



The Negev Coexistence Forum Newsletter

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A word from the editor

We at the Negev Coexistence Forum are pleased to present the 4th edition of our newsletter, now published in a new format. This edition opens with a column discussing recent events relevant to co-existence in the Negev, including relevant legislation, Knesset decisions, and government actions. Following this section are articles describing the Forum's activities in the Negev over the last few months.

Readers will also find a comprehensive overview of Negev events and issues from a critical and alternative perspective not often aired in the popular media. We hope that readers will obtain a balanced picture on current affairs in the Negev and on the hardships that local communities face.

Of the variety of activities the Forum undertook lately, it is specifically worth mentioning the presentation of a report on 'The Indigenous Bedouins of the Negev' at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations. The report was written Forum volunteer Ms. Elana Boteach, and was presented in Geneva in July by Ms. Ferial Abu-Nadi, a Forum activist from the unrecognized village of Um Batin. We would like to thank Ferial and Elana for their contributions to raising the Forum's international profile.

Have an enjoyable read!

Conference on the Public Land Law (expulsion of invaders) and the Bedouin society in the Negev _____ Ariel Dloomy

On May 22, a conference on the new 'Expulsion of Invaders' amendment and its implications on the Bedouin community in the Negev was held at the Teachers' Center in Be'er Sheva. Speakers included Judge (ret.) Abd al-Rahman Zuabi, attorney Banna Shoughry-Badarne from the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), and Haia Noach from the Negev Coexistence Forum.

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In January 2005, the Knesset approved an amendment to the Public Land

Law (expulsion of invaders), which expands the mandate of the ILA and local municipal authorities to evacuate "invaders" of public land without being granted evacuation orders from the Debt Enforcement Office or the courts. Furthermore, the amended law enables the ILA to issue evacuation orders up to three years from the date of the "invasion," and sets charges of up to one-year imprisonment for unauthorized trespassing or holding of public land. The majority of lands used by Bedouin

in the Negev are under legal dispute with regard to ownership. Therefore, the new amendment poses a threat of massive destruction of thousands of homes as well as the expulsion of Arab Bedouin civilians in the Negev from their lands.

Haia Noach reviewed the development of the land dispute between the Bedouin and the State, and concluded that the various land laws have served as the state's legal mechanism to expel the Bedouin from their ancestral lands. Noach further noted that the new amendment continues this trend.

Attorney Shoughry-Badarne presented the details of the new amendment and its implications on the population residing in unrecognized villages. She explained that this population is now subject to the threat of evacuation orders and of long and costly legal action against them. The burden of proof of ownership of the land is, ironically, on the residents, without giving them an option to postpone or appeal the ruling.



The retired Supreme Court Judge Zua'bi called the new law "racist." Zuabi said, "I am a man of law and I act in legal ways only, but they should be ashamed of legislating such a horrible law." Judge Zu'bi offered to serve as a mediator in the land dispute between the state and the Bedouin, and expressed a confidence in his ability to solve the problem in short time.

A water convoy for the unrecognized village of Tel Arad _____

On Saturday, July 17 a convoy of 30 vehicles and water tankers arrived from Tel Aviv and Jerusalem to the unrecognized village of Tel Arad in the Negev. One hundred and twenty activists from the 'Hakara' Forum protested against the government policy that prevents residents of the unrecognized villages in the Negev from having running water in their houses.

The 160 families in Tel Arad make up a total of 1000 residents, and are comprised of members of the Elnabri, El Amor, El Kashchar and El Nassasra families. Most of the inhabitants do not have access to running water. The residents are forced to bring a supply of water from outside the village using water tanks

towed by tractors. A large number of the residents have received demolition notices for their houses.

During the course of the day the villager's water tanks were filled up. Village elders and representatives from the Hakara Forum gave



speeches praising the cooperation between them. A resident from the village, Uda Elnabari, stated, "The village residents have applied numerous times for running water from the authorities, but they were told that only if they give up their land and relocate to designated townships will they be granted a connection to running water. This is in spite of a standing court order ordering the authorities to supply running water to the village. In response to our application, the following day we received demolition notices for our houses from the authorities." Elnabari summarized, "I am old but I am telling my children and grandchildren that they should not leave this land."

