



International Human Rights Day 2013 | Position Paper

## Damaging the Right to Water of the Residents of the Unrecognized Bedouin Villages of the Negev-Naqab

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The right to a clean water supply in sufficient quantity and at a reasonable cost was made clear by the United Nations General Assembly and also by the Israel Supreme Court as a basic human right essential to the realization of a life of dignity. This document indicates the non-realization of this right among the Arab Bedouin in the Negev.

Some 210,000 Bedouin live in Israel's Negev region and of these some 70,000 live in villages which are not recognized by the State. The Government is promoting a programme to transfer this population from its place and to settle it in the recognized villages and townships. The way in which the State enables access to water for the residents of the unrecognized villages makes the realization of water rights conditional on the willingness of this population to vacate their villages and give up their lands to the State. This is contrary to Israel's own Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty.

According to research carried out by the Negev Coexistence Forum (NCF) and Adalah during the latter part of 2013, it emerges that the right to water as it is defined in international treaties is denied in a number of ways to the Arab Bedouin who live in the unrecognized villages:

**Low Water Pressure:** In those villages in which the State has permitted residents to connect to the water system, the connection is via a pipe that is a mere 1" in diameter per an average of 240 souls. This connection results in water supplied at very low pressure and actually prevents any supply at times when there is a high demand on the water pipe. The low pressure damages the ability of the residents to continue to live off agriculture. Many olive groves in the unrecognized villages dry up and are abandoned and many residents reduce the size of their flocks.

**Inadequate Infrastructure:** In those places where the Government permits a connection to the water supply, the responsibility for infrastructure from the central water collection point to the actual houses devolves onto the residents. This responsibility includes installation of the infrastructure and routine maintenance as well as all financial costs involved. For this reason the infrastructure consists of plastic pipes spread along the surface of the ground, exposed to damage and suffering constant breakdowns.

**The Refusal to Connect Whole Communities to the Water Supply Source:**

The State denies some communities in the villages' connection to the water supply line. This is the situation in Umm Al Hiran, Tel Araad, Sawawin, Al Arakib and others. Thousands of people living in these villages are daily compelled to transport water to their homes in tanks the tanks must be privately transported to the villages by the

residents from a collection point several kilometers distant from their homes.

**Poor quality, polluted, water:** Because of the poor quality infrastructure exposed to the vagaries of weather and because the water is stored in tanks, there is an increased risk of damage to the cleanliness of the water and thus a danger to the health of residents who drink it.

**The Highest Cost of Water in Israel:** Between 2011 and 2013 there was a jump of 75% in the cost of water to residents of the unrecognized villages from 5.36 NIS per cubic meter to 9.42 per cubic meter, before VAT (18%) and without any improvement in service. The equivalent tariff costs to private urban consumers is 7.85 NIS per cubic meter and 5.68 in the rural villages. Additional costs to the basic cost of the water are added for those transporting water to their homes: they have to pay for gasoline, for the time and effort of the driver and for the maintenance of the tanks. Taking this into account, the daily cost of a 4 cube tank is 250NIS. These prices make this most essential product to human existence an economic burden on families who are for the most part the poorest in Israel.

The data arising from our research indicates therefore that the right to water as defined by international institutions and as recognized also in Israeli law, is routinely and deliberately denied to the residents of the unrecognized villages in the Negev. The cost of water in the Negev is far higher than the equivalent cost in the rest of Israel, the amount of water available is insufficient to meet the demand, and its level of hygiene is dangerously low. Under these conditions water is transformed from a basic human need, accessible to every citizen of the State, to a means of pressuring residents to leave their homes, their rural life style, traditional communal structure and move to urban settlements planned by the State.

We are convinced the connection made here between the acquisition of basic human rights and between agreements with the Government policy of concentrating the Bedouin in defined areas, is dangerous and destructive. We therefore call on all the relevant authorities to act to enable an equitable water supply, of appropriate quality and at a reasonable cost, to the residents of the unrecognized villages in Israel's Negev.



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