**Yaela Raanan, CEO of the Unrecognized Villages Council**

1. **Please introduce the candidate’s general biographical background, what she did before becoming an activist, etc.**

Dr. Yaela Raanan is the CEO of the Unrecognized Villages Council. Residing in Kissufim on the Gaza border, she is a human rights activist, social activist, and lecturer at Sapir College. Yaela is a mother of four and a grandmother. In recent decades, she has been at the forefront of the campaign for the recognition of Bedouin communities’ rights to their lands, tirelessly advocating for their rights as both citizens and human beings. Her efforts have been instrumental in securing recognition for ten Bedouin villages in southern Israel and in establishing a robust organizational framework for the Unrecognized Villages Council, ensuring its ongoing efforts toward the recognition and regularization of all villages.

Yaela was raised in Arad, where as a child her aspirations revolved around creating a just and equitable society where everyone was treated with dignity. Recognizing the challenges inherent in effecting social change, particularly as a woman, she pursued academic studies, ultimately earning a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Utah. Her goal was to leverage her academic credentials and expertise as catalysts for social impact and change, a commitment evident in the courses she teaches at Sapir College: “Oppression as Policy” and “Coping with Poverty.”

During Operation Protective Edge, Yaela found herself evacuating her three-year-old daughter from the kibbutz, leaving her older children and partner behind. She cared for the community she was part of as a member of the emergency team while striving to find solutions for the residents of unrecognized villages who lacked secure shelter. This experience was pivotal: “During the war, I began to take action on a national level - everything is interconnected, and if we don’t address problems at the root, society will spiral further into cruelty and hatred. Three movements emerged from this war: the Periphery Movement, Women Wage Peace, and Standing Together; I joined them all. In each, I worked with others to create a better society. I’m also involved in social justice issues... For years, I was a single mother struggling financially. I felt the fear of not having a place to live with my children looming over us every month. The system favors the wealthy, but there are ways to fundamentally reform it. For example, I strongly believe in the idea of universal basic income.”

In the past two decades, Dr. Raanan has dedicated herself to advocating for the rights of the residents of unrecognized Bedouin villages, the most marginalized population in Israel. Kibbutz Kissufim is one of the kibbutzim closest to the Gaza border and is frequently impacted by violence. On October 7, Yaela experienced the fear of death when she was trapped for hours in a secure room, huddled in bed with her 13-year-old daughter, while terrorists rampaged their home. After escaping, she and the Kissufim community were evacuated to a hotel by the Dead Sea, and since then they have been seeking ways to create a shared future for themselves under impossible circumstances. Dr. Raanan has played an active role in the kibbutz, serving as the head of the education committee and as part of the emergency team responsible for supporting and defending the community during security emergencies between Israel and Gaza. She is also active in Another Voice from Sderot and the Gaza Envelope, an organization that advocates for the recognition of the right of Gaza residents to live in peace and dignity.

1. **How does the candidate’s activity align with the criteria for the prize: courageous, impactful, committed, inspiring? Please detail each criterion.**

Impact - Dr. Raanan influences her students’ understanding of society, enabling them to identify, understand, and act against social injustices. Additionally, through her work in the Unrecognized Villages Council, she enhances the social awareness of the Bedouin community as a whole and of Bedouin women in particular, by empowering their voices, expanding their spheres of influence, and collaborating with civil society organizations that promote the Bedouin population. In every capacity she serves, Dr. Raanan is dedicated to fostering a shared and egalitarian society for Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, and Bedouins.

Promise and commitment - Dr. Raanan has worked tirelessly for years on behalf of heavily marginalized communities (Palestinians, Bedouins, southern Israelis, the economically disadvantaged, and more), who are treated as an afterthought in braoder societal struggles and peacebuilding initiatives. Despite these challenges, Dr. Raanan perseveres with tenacity, having established a long-term process for the recognition and regularization of villages. As a resident of the Negev, she spearheads a program for the socio-economic development of the region, centered on getting villages recognized and incorporating Bedouins into all facets of Negev life.

Courage - Dr. Raanan knows no fear. For years, she has been voicing her unpopular positions and persisting in her fight for a just society, despite the violence she endures and the personal toll it takes. She lectures in classrooms where students often hold very negative preconceptions and exert considerable influence against her. Nonetheless, she manages to earn their trust and leads them on a path of reflection and deep, complex learning about the social reality in the country. Moreover, she often faces violence while speaking or leading public protests.