The Bedouins in the Negev as an Indigenous Population – a report submitted to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations _____ Elana Boteach

The Negev Co-existence Forum recently published a new report entitled, 'The Indigenous Bedouins of the Negev'. The report was written by volunteer Elana Boteach and was presented at UN conference in Geneva by Forum activist Feriel Abu-Nadi. Upon her return from the

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Abu Nadi stated that "raising awareness about and putting the Bedouins (in Israel) on the international agenda signify a step forward in our struggle."

At the heart of the working group lies the concern for the rights of indigenous peoples who live on the fringes of their countries, and the aim to preserve their cultures and traditions. These rights originate from the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Israel is a signatory.

The hardships that the Bedouins living in Israel face were presented at the conference. This was the first time that an international forum has heard a firsthand account of the situation of the Bedouins in Israel. Below is a summary report of the UN presentation:

German youth visit the Bedouin community in the Negev _____ Ariel Dloomy

A group of twenty-five German youth visited the Bedouin community in the Negev on May 17th. During the trip, the group visited the unrecognized villages of Abu-Tlul and Um-Batin as well as the Laqiya and Rahat townships. Leaders of the Bedouin community spoke to the group members about the daily life of the Negev Bedouin, and the difficulties they face.

The Negev Coexistence Forum holds monthly tours for Israeli and overseas groups ...

survivors. In a previous trip to the South, the group saw and heard about the unrecognized villages along the Negev routes, and requested

Traditionally a nomadic or semi-nomadic people, the Negev Bedouin have subsisted by farming and raising herds in the Negev desert for centuries.

Following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, with the Negev desert as part of its territory, the lives of these indigenous people were dramatically transformed. The report discusses the ramifications of Israeli policy vis-à-vis its indigenous Negev Bedouin population from 1948 until today. As with other indigenous minorities, the Bedouin are struggling for equality, recognition, and preservation of their culture and way of life. Dispossessed of the lands they had lived on for centuries, the Bedouin have lost their established means of livelihood and have consequently experienced a disruption of their traditional social and economic structures. Today, almost half of Israel's 150,000 Bedouin citizens live in seven failing government-planned townships. The remainder live in

45 villages unrecognized by the government, and do not receive basic services like water, electricity, garbage collection, education and



social services. Israel's planning authorities have given little to no consideration for the Bedouin's culture, needs or way of life. This paper takes a critical look at the outcomes of this policy, focusing on land, health, and education. Fifty-seven years after the founding of the state, the Bedouin "problem" remains unresolved and the state continues to violate the indigenous rights of the Negev Bedouin population under its control.



prior to their arrival to Israel. Atiya el-Asam spoke to the youth in the Abu-Tlul village, noting, "Just as the Jews struggled to obtain equal equality in the countries in which they were a minority, so the Bedouins want to live in Israel with full equality. It is disappointing to see that the Jewish people who suffered in Europe prevent us from basic equal rights. When you return to your country, you should tell others about the conditions of the Bedouin in Israel."

The Negev Coexistence Forum holds monthly tours for Israeli and overseas groups in order to raise awareness about the hardships faced by Negev residents in the unrecognized villages and Bedouin townships.

A working day in the village of Um El-Hiran _____

On April 9 tens of volunteers and activists from the 'Hakara' Forum participated in a working day in the unrecognized Bedouin village of Um El-Hiran, located near Hura. During the course of the day, activists built a bridge at the village entrance, expanded the soccer field, and planted trees as a symbol of empathy with the inhabitants of the village, who are living under the second expulsion threat of the village's history.

During the day, additional groups of students from the Technion and youth from the

north visited the village. They took part in the activities and heard firsthand about the situation of the unrecognized villages. Volunteers from 'Reut-Sezaka' organized children activities on site. A group of Arab and Jewish women volunteers visited the houses and conversed with local women.

