



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality

For a shared society in the Negev-Naqab where all residents live in dignity



منتدى التعايش السلمي في النقب من أجل المساواة المدنية
 פורום דו קיום בנגב לשוויון אזרחי
 Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality

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In accordance with the law, the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality is proud to note that as a result of cooperation with friendly countries and international organizations that promote human rights, most of the funding for our activities comes from "foreign entities."

-Cover picture by NCF's staff members-

PREFACE

I am honored to present the Negev Coexistence Forum's Annual Report for 2020. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our partners, donors and supporters. Without each one of you, we would not have been able to carry out the tremendous work NCF is doing in the Negev/Naqab.

Amid a worldwide pandemic, without government and following three failed elections, the human rights situation of the Arab Bedouin residents of the Naqab has become even more vulnerable. Ironically and unfairly, the number of house demolitions in the Naqab in 2020 reached an historic peak. This, despite the instruction of the Attorney General to reduce demolition warrants and Police presence in the Naqab, after NCF with other civil society organizations sent an urgent letter requesting a halt in demolitions during the pandemic. In addition to the increasing discrimination and exclusion supported by the Kaminitz Law (2017) and the Nation State Law (2018), the Arab Bedouin residents have experienced extreme adversity connected to the increasing presence of the Police in their villages, tractors that plough their lands and demolition of their houses. This conjuncture of circumstances reflects that instead of protecting the rights of its citizens, the State of Israel has taken advantage of this dire situation to continue urbanizing the indigenous population of the Naqab through forced eviction and a series of actions that systematically violate their human rights.

The economic crisis has created severe difficulties still unresolved at a national level, that affected the Bedouin society deeply. This, mainly due to the denial of infrastructure and basic services on behalf of the State. Unemployment has raised significantly, and the state of the education is much more severe for the children of unrecognized villages compared to the rest of the country due to the lack of internet and electrical systems, that in addition to shortage in computers have make remote learning quite impossible. Although the academic year for nearly 142,000 children is lost, the State chooses to focus on repression and violence instead of responsibly investing on education and resources for a population that 72.9% of them live under the poverty line. Considering that 46% of the Arab Bedouin population are under 14 years old, and unable to continue with their studies, an urgent response on behalf of the State is needed.

Despite this setback, we have witnessed important achievements in the communities' struggle for recognition and rights. Namely, the approval of a plan to build temporary portable structures for educational institutions in the unrecognized village of Khašim Zannah, which we hope that can be replicated in other villages, and kick-start processes for its recognition, alongside the other unrecognized villages. We worked around the clock to see such changes, and in 2020 we launched a digital literacy project to help Bedouin women from unrecognized villages gain access to information about employment rights and government services that all depend on internet proficiency, thus promoting a community-led model of mutual assistance; we held online and mobile exhibitions collecting the photographs produced in our *Yusawiruna* project, gathering the civil society, diplomats and Bedouin photographers into a joint dialogue on human rights; we worked closely with UN Special Rapporteurs and the international community that called on the State of Israel to recognize the unrecognized villages and quit its eviction policy towards the Bedouin community in the Naqab; we also produced our annual calendar with pictures taken by children from the Bedouin township of al-Lagiyyih and participated in several meetings with Knesset members regarding topics of employment and women capacity building.

I believe that 2020 has caught us all off guard and presented us many obstacles, but we have rose to the challenge and led joint struggles that demonstrate the power of a shared Jewish Arab society in the path of achieving equality.

With wishes of health, Haia Noach, Executive Director



ABOUT US

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF) is a grassroots organization established in 1997 by a group of Arab and Jewish residents of the Negev-Naqab who were alarmed by the government's discriminatory policies and practices towards its Arab-Bedouin citizens. We work to promote the rights of the Arab Bedouin Indigenous community and a shared society in the Negev-Naqab, where all its residents live in dignity and enjoy their human rights, as well as equality and justice. Our strategy consists of working closely with Bedouin communities, raising awareness among local and international stakeholders and the general public about the situation on the ground, and advocating for policy change. NCF has three main **programs**:

1. Documentation and Bedouin Human Rights Defenders' Network: Bedouin children, women and youth document their every-day-life as well as home demolitions, arrests, demonstrations, and the daily impact of state neglect and discrimination. All participants of this program build our Bedouin Human Rights Defenders' Network. This program consists of three projects:

