

THE NEGEV COEXISTENCE FORUM
FOR CIVIL EQUALITY

2012

ACTIVITIES REPORT

פורום דו-קיום בנגב לשוויון אזרחי
منتدى التعايش السلمي في النقب من اجل المساواه المدنية
Negev Coexistence Forum For Civil Equality



SUMMARY OF 2012

The Bedouin community faced immense challenges in 2012. The community was threatened by the Government's promotion of the Praver-Amidor-Begin Plan in its various incarnations, as well as by the Jewish National Fund's (JNF) intensified planting campaign to Judaize the Negev-Naqab. In addition the Be'er-Sheva Metropolitan Plan and programs for the construction of towns for Jewish occupancy presented new hazards to the community. The year ended with the national elections, which strengthened right wing parties that strongly oppose the Bedouin claims for their land. Nevertheless, Bedouin activists and the Negev Coexistence Forum (NCF) mobilized a wider segment of the population and attracted local and international attention to Bedouin issues.

THE GOVERNMENT PROMOTES THE PRAVER-BEGIN PLAN

In 2012, the government pursued the Praver-Plan, which proposed to forcibly relocate some 30,000 people from their villages and the destruction of a large number of unrecognized villages. The plan raised considerable objection and the government nominated former Minister Benny Begin to handle a 3 months hearing process among the Bedouin. Toward the end of 2012 Begin suggested some changes to the plan, but these amendments were for the most part semantic and cosmetic rather than substantive. NCF published a position paper with its objections to the Plan. It also held protest activities, including several demonstrations opposite the Prime Minister's office in Jerusalem while the Plan was under discussion and the distribution of materials at various events.

STATE INTIMIDATION CAMPAIGN AGAINST ACTIVISTS AND RESIDENTS

Since 2010, there has been a marked increase in the harassment of NGOs activists. Numerous civil society organizations and grassroots activists came under assault through harassment by government authorities or through the campaign to de-legitimize their activities, which presented them as criminals. New legislation was aimed at limiting the activists' freedom of expression and funding opportunities, thereby suppressing their activities. Additionally, the Israeli government actively attempted to prevent peaceful assemblies and mass resistance in the Negev.

In the unrecognized village of Al Arakib, which has been demolished over 40 times, activists and residents faced harassment and incarceration for their peaceful opposition to the state's actions. The police resorted to the use of violence on a number of occasions, resulting in injuries, arrests and charges. In Bir-Hadaj on November 12th, the police fired tear gas and rubber and sponge bullets at residents, injuring many people, including women, children and the elderly. Nineteen residents –including 7 minors– were arrested in the clashes that ensued, and 29 children were subsequently taken to Soroka Medical Center in Be'er-Sheva to be treated for tear gas inhalation.

UNITED NATION'S FOCUS ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE NEGEV

In May, Dr. Mansour Nasasra read a statement on behalf of the NCF during the 11th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York. Dr. Nasasra explained how the Praver-Amidror Plan violated the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Dr. Nasasra also met privately with the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Professor James Anaya, to discuss Israeli violations of Arab-Bedouins' rights in the Negev. Professor Anaya promised to follow up on the situation and to raise the issue with the Israeli authorities.

On February 8th, the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing Raquel Rolnik visited the Negev-Naqab area. The Rapporteur also participated in a round table with experts from the Negev, including NCF executive director Haia Noach and the NCF secretariat member Khalil Alamour. Rapporteur Rolnik promised to hold a discussion in Geneva in 2013 about her findings.

NCF additionally submitted numerous reports to UN bodies (more information on this will follow).



Dr. Mansour Al Nasasra at the UN headquarter in New-York during the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues May 2012

ABOUT THE NEGEV COEXISTENCE FORUM FOR CIVIL EQUALITY

HISTORY

In 1997, a group of concerned Arab and Jewish residents of the Negev (the southern desert region of Israel) established the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF) to provide a framework for Jewish-Arab collaborative efforts in the struggle for civil equality and the advancement of mutual tolerance and coexistence. The NCF, also known as "Dukium" in Hebrew, is unique in being the only Arab-Jewish organization established in the Negev that remains focused solely on the specific issues confronting the Negev.