Inspiration - Dr. Raanan is an inspiration to all who hold human rights, justice, and social equality dear to their hearts. Her determination, perseverance, willingness to make personal sacrifices, breadth of activities, and courage all make her an exemplary figure in the field of social activism. Immediately after the passing of former Knesset member Sa’id al-Harumi, may he rest in peace, when MK Mansour Abbas sought an advisor to accompany him in Bedouin affairs, he asked about ten opinion leaders in the Bedouin society who they believed could fulfill this role. They all unanimously agreed that Dr. Raanan was the most suitable person for the job, despite not being Bedouin, due to her deep understanding of the community’s needs, her impact on their society, her dedication and hard work over the years, and her commitment to ensuring their human rights.

1. **What is the candidate’s most impressive achievement?**

Working in the Unrecognized Villages Council is a slow and arduous task that requires marathon-like endurance. Dr. Raanan stepped up to the challenge of reviving the council when it fell into a deep economic and managerial crisis. Through her determined and thorough efforts, she transformed it into a stable organization, securing support from committed long-term donors. She recruited and trained top-tier staff and management, demonstrating exemplary leadership and setting a personal example. Dr. Raanan has always emphasized that the Bedouin community is the most vulnerable in Israel and that working with them is the moral and just course of action. Despite facing widespread opposition to the transfer of lands to non-Jewish hands—a stance at the heart of the Jewish consensus—Dr. Raanan’s effective work has led to the recognition of ten villages during the brief tenure of the “change government,” and has laid the groundwork for the recognition of many more villages as soon as the political situation permits. This success garnered her overwhelming support from community leaders in their recommendations to MK Mansour Abbas. Despite the Sisyphean nature of her work, filled with disappointments and setbacks, Dr. Raanan remains steadfast. She continues to strive toward her goal of making the Negev a fair and just living space for all its inhabitants, dedicating her efforts not only to the Bedouins but also to the betterment of the entire Israeli society.

1. **What personal price has the candidate paid?**

Dr. Raanan pays a daily personal price for her choice to be an activist based in the Negev. She resides in the Gaza envelope settlements, which places her in significant danger during every military operation, and even more so on October 7. Her decision to live in a southern kibbutz is driven by her commitment to being part of a cooperative and egalitarian community, where she actively contributes to a movement that promotes equality across Israel, supported by collective efforts to realize this vision. Additionally, she has been the target of an ongoing campaign for several years that has not only limited her teaching opportunities at the college but also subjected her to severe violent attacks.

Following are links illustrating these points:

<https://political-campus.co.il/lecturers/%D7%93%D7%A8-%D7%99%D7%A2%D7%9C%D7%94-%D7%A8%D7%A2%D7%A0%D7%9F/>
A campaign by Im Tirzu objecting to Dr. Raanan holding a position as a lecturer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1Vy0hJgk7o>
An event where Dr. Raanan was violently attacked while protesting at a junction.

<https://bit.ly/sapirantiYeela>
A petition by students against Dr. Raanan.

<https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/education/2023-10-30/ty-article/.premium/0000018b-7d28-d0f6-afeb-7fbd3ad80000>

A review published in *Haaretz* about left-wing activists suffering from slander and threats.

1. **How will the prize impact the candidate’s activity? If you win the prize, how will you use it?**

Dr. Raanan will use the prize for two main purposes: Firstly, she faces a very aggressive campaign by Im Tirtzu other right-wing organizations aiming to silence voices in academia. As a result, and as Achlama Peretz also points out in her recommendation letter, Dr. Raanan’s teaching workload at Sapir College has significantly decreased over the years, and this year in particular. A portion of the funds will allow Dr. Raanan to rebuild her career with a more intensive focus on the Unrecognized Village Council.

Secondly, Yaela has lost her home; the family nest that was concentrated in the kibbutzim on the Gaza Envelope has disintegrated, with family members dispersing to America (her daughter left the country a week after October 7 due to the trauma), Africa (where her partner currently works), and across Israel. The high ongoing costs of living outside the home while continuing her work as the CEO of the Villages Council pose a serious threat to Yaela’s and her family’s financial stability. This is particularly critical at a time when the village residents are unprotected and have suffered significant losses. The financial strain may compromise her ability to effectively lead the organization, which is especially vital now, during the most severe crisis in the country’s history.