- **"Yusawiruna - Photographing for Human Rights"**, is a project that gathers women, activists and teenagers from unrecognized villages, to teach them tools of photography and video documentation as well as knowledge on human rights, for storytelling and advocacy purposes.
Through a Child's Lens, Bedouin children from unrecognized villages learn to use photography as a creative tool to document their daily lives and tell their own stories.
- **Recognized:** Documenting Life in the Negev is the Negev Coexistence Forum's visual documentation video project where women and men are documenting their lives in the Negev-Naqab.
- **"Sumud: Life and resilience captured by Bedouin women"** is a series of online and physical exhibitions that collect the work produced by Bedouin women in *Yusawiruna*, classified in the categories of infrastructure, demolitions, employment, struggle and *Sumud*. Within the frame of the physical exhibitions, an intercultural dialogue is created between the civil society, the Bedouin photographers and diplomatic bodies.

2. Human Rights Campaign and Advocacy: Our work with Bedouin communities and the audio-visual documentation projects support our Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and advocacy efforts. In 2020, given the humanitarian and financial crisis and with the aim to support the Arab Bedouin community in its resilience processes, we started implementing a project of digital literacy and accessing rights for Bedouin women from unrecognized villages. Accordingly, our advocacy efforts have been focused on generating national and international campaigns on the topics of forced evictions and home demolitions, employment and equal education and resources for the Naqab's citizens; hence creating political pressure on the State of Israel to change its policies towards its Arab-Bedouin citizens. We do this by researching and delivering expert analysis on violations of human rights in the context of national and international law. In doing so, NCF gives exposure to the plight of Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab, within Israel and abroad, and brings the subject matter into public dialogue and political debate.

3. Our Shared Society Program aims at promoting a socially cohesive society that is diverse, tolerant, and safe and where all those living in the Negev/Naqab feel at home. We promote a society that respects everyone's dignity and human rights while providing every individual with equal opportunities.

All programs support each other: All research, documentation and audio-visual materials derived from the Documentation and Human Rights Campaign and Advocacy program are used for advocacy purposes through our human rights framework. All advocacy efforts are informed by our work on the ground and through our close partnership with Bedouin communities. NCF carries out its work to promote and protect the rights of residents in the Negev/Naqab in close coordination with residents' groups, our strongest partners and allies.

In 2020, we worked closely with other organizations, including Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel and the Human Rights Defenders Fund on international advocacy; Shatil, Bimkom, RCUV (the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages), Zazim, Sikkuy, Kedmah – promoting equality in education and society in Israel, The Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow – New Discourse, ACRI – The Association for Civil Rights, The Minerva Centre, ADVA Centre, Sidreh, Jahalin Solidarity Group and more, on local activism and advocacy.



Demonstration az-Zarnūg- 25.6.2020 by NCF staff

UPDATES FROM THE NEGEV / NAQAB

The Bedouin are a recognized indigenous people by the United Nations, a status which is denied by the State of Israel. Over the past 70 years of Israeli rule, the communities have been subjected to forced-urbanization, violence, and discrimination particularly regarding land rights. Until today, they are the poorest population in Israel, with the highest unemployment rates, and severe problems regarding access to health, infrastructure, and education.

2020 has been a uniquely challenging year for the Bedouin communities, as the impacts of Covid-19 echoed existing gaps and worsened the already-struggling communities' access to human rights and social resources.

Health

The reality of denial of basic rights of the communities has impacted their resilience in dealing with Covid-19 and other health related problems. On the one hand, the denial of infrastructure, and particularly water and electricity, as well as wider access to health services, made the communities more vulnerable to Covid-19. Without housing permits, in poverty, and density, self-quarantine for family members exposed or suspected exposure to Covid-19 has been hardly possible.

Furthermore, as with all civil rights, the government has not done enough to protect the rights of the Bedouin communities. The MOH did not carry out sufficient attempts to spread information in Arabic to the communities on COVID-19, the legal restrictions, and the health recommendations. Information on the locations of out-break centers and the trails of infected patients was not translated to Arabic, and health advisory was late in reaching the communities.

Even when vaccinations were made available, due to the trust crisis of the Bedouin communities with the authorities, many residents

Continued Harassment and Demolitions

Israel's use of demolitions as a mechanism for the forced displacement of the Bedouin population in the Negev/Naqab has continued despite the pandemic. In 2020, 2,586 structures were demolished by the authorities in Bedouin localities in the Naqab. Tens of thousands of Bedouins in the Negev/Naqab currently live in homes that are subject to demolition orders due to the lack of approved building plans for their villages, but in both the recognized and unrecognized villages such plans are effectively never approved by the state to begin with.

