April 29, 2019

24 Nisan, 5779

To: Dame Shirley Porter

Re: Cultural Change Project Promoting Litter-free Public Spaces by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI)

Dear Shirley,

Given the extraordinary activities of the Porter Fund in the areas of environmental preservation, nature protection, education, and research, we are honored to invite you to take part in an initiative of cultural change for litter-free public spaces in Israel.

We are aware of the amazing change that you wrought in Westminster regarding littering. You initiated this change while you were still a citizen, concerned by the litter in open spaces and streets, and, as Mayor of Westminster, your efforts met with great success and brought about lasting change. As in Westminster at the time, Israel is now in need of dramatic change with regards to its citizens’ littering habits. Israeli public spaces are strewn with trash, causing significant harm to the natural environment and ultimately to the human residents themselves. The damage goes much deeper than mere aesthetics.

Anyone going on a nature hike in Israel, spending time at its beaches, or travelling or walking through public spaces, has encountered this painful reality. People discard their trash in public spaces, and while others may collect the litter, all too often even the collected trash ends up remaining in place rather than being carted away to a disposal site.

Photographs depicting mountains of trash, left behind by what has become known as the “littering Israeli,” have become routine news items following Jewish holidays.

Lack of adequate infrastructure means that even when the trash is collected, it is not brought to a disposal site. The result: trash is scattered by wild animals and once again the public spaces are covered in litter.

Littering of natural areas also causes severe ecological damage and creates hazards to public health. The litter endangers wild animals, pollutes water sources, and causes the growth and spread of certain species, thus upsetting the ecological balance, spreading diseases, and threatening public health.

Beyond the environmental issue, litter in public spaces expresses the problematic relationship between people and nature and wild places. An individual who litters, or walks by trash in a natural setting without noticing it, does not feel connection to or stewardship for the environment, and may even feel hostility or alienation.

As with other forms of environmental protection, protecting the environment by eliminating litter requires a cultural change in people’s relationship to the public spaces and nature that surround them.

Several surveys have found that the phenomenon of “public littering” is a worldwide problem that causes both aesthetic damage and significant damage to public health and natural ecological systems. These studies indicate that littering is generally a symptom of a deeper malaise: alienation, irresponsibility, a litterer’s lack of a sense of belonging to the place where s/he leaves trash behind.

The literature on environmental education indicates that changing people’s opinions or increasing their knowledge has little effect on their actual behavior. In addition, environmental issues that can only be solved by cultural and lifestyle changes clearly call for a long-term process and not merely a ‘quick fix.’

Many studies have found that people tend to litter more when the area is already littered; that is, the characteristics of the environment shape people’s behavior. In addition, the availability of trash receptacles has been found to be directly linked to the level of littering.

Today, a variety of successful projects around the world aimed at changing the littering culture indicate that a comprehensive, systematic approach is required: addressing different target populations according to the types of litter; adhering to high standards of cleanliness in public spaces; placing trash receptacles in appropriate places and explaining how to dispose of trash where there are no receptacles nearby; educational and public relations initiatives to raise awareness, via both advertising campaigns and one-on-one encounters; and backup by effective enforcement.

Moreover, it appears that a systemic change could be set in motion with a tool such as coalition-building – in this case, a broad coalition of clean-up partners, including public and community representatives, municipal officials, and representatives of the non-profit sector.

In light of this, and in light of a comprehensive examination of processes related to litter in Israel and around the world, SPNI is honored to propose a process designed to bring about a systematic cultural change in Israelis’ littering habits.

Our ultimate goal is the **creation of litter-free public spaces, brought about as a result of cultural change**.

The result we are seeking is two-fold:

* Litter-free spaces in practice (levels of cleanliness will be measured for specific public spaces chosen for the project)
* A cultural shift that will bring in its wake sustainable cleanliness for the long term

A bit about us: SPNI (NGO) is the largest and oldest environmental organization in Israel and among the oldest in the world. We are a registered, independent non-profit organization.

SPNI was founded in 1953, in the context of the battle against draining the swamp in the Hula Valley. Ever since then, our activities have focused primarily on protecting Israel’s nature, environment, and scenic vistas. Our mission is to track the most urgent environmental issues in our country and to find solutions that meet the needs of humans and of nature.

We apply our working principles in a variety of ways: education, public struggles to protect open spaces (for example, the wildflower campaign, protection of the marine spaces and the coastline, conservation of the Kinneret, the Crane Project in the Hula Valley), lobbying decision-makers and members of planning boards, encouraging hiking and domestic tourism, marking trails, working with the public in cities and small towns, and fostering cooperation between environmental and commercial bodies.