**Rivka Cohen Benilulu, Social Activist**

1. **Please introduce the candidate’s general biographical background, what she did before becoming an activist, etc.**

Rivka Cohen Benilulu, known as Ricky, was, until the 2011 social justice protests, one of the thousands of women who grew up in poverty only to continue living in poverty. As a mother of five children who endured domestic violence, Ricky’s life was consumed by the daily battle for survival. Her childhood and youth, like those of many girls in similar circumstances, were marred by a series of profoundly challenging experiences both at home and in welfare institutions. However, despite these hardships, Ricky managed to complete her education successfully, thanks to her intellectual abilities and unwavering determination.

After the birth of her eldest daughter, the desperate need for a roof over their heads led them to squat in an abandoned apartment. Later, she and her husband qualified for public housing. Yet, between struggling to provide for her family, enduring domestic violence, and constantly fighting against welfare services, Ricky also found herself trapped in a cycle of debt, a burden she has only recently managed to escape. Facing physical threats, Ricky sought refuge in a shelter for battered women. However shortly thereafter, realizing she might lose her apartment, she chose the risk of domestic violence over losing her home. Throughout these years, Ricky personally experienced the state’s failures to protect her and her children. After divorcing her husband and shouldering the burden of family debts, she persevered in her struggle for survival, solely for the sake of her children. When Israeli citizens took to the streets in 2011, Ricky joined them, and since then, she has been dedicating herself not only to her own struggle but primarily to advocating for other women and men grappling with poverty and housing insecurity.

1. **How does the candidate’s activity align with the criteria for the prize: courageous, impactful, committed, inspiring? Please detail each criterion.**

Ricky’s first foray into advocating for other women occurred during the 2011 protests. She swiftly integrated into the Unpleasant Women–Unpleasant Men group and emerged as a pivotal activist in the Social Justice–Situation Room, an organization committed to amplifying the voices of marginalized communities in the protest movement. Ricky rose to prominence in the public housing movement as a member of The Fighters, a group of women advocating for public housing rights and leading the Public Housing Forum, whose mission is to enact comprehensive reforms in public housing policy. This group became a refuge for those disillusioned by the authorities’ inability to provide adequate housing solutions.

Through her involvement, Ricky gained widespread recognition as a public figure. As a leader, her voice resonates not only on the streets but also in mainstream and alternative media platforms. Ricky led and initiated discussions with policymakers to effect substantial changes in housing policy. In their ongoing efforts, The Fighters strive not only to be heard but also to engage with those willing to listen and take action.

Throughout her struggle, Ricky demonstrated exceptional personal courage. Not only did she bravely share her own story with the public, but she also fearlessly confronted individuals in positions of power, whether within housing companies or in the corridors of the Knesset and government. Her steadfast determination yielded tangible results, influencing changes in housing company policies, such as addressing evictions and sexual harassment, and making an impact at the executive level. Particularly noteworthy was her collaboration with former Housing Ministry CEO Hagai Resnick to enact significant changes in public housing policy under Minister Yoav Galant. As a result, Ricky’s struggle alongside her fellow Fighters became one of the most remarkable grassroots movements. She emerged as an inspirational figure for women facing housing difficulties and a resource for both women and men living in poverty, many of whom seek her guidance and assistance, from fundraising to navigating bureaucratic processes. Even today, as Ricky grapples with the personal and physical toll of her activism (more on this later), she remains committed to advocating for those in need.

However, Ricky’s activism has extended beyond “the field.” Over the years, she has amassed extensive knowledge, not only through her own life experiences but also through independent research and study on welfare and housing policy issues. Like many women living in poverty, Ricky learned that no one was going to inform her about her rights as a citizen. As her activism attracted attention from academics, she was presented with the opportunity to become a researcher herself. Despite the fact the she is only now completing her undergraduate studies at the Open University, Ricky has already co-authored several academic articles published both domestically and internationally. This not only demonstrates her intellectual capabilities but also her broad perspective and ability to analyze the struggle from both external and internal viewpoints. However, Ricky is not content to stop there. Upon completing her studies, she intends to continue learning not only for her personal growth but also to further expand the struggle and her activism.