Since March 2020, and in spite of the state of emergency and the government's instruction to home confinement, the authorities continued to distribute demolition warrants and plough up hundreds of acres of fields in over a dozen Bedouin villages, both recognized and unrecognized by the state. 2020 had the highest number of demolitions recorded and illustrates the continuation of the policies implemented in 2019, with a large monetary investment in enforcement of land laws against the Bedouins.

The wide range of demolitions were carried out contrary to the General Attorney's commitment to freeze demolitions during the pandemic.

Out of the 2,586 structures that were demolished in 2020, more than half (1,437) were carried out by the owners. This indicates the intensity of the intimidation campaign that the state leads against the Bedouin citizens, notably high fines, the criminal sanctions and the price paid by those who refuse to accept a forced settlement or a forced evacuation.

Poverty, education, and employment

In 2020, 56% of the Arab population in Israel lived in poverty, an 11% increase from 2019. This is a very high rate compared to 39% in the Jewish population in 2020. A similar trend of deepening poverty is likely to be found in the Bedouin community. Usually, the poverty rates in the south are higher: in 2018, 72.9% of the Arab Bedouin population in the Negev lived under the poverty line.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the gaps between the Arab Bedouin pupils and the rest of the country have deepened. With no endpoints and computers that provide access to online learning, and without sufficient internet infrastructure in the recognized and unrecognized villages, the children have lost many months of formal learning. The Council for Children's Welfare reported that in 2020, 7% of distant learning courses did not take place in the Jewish sector and 15% in the Arab sector. The situation in the Bedouin communities in the Negev is even worse, especially in rural localities.

In view of the worsening economic situation, many salaried employees were fired, and businesses closed. Many high school students are likely to have to take care of their family's livelihood and will drop from school. In a recent survey, 52% of the Arab University students reported considering leaving the university as they are unable to do online studying and unable to pay tuition because of the economic distress. Even before the pandemic the Arab population in the Negev suffered very low employment rate of women, and for both men and women the salaries were considerably lower than the state average.

While the state failed to provide adequate care for the most impoverished populations in the country, the poorest population in the country, the Bedouin communities in the south, have been thinking outside the box to come up with local solutions. Relying in mutual aid, creativity and small-scale initiatives, they are proving resilience and *Sumud* in resisting the severe humanitarian and health crisis. 2021, with another elections and political unrest, does not promise much for the communities. But for that we are alongside them in the fight for civil rights, in the demands for equality and human rights.

OUR WORK IN 2020

DOCUMENTATION & BEDOUIN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER'S NETWORKS

2,131 photos collected from women photographers, of which we archived 473 photos on flicker;

Over 8,000 photos collected from children, of which we archived 1,821 photos;

4 short videos produced;

3 exhibitions and screenings: Recognized in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Beer Sheva and Solidarity Human Rights' Film Festival at the Cinematheque in Tel Aviv.

YUSAWIRUNA: WOMEN'S PHOTOGRAPHY

Since 2014 NCF has provided workshops and training on photography to women in unrecognized and recognized villages. Participants use these skills to document their lives in the villages and the continual human rights violations perpetrated by the state. Participants receive a camera, which acts as a form of protection, empowering the user and deterring authorities, while the materials compiled are utilized for advocacy efforts.



Rimal Abu al-Qian - Umm al-Hiran - 10.12.2020

In 2020, Bedouin women and youth, from five unrecognized villages and two townships, participated in the project. They took part in 37 personal training workshops, and two network-wide gatherings.

Participants worked on the filming, directing and production of short videos about their lives in the Bedouin villages, the abuse of their civil rights, their lands and their families. They documented the presence of authorities in their villages and stood guard to document cases of abuse or of home demolitions in real time.

Despite the lock-down, NCF's project coordinators continued working virtually with the women participants in the villages. With no shopping centers, supermarkets or health clinics in the unrecognized villages, women are facing harsher conditions since the beginning of the outbreak.

RECOGNIZED: AUDIO VISUAL DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

Recognized – Documenting Life in the Negev is the Negev Coexistence Forum's visual documentation video project where women and men are documenting their lives in the Negev-Naqab. In 2015 NCF started to distribute video cameras and to train volunteer photographers in the unrecognized villages to document, from their perspective, the human rights violations that occur in their villages. The residents themselves can document their lives and expose viewers to the living conditions in the unrecognized villages in the Negev-Naqab on a daily basis.



Watch the new film [Corona by Šabāḥ 'Abū Mdiḡim](#), from the unrecognized village of al-'Arāgīb.

Watch [Maryam an-Našāšrah's film](#), from the unrecognized village of Tal 'Arād.