The unrecognized village of Um El-Hiran is situated in the Yatir stream region in the northern Negev, five km north of Hura. In April 2004 the village residents received formal evacuation notices under the pretense that

they illegally inhabited state-owned land. The village residents have been occupying these lands since 1956, following the southern military governor's orders at the time. The original location of the village was in the Wadi Zubale area (present day location of Kibbutz Shoval). In the current location of the village the state is planning the construction of a new Jewish village under the name of Hiran.

What's new in the Negev

February On February 8 the Israel Land Administration (ILA), accompanied by police forces, demolished four residential tin shacks belonging to the Abu-Marhil Family of the El-Azazme tribe. The ILA argued that these houses were built inside a military training area. Most of the family's possessions remained buried under the ruins left by the ILA bulldozers. ILA representatives claimed that trucks transferred these possessions to the nearby Bedouin village of Bir Hadaj, to which the Abu-Marhil family is supposed to move. Thirty family members, half of whom are children, were left without shelter in the cold desert winter.

The new Minister of the Interior, Ofir Paz-Pines, promised after his appointment that no houses would be demolished in the unrecognized Bedouin villages (Haaretz, January 25, 2005); but we see that he reneged on this promise.

On February 22, the city of Be'er Sheva submitted its response to the High Court of Justice (HCJ) concerning the debate over the use of the 'Great Mosque' in Be'er Sheva. The city rejected a proposal put forward by the HCJ to make the mosque available for use as a community and cultural center for the Muslim population in the region for a set amount of time. The city justified its stance by claiming that allowing Muslims to pray in the mosque will increase tensions between the Jewish and Muslim populations and ultimately disrupt public order in Be'er Sheva. The city instead wants to turn the mosque into a museum.

March In March 2005, the District Court of Be'er Sheva issued a demolition order for a mosque in the unrecognized Arab village of Um-al-Hiran in the Negev. The claim was a familiar one – that the mosque had been built without the appropriate building permits. Judge Ido Rosen ruled that the mosque is to be demolished within 21 days of his verdict. The Court further ruled that Sheikh Mussa Abu El-Qian, who initiated the construction of the mosque, is subject to either a fine of NIS 30,000 or 120 days of imprisonment.

The central event to commemorate Land Day, which is commemorated annually on March 30th, took place this year in the Negev unrecognized village of Abu-Tlul. Hundreds of Arab and Jewish citizens from across the country participated in the event. Members of Knesset and activists from the Negev and from the North addressed participants throughout the day and 12,000 tree seedlings were planted in many of the unrecognized villages in the Negev.

April In the early morning hours of April 17, ILA bulldozers destroyed about 1,500 dunams of crops in the unrecognized village of Sahwa, east of Hura. The destroyed agricultural fields are owned by Arab citizens from the al-Atrash, al-Qsasi, Abu-Sbayt, and al-Khawathra families. More than 500 police officers and Police Special Forces raided the area to ensure the interrupted destruction of the crops. The police blocked all roads to the area, forbade residents to leave their houses, and prevented schoolchildren from traveling to their classes in Hura.

On April 20 the NGO Adalah filed an appeal to the Haifa District Court, which functions as the Water Tribunal, on behalf of six residents of unrecognized villages in the Negev. Plaintiffs requested that the Court order the Israel Water Commissioner to authorize the installation of water access points in all Bedouin villages, as required by law. This appeal followed a rejection of a similar request submitted earlier to the Water Committee of the ILA.

May On May 5 the al-Ghanami family, which resides in the vicinity of the Ramat Beka restricted military site, received nearly 50 demolition orders. These orders are an effort by state authorities to put pressure on the al-Ghanami family to move to the planned community of Abu-Krinat. The Abu-Krinat community has no approved statutory plan yet, and thus, the al-Ghanami family has no set place to which they can move and reside. In late August 2004, the authorities demolished several houses exactly in this area. In that incident, only those families that signed an agreement with the government to evacuate their homes when required did not have their homes demolished.

Tens of olive trees were uprooted on May 8 from the graveyard of the Abu-Siam tribe near kibbutz Mishmar Ha-Negev. Representatives of the Abu-Siam Family accused the ILA of uprooting these trees. The ILA rejects this accusation and claims that the graveyard and the road leading to it were built on state lands. A few days prior to the incident, ILA bulldozers damaged the road leading from the Abu-Siam community to their graveyard.