The public has been a natural partner in our work all along: tens of thousands of families are members of SPNI, hundreds of thousands of people participate in our activities and hikes every year, and thousands of children and youth are active in our educational frameworks and in the nature and wilderness classes we offer. Our strength as a nature protection society stems from our large community of active, contributing supporters who identify with our goals.

Our keys to success:

* Multiple interfaces with the public and with decision-makers – We are active across wide geographical areas and we are involved in regular, active partnerships with both national and municipal bodies.
* The ability to activate a large circle of participants – We have extensive experience in successfully leading projects with large numbers of participants.
* Organizational skills to act in four spheres: education, civil enforcement, infrastructure, and public relations – The four spheres of action proposed for this project are those in which we work on an ongoing basis.
* Experience in working with the public and the capacity to create meaningful public activities – We regularly run public activities on both the regional and the national scale.
* Joining forces – We can integrate the project’s content into SPNI’s day-to-day activities, in addition to the activities specifically designated as part of the project.
* Use of urban nature surveys as a significant tool in the process (both to foster a sense of belonging and to provide a tool for measurement and evaluation) – As a professional body, we specialize in conducting professional surveys accompanied by and in cooperation with the public.
* A system of measurement and evaluation – The use of this system will enable us to pace and track the project, as well as continuously improve the project and hone its precision.
* Pilot projects – This involves work in defined areas, which enables measurement and evaluation as well as increasing knowledge and fine-tuning the project, with the goal of gradually increasing the project’s scope.
* Activities in regions that meet the requirements for inclusion – This involves a broad selection of partners, extensive infrastructure, high visibility, and established SPNI activity.
* Ability to demonstrate change and its effects – We can conduct comparisons between regions where the activities are carried out and regions where they are not.

Action strategies:

The working outline of the project is based on a review of the literature and on similar projects that SPNI has carried out in the past. The proposed mode of operation is based on the following insights:

In order to reach the desired objectives, a systematic approach is required, comprising several layers:

* In-depth educational and public relations activities and an advertising campaign in a specific area (pilot), combined with a national campaign.
* Ongoing activity for a significant length of time – a ‘one-shot deal’ cannot bring about cultural change.
* Creation of a broad coalition of committed, active partners. Cooperation across various sectors: national government, local government, academia, civil society, etc. SPNI will lead this cooperation in whichever spaces the pilot takes place, as well as on a national level.
* Ensuring adequate physical infrastructure that will allow appropriate norms of cleanliness to be upheld.
* Effective enforcement, relying on both citizens and municipalities.
* Successes during the project and visible, recognizable results in the field will catalyze motivation to continue and expand the project.

What does not work?

* One-time cleanup projects that are not reinforced or accompanied by an educational process: while such projects can produce some nice photo opportunities and bring about short-term results, they do not product the hoped-for result – cultural change.
* Media campaigns that are not backed up by other initiatives: a clear example is the “Those who litter are trash” campaign led by the Ministry of the Environmental Protection.

Participants:

A meaningful process that will bring about significant, long-term change will require a coalition of committed partners on both local and national levels. The project depends upon fostering cooperation between various parties and working together with the following bodies:

The Ministry of Environmental Protection – The Cleaning Fund operates under the auspices of this ministry.

Local governments – The local government is the primary partner for this project. Planning in the field and managing the project will take place in cooperation with local governments. Civil enforcement will be accompanied by direct municipal enforcement.

On the national level, cooperation will take place with the Center for Local Government and the Center for Regional Councils.

The school system – Carrying out environmental education programs in the context of school-wide and grade-specific activities, to be defined together with the local school system. On the national level, cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

The informal education system – Setting up a system of environmental education training for youth group counselors and for professional mentoring of the counselors as they implement the program, running experiential activities on the material learned, and optimizing the educational process.

Residents – This project rests on the power of the public. A meaningful process can only take place with public participation. The project will involve the creation of citizen action groups, who will undergo training and carry out “face to face” public relations.

Academia – We foresee possible cooperation with academics to implement reliable measurement and evaluation procedures, which will help us track the progress of the project, as well as adjust the process as needed to increase precision.

Other nature protection organizations that are active locally – The Nature and Parks Authority, drainage authorities.

Attached to this letter you will find a detailed presentation, laying out the proposed plan of operation in detail.

We invite you to support this project, which will transform the current state of littering in Israel. By taking part in the project, you can join us in working together for a cleaner Israel!

We will gladly answer any questions and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and present the project in greater detail.

Iris Han

Director-General, SPNI