

## Editorial

The Israel Lands Administration (ILA) is 36 years old.

In 1960, all the land deeds of the State of Israel, the Jewish National Fund and the Development Authority were deposited in the hands of a single body, the ILA. This body today commands 19,297,877 dunams<sup>1</sup> of the total state territory of 20,609,422, yielding an annual income in 1995 of NIS 3,270,222,000.<sup>2</sup> The total number of leaseholders is 900,000, and the ILA supplies virtually all the land for residential, industrial, commercial, educational and other purposes.

The ILA is supervised by the Israel Lands Council which, since the former's establishment, has adopted 761 land policy and management decisions.

This powerful body, the ILA, has recently aroused considerable media interest as well as sharp public criticism, resulting in parliamentary questions, Knesset bills, High Court petitions, arbitration, etc.

The reason for this, in our opinion, is the plight of Israel's land policy.

While efforts are certainly being made to relieve the situation and various ILA-appointed committees have drafted recommendations — there is no solution in sight.

Painful questions are being heard in the rising tide of criticism, casting doubt on the need for the ILA at all. Is the ILA fulfilling the functions for which it was created, it is being asked; in particular, the function of safeguarding national ownership of the land, which cuts to the very heart of JNF's existence, it being partner to the ILA. Is the ILA, in its present format, even capable of protecting the system of national land leasing against the spreading economic trend of privatization?

Assuming that the answers to these two questions are negative, one can only wonder that, to date, no protest has been voiced by the relevant bodies. Why do they not exercise the authority vested in them by the Covenant between the State of Israel and JNF of November 1961, and by the Israel Lands Basic Law to ensure the Jewish People's ownership of the land in their country. And the sooner this is done, the better.

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1 A dunam is 1/4 of an acre or 1/10 of a hectare.

2 See ILA Report No. 35, 1995.