On May 17, the Supreme Court of Israel heard an appeal submitted by representatives of the Al-Uqbi tribe against a decision made by the District Court rejecting their claim to re-settle in their ancestral land, which is adjacent to the newly established Jewish settlement Gvaot Bar. Supreme Court Judge Asher Grunis requested to review the District Court file before making decision in the case. The original plan had allocated the Gvaot Bar site to the Tarabin tribe, which received alternative location. Gvaot Bar was set up overnight in early 2004 under a direct order from Effie Eitam, then Minister of Housing and Construction. The hurried construction was part of Eitam's plan 'to prevent Arab citizens taking over state lands'.

June On June 6, ILA workers uprooted about 270 olive trees in the village of Hashem Zane, south of the Jewish community of Nevatim. These trees were planted during the March 2005 Land Day. Residents of the village regard this act of tree uprooting as another step in the attempt to expropriate their lands and relocate them to the town of Segev Shalom. On February 20, as much as 1,500 dunams of wheat crops owned by these villagers were destroyed.

On June 9, the state Attorney General submitted a response to Adalah's petition to the HCJ against the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Labor and Welfare. The petition requested additional educational psychologist positions be allocated to the seven Arab-Bedouin towns in the Negev (Rahat, Laqiya, Kseifeh, Ar'ara in the Negev, Segev Shalom, Hura, and Tel Sheva). The petition was filed by Adalah attorney Morad El-Sana.

In response to the petition, the MoE committed to increase the number of educational psychologists by 50% of the total required positions as of the next school year. Within the following two years, the Ministry has further committed to a gradual increase of additional positions that will eventually reach 80% of the required staffing. This level of staffing is equal to standard rates in Jewish localities in the Negev.

On June 15, inspectors from the Ministry of the Interior, accompanied by large police forces, destroyed two commercial buildings owned by Haroon al-Sayid close to Hura. In addition, the inspectors presented new demolition orders to tens of commercial facilities along the road between Shoket Junction and Arad, as well as to the Omar Ibn-el-Hatab Mosque..

On June 21, bulldozers accompanied by large police forces demolished the house of Salame Al-Mahdi in the unrecognized village Um-Ratam, west of Dimona. Al-Mahdi said that the demolished wooden shack served as the only shelter for his eight children, who are now left without a roof over their head.

On June 30, ILA officers, accompanied by about one hundred security guards, distributed demolition orders to buildings in the village of Bir al-Mashash, located 16 km from Be'er Sheva. Police responded violently to an argument that developed at the scene. A mother (age 22) and her daughter (age 3) from the Abu-Sbeih family, as well as four young adults residents of the village, required medical treatment. Residents put up a demonstration tent in response to this incident.

July On July 18, the Ministerial Committee for the non-Jewish Sector, chaired by the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, authorized a comprehensive plan for the development of the Abu-Basma municipality, home to 25,000 residents of the Negev Bedouin community. This plan follows an earlier government decision concerning the establishment of eight new Bedouin villages in the Negev. The plan is expected to cost NIS 470 million, which will be invested in education, transportation, infrastructure, employment, housing, healthcare, welfare, and agriculture.

Major General (ret.) Giora Eiland, the head of the Israeli National Security Council (NSC) said during a conference held in the Negev that "we must do something to stop the high birth rates in the Bedouin sector." He also noted that "this level of birth rates does not allow any prospect for long-term planning in the Negev." Eiland further revealed that during the last six months the NSC prepared a plan to put an end to the problems in the Bedouin sector, which, according to Eiland, has become a national problem.

A study conducted at Ben-Gurion University by Professor Drora Fraser and colleagues found that one out of six Bedouin and one out of eight Jewish first grade pupils in the Negev suffer from malnutrition. The prevalence of malnutrition was 2.4 times higher among children from unrecognized villages than in children of the same age from Bedouin recognized townships.

The Negev Coexistence Forum and Alma College jointly chaired a special event on March 17 held at Alma College in Tel Aviv. The evening focused on unrecognized villages in the Negev, and was entitled, "Man landed on the Moon a long time ago, and I still dream of drinking water running in my tap." The title was borrowed from the documentary screened at event: "Sawawin" directed by Yael Kipper-Zaretzky, which chronicles the hardships the unrecognized Bedouin village Sawawin in the Negev, and follows the daily lives of one family and its struggle to survive.