MISSION

The NCF considers that the State of Israel fails to fulfil its responsibility to respect, protect and meet its human rights obligations without discrimination towards its Arab-Bedouin citizens in the Naqab-Negev. As a result, the NCF has set out as one of its goals to advance the civil rights and equality for all those living in the Negev.

ACTIVITIES

Within the framework of the Recognition Forum we oppose current government policies and plans for the unrecognized villages and strive to promote alternative plans for recognition for these villages. Our activities include lobbying and awareness raising at the national and international level, protests and demonstrations, solidarity visits against house demolitions, tree planting, workshops for children and tours of the Negev unrecognized villages. The NCF works hand in hand with its partners and independently in presenting legal challenges, organizing tours and protest actions.

PARTNERSHIPS

The NCF's Social Justice Network cooperates closely with local and national organizations that have an interest in the issues concerning the Negev. One of the coalitions that we formed in 2002 was the "Recognition Forum" which aimed to achieve recognition for the unrecognized villages. The Recognition Forum includes the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), Taayush – Arab-Jewish Partnership, the Association of Forty, Rabbis for Human Rights, Women's Coalition for Peace, Yesh Gvul, Gush Shalom, The Association for Support and Defense of Bedouin Rights in Israel, The Negev Coexistence Forum, New Profile, Alternative Information Center and Social Television.

The NCF also has working ties with organizations such as Community Advocacy, the Environmental Justice Clinic at the Tel Aviv University Law School, Physicians for Human Rights, and the Regional Committees of the Unrecognized Villages, Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Adalah, the Legal Center for the Rights of the Arab Minority in Israel, Hithabrut-Tarabot, Activestills and many of the villages committees.

SECRETARIAT

The governing body of the NCF is the Secretariat whose members during 2012 were as follows:

- Musa Abu Ghanem: Lecturer and educator at Achva College; school principal; activist in various social domains, especially education; co-founder of the Negev Coexistence NCF for Civil Equality.
- Prof. Avner Ben-Amos: Historian of Education, School of Education, Tel-Aviv University.
- Rachel Naparstek: Artist, peace and social activist.
- Saïd a-Sana: Director of the Bedouin Mobile Health Unit for the past 25 years and active among the Arab Negev population.
- Yehudit Keshet: Political and social activist, writer.
- Khalil Alamour: Member of the Alsira Village Committee, former member of the Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages (RCUV) in the Negev, educator and active member of Bedouin rights in the Negev.
- Yaacov Manor: Peace activist, co-founder of The Committee Against House Demolition, Recognition Forum, Coalition of Organizations for Peace, The Water Coalition and Olive Harvest Coalition.

TEAM

During 2012, the staff was the following:

Haia Noach, Executive Director (full time)
Karen Douglas, Resource Development Coordinator
Noam Tirosh, Activities and Tours Coordinator
Michal Rotem, Press and Advocacy coordinator
Ratb Abu Krinat, Field Coordinator
Yosra Abu Kaf, Photography and Video Advocacy Coordinator
Doron Karasanty, Multaka-Mifsgash (Arab-Jewish cultural center) Coordinator
Yoav Galai, Villages interactive documentary project coordinator
Jalal Zaidneh, Arabic translator and editor
Adel A Gafir, Local advocacy coordinator
Jill Kestler D'amoç, International advocacy coordinator

The team was supported by numerous devoted volunteers from the local community.

SUPPORTING THE RESIDENTS OF AL-ARAKIB

Since the vast demolition of the village of Al-Arakib, on July 27th 2010, NCF supports its residents struggle against the demolitions of the village. The connection between the village of Al-Arakib and NCF, which had begun a couple of years before the first demolition of the village, developed into a strong bond between NCF and the residents of the village as the struggle expanded. During 2012, NCF continued the support in the struggle of Al-Arakib:

WEEKLY PROTEST AT LEHAVIM JUNCTION

The residents of Al-Arakib hold a weekly protest, every Sunday afternoon, at Rahat-Lehavim junction.

