein the number of segregated education establishments will be lower, our children will be educated and grow together, intellectually disabled persons will integrate into the community – both in the housing and leisure as well as in the work places.

Notwithstanding the arduous efforts and good work, Israel is presently way behind other countries worldwide. The Dorner Report is the first sign, but it does not yet mark a change.

The UN Convention sets self-advocacy as another goal in the framework of the vision. Currently, intellectually disabled persons in many countries are personally struggling for their rights - appearing at European Parliament committee meetings and presenting their point of view at international conventions. Intellectually disabled persons take part in determining the housing standard required by the Ministry of Welfare in their countries, reviewing and determining whether the services do indeed conform to the standards which are set,

We will face a difficult question in regard to our identity in the course of the coming decade:

Is Akim an association of parents fighting for the rights of their children - or an association of intellectually disabled persons and their families, fighting to create a better Israeli society?

And finally, we face another challenge- do we comprehend the gains of giving and whether it is possible to transform the vocabulary of rights and obligations in a way that will conform to today's reality?

In the Israeli society of 2020, the basic rights of the intellectually disabled persons will be to fulfill the civic duties of serving in the IDF or National Civic Service, as well as paying taxes and participating in public demonstrations – as a civic duty in a democratic society.

According to this new vocabulary of terms, it will be the right of all citizens to meet and become acquainted with intellectually disabled persons at school, work, recreation and residential neighborhoods. Daily meetings will transform us into better people, better citizens and the Israeli society into a more worthy society.

Do we possess the power to lead this vision?