THROUGH A CHILD'S LENS: CHILDREN'S PHOTOGRAPHY

Through a camera lens, children document their lives, the stories in their villages, and human rights abuses they encounter. Children not only learn how to take pictures, they also learn how to tell their stories, to raise their voices, and to use photography as means to advocate for their community. They are involved in the community's struggle as it is, suffering severe abuses by the state, and the camera enables them to process their experiences but also take part in the advocacy, it is a shield



Rabi Abu al-Qian - Umm al-Hīrān - 10.12.2020

against helplessness. Empowered with new skills and a camera, they can present the beauty, wealth and strength of their community and way of life, countering negative stereotypes about Bedouins.

In 2020, NCF has facilitated and coordinated 32 photography workshops and gatherings. Participants included 49 children from 5 unrecognized villages and one recognized township, aged 8-13 years old. The workshops focused on different aspects of photography as a tool for protecting human rights. Young participants were encouraged to use the cameras to tell the stories of their villages. NCF produced the annual calendars with pictures taken by children from the township of al-Lagiyyih.

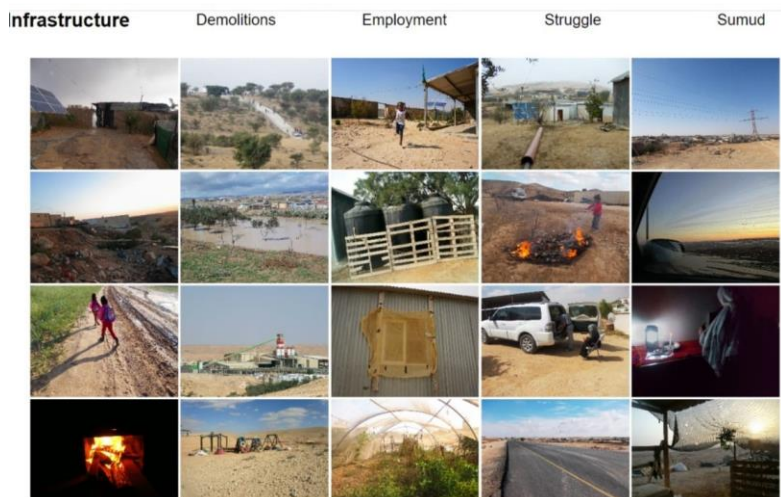
EXHIBITION “SUMUD” LIFE AND RESILIENCE CAPTURED BY BEDOUIN WOMEN



The exhibition “Sumud” Life and Resilience as Captured by Bedouin Women, presents a collection of still photographs and videos taken in the last years by Bedouin women in 10 communities in the Naqab. The exhibition is a testimony to a life of continuous institutional dispossession. The photography exposes the women’s participation in the struggle against home demolitions and steadfastness– Sumud.

Through their camera lens, the photographers proclaim their citizenships, they claim “our citizenship was expropriated and therefore we live in unbearable conditions. We demand what every citizen deserves, everything that all other citizens take for granted with no need for a struggle”.

The courage of these [photographers](#) is remarkable and their commitment is great although some of them chose not



to be identified by their full name. The photographs taken puts them in the front line, both against authorities, but also as brave defenders of land, as a voice of the collective memory. Exceed the role assigned to them by the traditional society, they take a stand publicly and take part.

Human Rights' Week, December 2020:

- **Report:** On the occasion of International Human Rights Day, NCF published a report on [Violations of the Human Rights of the Bedouin Community in the Negev/Naqab during Pandemics](#)

Online exhibition launching: On Wednesday, 9 December, NCF launched the online exhibition *Sumud* through an online webinar to commemorate the International Day of Human Rights an event led by Arab Bedouin activists and NCF's staff members. The online event was organized in cooperation with the Rahat Community Centre on Avant Guard Art and Activism. It included a panel discussion with one of the photographers, who told her stories of transformation through documentation and photography and two Bedouin women art-students in Betzalel. A [video of the event](#) has been uploaded to our YouTube channel. The virtual exhibition can be visited [here](#). The event took place in Arabic with simultaneous translation to English and Hebrew. A day after there were more than 1,000 views of the online event.

- **"Sumud" exhibition touring Israel:** After the virtual launching, the exhibition toured through Israel, reaching Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Beer Sheva. Hundreds of people visited the mobile exhibition.

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN & ADVOCACY

Summary:

4 position papers and 2 reports published.

More than 2,600 people participated in tours & educational activities (some virtually).

3 tours and 5 briefings to diplomats and members of the international community.