NCF's staff and volunteers join the weekly protests, chanting together with the residents in favor of recognition and against the village's demolition.



The weekly protest at Rahat-Lehavim junction

AL-ARAKIB MARKS TWO YEARS SINCE THE FIRST DEMOLITION

In July, the residents of Al-Arakib marked the second year since the village was demolished on July 27th, 2010. Since then it was demolished over 37 times. Over 150 people — including Bedouin, Israeli and international activists, MK Ahmed Tibi and other local leaders — marched from the main road to the village and shared a special Iftar dinner for Ramadan.

"It is a privilege to be a part of the struggle in Al-Arakib," said NCF Executive Director Haia Noach: "As a Jewish citizen, it's not a right but a duty to support people whom the State of Israel is oppressing."

SOLIDARITY VISITS TO AL-ARAKIB

In order to raise awareness and express support in the struggle of Al-Arakib, NCF organized in 2012 three solidarity visits to the village, in collaboration with other NGOs. Israeli and international activists arrived at the village, learned about the ongoing struggle and met with its residents. The visits were held on the following dates:

- On January 28, 2012
- On May 27, 2012
- On July 27, 2012

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

LAND DAY EVENT IN WADI AL NAAM

On March 30th two thousand Bedouin and other activists marked the annual “Land Day” in the Negev-Naqab in the village of Wadi Al Naam. Many participants held placards protesting the proposed Prawer Plan and the house demolition policy. Among other speakers, NCF Executive Director Haia Noach presented a speech to the gathering. Noach stated, “Everyone should work together — Arabs and Jews—to organize an effective campaign that will bring results, particularly the recognition of villages.”

SOLIDARITY VISIT TO BEDOUIN VILLAGES AFFECTED BY DEMOLITIONS

On September 22, 2012, following demolitions in Wadi-Aricha, Abdeh and Al-Arakib, NCF organized a solidarity visit in order to make Israeli and international activists aware of the situation in the Negev-Naqab.

Dozens of participants arrived for the visit and expressed their support for the ongoing struggle of the villages for recognition.

Among other speakers, NCF Executive Director Haia Noach presented a speech and stated, “Everyone should work together—Arabs and Jews—to organize an effective campaign, which will bring results, particularly recognition of unrecognized villages.”

CHILDREN’S WORKSHOP

In the villages of Umm Mitnan and Al Makiman, two clowns – Carmen and Lorena – from the Spanish organization “Bailando Esperanza” put on a show for the children and taught them fun clowning techniques.

In September, Israeli volunteers—both Arab and Jewish—led a drumming workshop for children from the village of Al-Arakib. Al-Arakib children are now regularly using drums during the weekly protest against the demolitions of their village.

From late December 2011 to early January 2012, NCF’s annual photography workshop was conducted in the villages of Al-Arakib and Alsira, in cooperation with the villages’ committees. More information about this workshop is contained in the “Visual Literacy Project” section below (page 10).

BELGIAN ACTIVISTS CYCLE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE BEDOUIN

In November a group of Belgian activists conducted a bike tour rehearsal in preparation for a five-day cycling tour set to take place in April 2013. The group biked for two days, and visited Al-Arakib, Wadi Al-Naam, and other Bedouin villages to demonstrate solidarity with the unrecognized villages.

They spoke with Bedouin leaders in the villages and learned about their daily struggles for basic rights in the Negev.



Preparation leading up to five-day bike tour

JOINT CELEBRATION OF IFTAR

On July 31st NCF hosted its annual Iftar dinner (the Ramadan breakfast meal) at the Multaka-Mifgash Cultural Center in Be'er-Sheva. Dozens of attendees — both Arab and Jewish—shared a meal and viewed a brief presentation by NCF staff members about NCF's varied activities over the past year. In addition, one of the Muslim participants gave a short talk about the Ramadan fast and its meanings.