1. **What is the candidate’s most impressive achievement?**

Our society often underestimates the capabilities of individuals living in poverty. Ricky’s most notable achievement lies in her emergence as a public figure with a resounding voice and cultural impact, tirelessly advocating for the housing rights of those facing economic and social hardships. This makes it difficult to pinpoint a single accomplishment in her efforts; rather, focus should be placed on her influence as the public figure she has become. Evidence of her influence can be found in countless Facebook posts and private messages expressing gratitude for her advocacy, whether for individuals or broader housing issues. Visitors to Ricky’s Facebook page will not only witness her bravery, as she openly shares her battle with recently diagnosed cancer, but also discover her role as a crucial support system for those in need, often strangers to her. A heartwarming anecdote exemplifies this: while seeking legal aid for debt relief, Ricky was referred to a lawyer by a woman who later revealed that they had crossed paths before. Unbeknownst to Ricky, she had facilitated the donation of a laptop for this woman’s daughter during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grateful for the chance to reciprocate, the woman appreciated the opportunity to repay Ricky’s kindness.

1. **What personal price has the candidate paid?**

We should start by noting the rewards of activism. Today, Ricky cannot imagine her life without the activism to which she has dedicated herself for over a decade. Wherever she goes, Ricky stands as the tireless activist championing the rights of the marginalized. However, activism comes with personal costs. The immediate cost is financial. Devoting herself to activism while living in poverty and being burdened by the debts imposed upon her by society has prevented Ricky from earning a decent livelihood. But the most significant cost is physical and health-related. The relentless struggle, not only against domestic challenges but primarily against government authorities and welfare institutions, has taken a toll on her body. As mentioned, Ricky is currently battling cancer, and over the years, the struggle has exacted additional health tolls that she still needs to address. At the same time, her dedication to the cause has affected her ability to fight for the health and well-being of her children. However, even in the face of financial constraints and the obstacles frequently imposed by restrictive welfare authorities, Ricky remains steadfast in her fight. Another aspect of the struggle and its costs relates to Ricky’s integrity and sensitivity to inauthenticity, in both her allies and opponents. Ricky embodies and vocalizes the principle of speaking truth to power, a trait that all who know her recognize and admire.

1. **How will the prize impact the candidate’s activity? If you win the prize, how will you use it?**

Winning the prize will allow Ricky, quite literally, to stand on her own two feet. Now, with the burden of debts lifted from her, Ricky will be able to use the funds for her and her family’s self-recovery. A portion of the prize will serve as compensation for the income she did not receive for her years of extensive activism on behalf of society, often covering her expenses out of pocket. However, the majority will be dedicated to developing and expanding her personal skills, primarily through completing her bachelor’s degree, and as previously mentioned, continuing her studies toward a master’s degree. Thus, a significant portion of the prize will be invested in education and training that will enable Ricky to continue to act for the public good.

1. **Additional Comments: If you have any further comments regarding the candidate’s character or achievements that could not be mentioned elsewhere in the form, you may add them here:**

As much as I have tried to describe Ricky’s work and personality section by section, it seems inadequate. Ricky is an inspiration to so many women living a life of hardship. Even in the toughest times, she never stops thinking about what she can do to stand by these women. It is an honor for me to nominate Ricky for the Truth to Power prize, because I don’t know anyone who speaks truth to power like she does.

**Mickey Rosenthal, Social Activist and Journalist**

1. **Please introduce the candidate’s general biographical background, what he did before becoming an activist, etc.**

Rosenthal has been tackling the ailments of Israeli society for nearly four decades, as an editor, reporter, producer, investigative journalist, and social activist. Motivated by a profound love for his country, its people, and Israeli society, he dreams of achieving a fairer distribution of national resources, reducing inequality, confronting human rights violations, racism, and the exploitation of vulnerable workers, advocating for the rights for people with disabilities, upholding the rule of law, and combatting public corruption.

Rosenthal began his professional career at the newspaper *Hadashot* in 1983 and was one of its founders. From 1986 to 1999, he held a series of positions at *Yedioth Ahronoth,* including deputy editor and head of the news department. In 2002, he hosted the series *Bulldog* ( Channel 8) pioneering and developing the docu-activist genre in Israeli journalism.

Rosenthal also initiated and hosted the investigative series *Bulldozer* on Keshet, Channel 2. His distinctive activist approach brought the program to peak viewership for a commercial channel and introduced many viewers to “boring” issues rarely covered on prime-time TV, ranging from the establishment of illegal settlements and environmental issues to the nexus of wealth, government, and media dynamics. Rosenthal has published hundreds of investigative pieces across various channels, including *Hamakor* (*The Source)* on Channel 10 with Raviv Drucker.

Alongside his journalistic work over the years, Rosenthal has consistently shared his perspectives and findings primarily with young audiences. Through hundreds of lectures at schools, youth movements, and pre-military academies, he has inspired young people to advocate for a more just society and to engage as active citizens.

