

**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – Third session
Geneva, 12 to 16 July 2010**

Presented by Khalil Alamour on behalf of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality and Bedouin people in the Negev

Thank you Mr Chairman for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Khalil Alamour and I am an indigenous Bedouin man from the southern desert region of Israel. It is an honour to speak on behalf of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality and the Bedouin families in the Negev to share our views on the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and in particular whether the right to participate in decision-making is respected by the State of Israel with regards to the Bedouins.

The Arab-Bedouin of the Negev are an indigenous people. Following the establishment for the State of Israel in 1948, however, when the desert became part of its territory, most of the Bedouin were displaced from their lands with only 10 to 15 per cent of the original population remaining.

To this day, the State of Israel continues to violate the indigenous rights of the Bedouin people despite the fact that we are citizens.

Half of the Bedouins in the Negev, including myself, live in villages with no official status and are considered as ‘trespassers’ by the Israeli government even though we live on land that has been in our families for generations. Those of us who live in these ‘illegal’ villages are excluded from official maps and receive little-to-no basic services such as electricity, water, telephone lines, rubbish collection or educational, health or welfare facilities. Our homes and crops are frequently destroyed by the government with bulldozers. We are denied both participation and representation in local council and municipal planning bodies and are prevented from exercising the basic political right to vote and run for office in local government. This means effectively that we are also denied the right to shape the policy that affects the quality of our lives.

Even in those towns which have been set up for the Bedouin, we do not always enjoy self-government. I draw your attention to the case of Abu Basma. Last December, the government blocked the first open elections of the regional council which encompasses ten Bedouin villages that were recently officially recognized. The Israeli parliament passed a law at the last minute to cancel the scheduled ballot. The council was established more than six years ago, however, since then has been lead by mostly government-appointed, Jewish officials despite the fact that the residents of Abu Basma are Bedouin. At the present point in time, the election has been delayed indefinitely until the government considers we are ready to run our own affairs.

Not only was such a move clearly in violation of Israel’s constitutional principles but also Article 18, the subject of this expert mechanism.

Thank you.