Iftar 2012 at Multaka-Mifgash Arab and Jews end the Ramadan's fast day

AWARENESS RAISING TOURS AND PRESENTATIONS

NCF conducted in 2012 over 40 guided tours to Bedouin villages for groups and individuals. Politicians, diplomats, international and local students, educational institutions, international bloggers, artists, and activists participated in the tours, a total of over 350 people. In these tours we combined academic and historical presentations with encounters with people living in recognized and unrecognized villages, enabling people to gain a deep and critical understanding of the policy of

the Israeli state in the Negev urging them to advocate changes in these policies. In addition, we hosted and/or taken part in 11 panels and lectures to various audiences, at which we publicized our mission and goals. The tours included the following:

16 May | The British Ambassador to Israel, Matthew Gould, spent time with NCF Secretariat Members Khalil Alamour and Avner Ben-Amos and NCF Executive Director Haia Noach. The NCF team talked to Ambassador Gould about issues affecting the Negev and organized a meeting between him and the residents of the unrecognized village of Al-Arakib.

“For a village to be destroyed 37 times and rebuilt 38 times says a lot about the determination of the authorities, but even more about your determination”, Gould told Al-Arakib leader Sheikh Sayyah Al Touri during their meeting.

Mid-June | NCF Executive Director and Aziz Abu Mdigem from the village of Al-Arakib participated in a seminar in Sweden. They visited the parliament and met with Mr Mehmet Kablan, the leader of the Swedish Green Party. In their talks, they described the Bedouin's struggle for justice and equality in the Negev-Naqab and the ongoing demolitions taking place in Al-Arakib.

22 July | Representatives from NCF and Adalah gave the South African Ambassador to Israel, Ismail Coovadia, a tour of the unrecognized village of Al-Arakib. Al-Arakib leader Sheikh Sayyah Al Touri urged the Ambassador to apply pressure on the Israeli government and the Jewish National Fund to stop the forestation project. Most importantly, Sheikh Sayyah asked the ambassador to help raise public awareness of the village's plight.

Early August | Guided by NCF staff, French Embassy members visited the unrecognized Bedouin villages of Al-Arakib and Wadi Al-Naam.

7 August | Leaders of the Israeli social justice protests, including Stav Shaffir (who became a Knesset member in January 2013) came to the Negev to meet NCF activists and visit local villages. The objective of the trip was to find ways to work together and to better present the main issues with which the Bedouin community is struggling today, in particular, the Israeli Government's home demolitions policy in the recognized and unrecognized villages.

24 October | NCF participated in an information briefing and tour of the Negev for diplomatic missions in Israel. Organized by Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, the tour brought to the Negev representatives from the Greek, Canadian, EU, Belgian, Dutch and other embassies, for the purpose of presenting the challenges facing the Bedouin community. NCF Executive Director Haia Noach spoke to the group about the Jewish National Fund's role in Bedouin displacement and house demolitions in the area.

6 November | Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)—Veronique De Keyser of Belgium, Ivo Vajgl of Slovenia, Emer Costello of Ireland and Said El Khadraoui of Belgium - participated in a briefing organized by Adalah. Haia Noach talked about the role of the Jewish National Fund in the demolition of Bedouin villages in the Negev, and afforestation plans in the region.

VISUAL LITERACY PROJECT

During the two-week winter school vacation, the NCF ran a photography and video workshop in Alsira and Al Arakib with the support of several professional Arab and Jewish photographers and activists. These to express their experiences of the conflict and deal with their emotions and they also provided opportunities for children and their families to enjoy themselves. Various aspects of photography were explored with the children such as landscapes, portraits and photojournalism.



Photography workshop participant in Aalsira

DOMESTIC ADVOCACY AGAINST GOVERNMENT PLANS OF DISPOSSESSION

28 February | The NCF wrote an open letter to Professor Yaakov Neeman, the Israeli Minister of Justice, protesting the Praver Plan and outlining its contradictions. The letter was sent to the United Nations International Committees concluding observations on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR).

21 March | A march organized by Bedouin women in opposition to the Praver Plan took place in Beer Sheva. Approximately 150 people joined the march, including members of NCF

22 May | A demonstration took place in front of the Fifth Conference of the Negev, which took place in Beer-Sheva and was organized by the Ministry for the Development of the Negev and Galilee. When residents of Al-Arakib attempted to attend the Negev Conference to raise the issues that matter to their community, they were turned away. "The conference is at the expense of the Bedouin" said Sheikh Sayyah al-Touri, leader of Al -Arakib.