From 2005 to 2008, Rosenthal researched, produced, and presented *The Shakshuka System* (referenced in a separate section), a film that was later incorporated into the extended communication studies curriculum in high schools.

Mickey Rosenthal has been honored with the following awards for his journalistic work:

The Pratt Award for Environmental Journalism in 2003
The Sokolov Award for Broadcast Journalism in 2004
The Knight of Quality Government Award in the field of communication in 2007
(The Movement for Quality Government)
The Courage in Journalism Award in 2009
The Best Documentary Film Award in 2009 (Israeli Documentary Creators Forum)
*The Shakshuka System* also won Best Documentary Film of the year at the Ophir Awards

Rosenthal was elected as a member of the Knesset for the Labor Party in 2013. During his six-year tenure, he continued to focus on social issues and defend Israeli democracy from those scheming against it. Rosenthal initiated and promoted a series of social laws, particularly in the fields of welfare and anti-corruption.

In recent years, Rosenthal founded the Coalition for Saving the Dead Sea, which encompasses the majority of environmental organizations addressing the issue. He has been active in protesting against the dictatorial coup and against harm to non-combatants in the Gaza war.

Rosenthal is also a member of Friends of Breaking the Silence.

1. **How does the candidate’s activity align with the criteria for the prize: courageous, impactful, committed, inspiring? Please detail each criterion.**

In an era where economic power is increasingly consolidated in the hands of a select few, and with print and electronic journalism witnessing a decline in their traditional role as watchdog, individuals and journalists who posses the talent and courage to withstand the influence of government authorities and wealth are becoming rare.

In this landscape, Mickey Rosenthal stands out as a unique voice, vitally important in a society that is losing such figures. Without the protection of the institutionalized journalistic mechanisms, he confronts the most powerful economic forces in the country, jeopardizing not only his professional prospects but at times even the financial security of his family.

Mickey fights bravely against systems stronger than himself for a more equitable, just, and less corrupt society. His unwavering dedication to the Israeli public and society comes at a significant personal cost.

Rosenthal also serves as an inspiration to young people, meeting with them regularly and encouraging them to take part in public activities and fight for equality and justice. His investigative work has sparked public outrage and has often led to actions against the injustices he uncovered.

Even today, Rosenthal is very active against right-wing tyranny and the all-out war in the Gaza Strip, fighting on behalf of non-combatants and for humanitarian values. He is also dedicated to preserving the Dead Sea, a rare and exceptional natural treasure that is dwindling away due to greed. In this case too, vested interests and big money are involved, but Rosenthal does not back down.

1. **What is the candidate’s most impressive achievement?**

The film *The Shakshuka System* has been viewed by about a million Israelis. Most of them had not realized just how toxic and corrupt the relationship between wealth, government, and the media was until they saw the film, which sparked significant reactions and a broad public debate on the issue. *The* *Shakshuka System* has become an established concept in itself, describing corruption and blatant injustice.

1. **What personal price has the candidate paid?**

For years, Rosenthal has faced massive defamation lawsuits from those seeking to silence him. True to the saying attributed to George Orwell that “Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed. Everything else is public relations,” he did not shy away from confronting individuals and organizations stronger than himself, even when he didn’t know how he would fund his efforts.

After starting work on his film *The Shakshuka Method*, he was fired from Channel 2 while simultaneously facing a 3.5 million shekel defamation lawsuit from the Ofer family. Neither the lawsuits nor the threats against him and his family aimed at stopping his exposés and activity discouraged Mickey, although he and his family endured difficult years.

1. **How will the prize impact the candidate’s activity? If you win the prize, how will you use it?**

The prize would greatly assist Mickey in continuing his public service activities, all of which he currently undertakes on an entirely voluntary basis. His fight to preserve the Dead Sea is in full swing. Mickey established a dedicated association for the cause and even initiated and organized the Coalition for Saving the Dead Sea, which includes the majority of organizations dealing with the issue. Additionally, Mickey initiates and promotes expert opinions designed to enhance public discourse and advance practical solutions for saving the sea while also arranging meetings with decision-makers. Rosenthal actively publishes articles and interviews across diverse media platforms, addressing both environmental concerns and their geopolitical implications.

Moreover, following the Gaza war, Rosenthal intends to resume championing the idea of coexistence with the Palestinians as the only viable solution to the conflict. He plans to donate at least half of the prize money to Breaking the Silence.