



STATE OF ISRAEL



**State Comptroller
and Ombudsman of Israel**

Bringing People Closer

Model for the Accessibility of the Office of the Ombudsman through Regional Reception Branches

In his constitutional function as Ombudsman, the State Comptroller plays a central role in defending the individual against the arbitrariness of state authorities. The Office of the Ombudsman (hereafter also referred to as "the Office"), is a special and separate unit in the Office of the State Comptroller through which the State Comptroller fulfills his role as state Ombudsman. The Office provides an address to which thousands of members of the general public can turn, acting as their mouthpiece in their conflict with government.

Having said this, the public includes certain weak populations, such as the elderly, minority groups, low income earners and new immigrants, a proportion of which are totally unaware of the existence of the Ombudsman institution or have difficulty submitting complaints in writing in the regular ways, by post, electronic mail or fax. These weak populations are concentrated mainly in the periphery, far away from the three main offices of the Office which are situated in the central cities: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa.

In order to make these populations more aware of the Office of the

Ombudsman, and of the accessibility of the Office to them, we felt that the most appropriate and effective way to do this was by bringing the offices of the Office of the Ombudsman physically closer to them.

To this end, we decided several years ago to establish branches of the Office throughout the areas of the periphery. These branches would be prepared to receive residents living in those areas and to provide them with professional, efficient and rapid service. To date three new branches have been opened - in Be'er Sheva in the South, in Nazareth and Nazareth Illit in the North - and in the near future another two branches will be opened, one in the central region (Ramla-Lod) and the other close to the northern border of the country (Kiryat Shmona).

In order to make known to the residents of the periphery the existence of the Office, its authority to investigate complaints and ways of submitting complaints to it, the regional branches conduct broad-ranging publicity activities in the welfare offices of the local authorities in the respective areas and in various social welfare and voluntary organizations. Furthermore, the Office publishes the relevant information, several times a year, in the local press (in Hebrew, Arabic, Russian and Amharic) and distributes in numerous locations, including welfare offices and aid centers, information pamphlets in several languages.

The geographic proximity of the complainants and the bodies complained against to the regional branches, where each branch acts as a small-scale version of the Office, facilitates the submitting of complaints and contributes to the efficacy and rapidity of the investigation. Those requiring the services of the Office may be received in the branch by a staff-worker who speaks their language; they may consult with him and transmit their complaint to him verbally (the branches comprise workers who speak Russian, Arabic and Amharic). Receiving the complaint directly from the complainant makes it possible to receive clarifications concerning the complaint and to coordinate expectations, thus rendering the investigation highly efficient and saving unnecessary correspondence. Some of the complaints, including those which require urgent investigation, are investigated by the branch staff, and where appropriate,

the applicant receives immediate assistance. The remaining complaints are forwarded to the main offices, according to the subject of the complaint. Even then, the branch continues to serve the complainants who persist in visiting the office in order to receive continual updates as to the handling of their complaints. If it becomes apparent that the complaint may not be investigated by the Office due to limitations of authority determined by law, the applicant receives guidance and instructions as to other bodies which may be able to handle his matter.

Experience clearly teaches that bringing the Ombudsman institution closer to the complainants has positive results and that since the opening of the branches the number of those turning to them keeps increasing: From the date of their inception, the branches have handled over 13,000 inquiries. Most of the applicants are from populations which previously rarely applied to the Office or were unaware of its existence. The numerous letters of gratitude received from the applicants and the positive feedback received from other bodies, including the welfare services dealing with those populations, also bear witness to the fact that the regional branches have successfully achieved their objectives.

Our position is that the working-model described above contributes considerably to the protection of rights of the individual, in particular those of the weak individual, and to the promotion of his well-being.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Micha Lindenstrauss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Micha Lindenstrauss, Judge (re.)
State Comptroller and Ombudsman

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Address: 12 Beit Hadfus St., Givat Shaul,
P.O.Box 1081, Jerusalem, ISRAEL 91010
Tel.: +972-2-666 5000
Fax: +972-2-666 5204

Website: www.nezivut.mevaker.gov.il

Email: ombudsman@mevaker.gov.il