Following the screening, Dr. Avner Ben-Amos from the Negev Coexistence Forum moderated a panel discussion on the unrecognized Bedouin villages. Dr. Tovi Fenster, a founding member of "Bimkom" Association from the Geography Department at Tel Aviv University, opened the

discussion. Fenster described the conditions under which the discriminatory land policy of the Israeli government toward the Negev

In the course of the discussion, a heated debate developed between Cohen and Fenster concerning the current solution the government is proposing to end land disputes in the Negev.

Bedouin was created. She also called for greater participation of the Negev Bedouin community in the efforts to find a resolution to their problems. Is'hak Abu-Hammad, chair of Darijat village, described the hard work performed by the people of Darijat in order to achieve formal recognition of the village. Avishai Cohen, the head of the Coordination and Control Department in the Prime Minister's Office, outlined existing

government plans for improving the conditions of Bedouin living in the unrecognized villages. Cohen admitted that the Bedouin Development Authority (BDA) is a limiting and inhibiting factor in the progress of the Bedouin, and that the government is considering dismantling this body and redistributing its responsibilities among various government ministries.

In the course of the discussion, a heated debate developed between Cohen and Fenster concerning the current solution the government is proposing to end land disputes in the Negev. While Cohen claimed that newly planned villages will solve existing problems, Fenster insisted that these villages, if approved and developed, will perpetuate the difficulties, since no lessons were learned from past mistakes in the development of the existing seven Bedouin towns

Membership and Participation in the Forum



The Forum was first established as an organization dependent on volunteers and voluntarism, by citizens who understand that without community action and intervention, government policies in the Negev lead to injustice, hostility and a depressing future for the Negev and the country as a whole. The Forum's goals are to push equal rights further and forward and to promote tolerance and coexistence in the Negev.

We invite you to join us to help advance the goals of the Forum as they are outlined in this newsletter. If you are interested in doing so you can participate in any of these above-mentioned activities, even those already underway. The Forum is open and pleased to receive ideas and new initiatives for additional activities.

In addition, the Forum needs volunteers to carry out specific roles such as:

- 1) To develop and maintain the Forum's website.
- 2) To translate texts from Hebrew to Arabic and English and in the opposite directions.
- 3) To develop projects for topics such as: group meetings between the Jewish and Arab communities of the Negev, for youth, women and senior citizens.
- 4) To participate in visits to the victims of the policy of house demolitions in the Bedouin villages of the Negev.
- 5) To investigate instances of the policy of work discrimination because of ethnic origins.
- 6) For spokespersons and public relations persons to face the media and general public.
- 7) To co-ordinate volunteers activities.
- 8) To co-ordinate Knesset lobbying activities.

Due to the economic situation and NGO regulations persons wishing to join the Negev Coexistence Forum are encouraged to pay a membership fee as follows: Individuals - 40 NIS, families - 60 NIS, students and others who wish to pay a reduced fee - 20 NIS.

* Further information regarding the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality can be obtained from details at the bottom of the page, or through the Internet at www.dukium.org.

* We shall be pleased to receive the addresses of potential readers of the newsletter, or ideas for other subjects considered suitable to be included in the newsletter.

* If you no longer desire to receive this newsletter, or if you receive the newsletter also via the Internet, or if you are interested in receiving this newsletter via the Internet and not through the post, please inform us.

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality is an independent non-party organization that was established in 1997 by Arabs and Jews - Israeli citizens who live in the Negev. The Forum's aim is to provide a framework for Jewish-Arab co-operation as a basis for a common struggle for equal civil rights and to promote tolerance and coexistence in the Negev. The Forum's activities are carried out on a voluntary basis, or funded by private foundations, in particular The New Israel Fund. These activities include meetings and social events between the communities, information drives, environment justice campaigns, recognition of the unrecognized Bedouin villages of the Negev, legal aid and representation, the struggle for employment equality in the Negev and so on.

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