1 July | the NCF secretariat sent a letter to Professor Assaf Razin, Head of the Investigation Committee for the Examination of the Appropriate Organization of the Municipal and Local Planning Areas of the Bedouin Sector for the Beer-Sheva District. In the letter, the Secretariat members explained why council elections should take place as quickly as possible. The Abu Basma Regional Council was established on 2003 and elections still have not been held.

14 August | NCF participated in a petition (submitted by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) to the Israeli Supreme Court. The petition called for the cancellation of a plan to build new Jewish villages in the Negev at the expense of Bedouin citizens. Unfortunately, the petition was rejected because it was filed before an operative plan was submitted.

18 October | NCF participated in a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Interior offices in Be'er-Sheva, with approximately 2,500 Bedouin citizens and their supporters attending. The protest was organized in conjunction with a general, one-day strike in protest of the recent Israeli police violence and home demolitions in Bedouin villages in the Negev.



The demonstration against house demolitions and police brutality in Be'er-Sheva

In December | NCF participated in a demonstration against demolitions in village of Bir-Hadaj.

7 December | NCF participated in the annual Human Rights March in Tel Aviv, organized by the Israeli Association for Civil Rights (ACRI). During the March, NCF members marched together with Al-Arakib residents, with a photo exhibition of demolitions and police brutality. Demonstrators chanted for the recognition of Bedouin villages in the Negev and against Israel's home demolition policy.



NCF participated in the Human Rights March in Tel Aviv

REPORTING AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Throughout the year, the NCF reviewed and criticized Israeli policy toward the Bedouin. We did this through reports published in English, Hebrew and Arabic. These included:

- A shadow report to the UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in January.
- A report in March regarding Availability and Accessibility of Government, Commercial, Public and Health Services in Arab Villages and Structural Discrimination Against Arab Employees in Government Offices in the Negev, on the occasion of the International Day against Racism.
- An "Alternative NGO Report: Information for Establishing a List of Issues for the State of Israel before the Committee on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)" that was published in April.
- A report in July to the HRC pursuant to the Universal Review Period titled "NGO Report - Information on Human Rights in Israel: Presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the occasion of the 15th session on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working group".
- A position paper regarding the Praver Plan, which was designed to display 30,000 Bedouin citizens from their homes (see above).
- A report titled "Processes of dispossession in the Negev-Naqab" on the occasion of international Human Rights Day on 10 December 2012.
- On December 10th NCF also published its annual home demolition report.

MULTAKA-MIFGASH ARAB-JEWISH CULTURAL CENTER

The Multaka-Mifgash Cultural Center serves as an Arab-Jewish meeting place and hosts cultural events and seminars. The Center also contains the offices and meeting space of NCF. During Operation "Pillar of Defense", this facility was used as a bomb shelter for the local community



The "visual literacy project" party with the participants from Al-Arakib and Alsira and their parents

EXHIBITIONS

On June 20th NCF hosted an exhibition of children's photography in Be'er-Sheva. The photographs on display were taken by children from the Bedouin villages of Al Arakib and Alsira during NCF photography workshops conducted in cooperation with the village committees. Over 20 children and their parents attended the event to celebrate the children's achievements in the project.

Throughout 2012 | A series of lectures about Arab-Bedouin society in the Negev

LECTURES

The lectures focused on the indigenous people of the Negev, their history, their way of life and some of the difficulties they are facing.

FILM SCREENINGS

Multaka-Mifgash screened several films such as: Sharqiya (Dir. Ami Livni); The Bundist (Eran Torbiner); and Jahalin – Nowhere to Go. All the films addressed the challenges faced by minority groups in Israel and were followed by discussion.

SUPPORTERS

Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Government
New Israel Fund
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation
Sparkplug Foundation
Haella Foundation
Itery Community Belgum
Feldman Family Foundation
British Shalom-Salaam Trust
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