Over 2000 subscriptions to our online newsletter, over 9000 followers on social media!

7 solidarity visits & events to villages, activists and detainees.

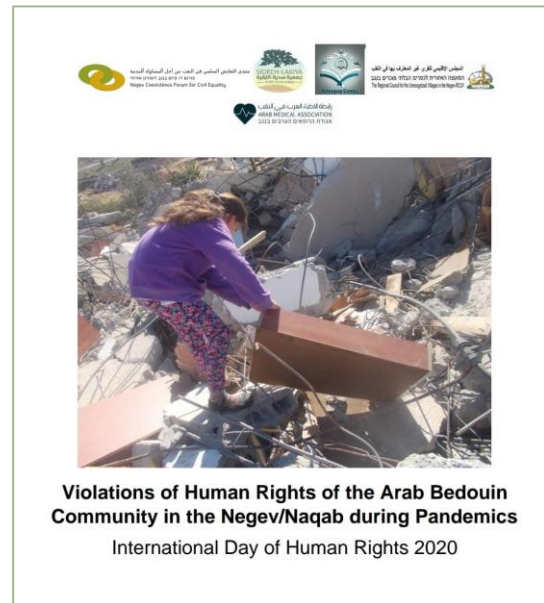
39 demonstrations & vigils.

73 occasions in which our work was covered through different media outlets.

RESEARCH & REPORTS

A major part of NCF's actions to promote the rights of the Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the Negev/Naqab is issuing reports and position papers for the use of local and foreign decision-makers, academic scholars, and to inform general public. Project coordinators conduct regular analysis of events at the political level in consultation with partners and file requests for information from different governmental offices on relevant topics.

Based on this information, we aim to produce accurate and liable data regarding the demographics of the Naqab's communities and the violations of their Human Rights. NCF reports are usually referenced in several reports prepared by third parties.



RESEARCH AND EXPERT ANALYSIS

1. **July 2020:** We published the new annual report ["On \(In\)Equality and Demolition of Homes and Structures in Arab Bedouin Communities in the Negev/Naqab"](#). The State of Israel continues to implement a policy of forced displacement towards the Arab-Bedouin community in the Negev/Naqab, denying their status as citizens with equal rights. **In 2019, 2,241 structures were destroyed, of which 33% were demolished before any demolition orders had been issued**, constituting an increase of 146% compared to the previous year (2018). No less than 88% of the residents preferred to demolish their houses themselves rather than have them destroyed by law enforcement, to avoid heavy fines and the trauma of police forces entering the villages.
2. **Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Report:** NCF collaborated with Sidreh Association, the Human Rights Defenders Fund, Alhuquq and the Arab Medical Association in the Negev on a report to the Human Rights Committee in Advance of its Review of the State of Israel. The report addresses violations committed by the State of Israel against the Arab Bedouin in the Naqab, with a special emphasis on the COVID-19 period.

3. Since 1968, IWGIA has cooperated with indigenous organizations and international institutions to promote recognition and implementation of the rights of indigenous peoples. IWGIA's publication, "The Indigenous World", is the result of a collaborative effort between indigenous and non-indigenous activists and scholars who share their valuable insights and analysis. In 2020, the Bedouin community in the Negev/Naqab was included, following a contribution submitted by NCF. [Read the online publication \(page 538\) on IWGIA website.](#)
4. The **US State Department** releases [a yearly report](#) on "Israel and the Golan Heights' Human Rights Report". NCF submitted in 2020 [a report](#) on the situation of human rights in the Bedouin communities in the Negev in 2019, which were included in the 2019 Report.
5. **Partners for Progressive Israel** has published an [article](#) we wrote presenting our projects, challenges, and Covid-19 related impacts on the Arab Bedouin communities in the Naqab.
6. **Habitat International Coalition**: we submitted our [position paper](#) on World Habitat Day, which was included in their report.
7. **December 10**: We published the [Human Rights' Report 2020](#), which is the result of the joint work of NCF, Sidreh, the Arab Medical Association, Alhuquq Centre and RCUV. The report presents the situation of the Arab-Bedouin population in the Naqab-Negev in relation to specific rights and their violations, including the right to adequate housing, development, education, work, health, nationality as well as adequate standard of living.
8. **Statement submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women**: NCF submitted as [statement](#) in its capacity of non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic Social council.
9. NCF submitted an expert analysis of the Five Year Plan for Development for the Bedouin Population. The briefing, analyzing the insufficient fulfillment of the bare minimum promised to the communities via the plan, was written to support MK Touma-Suliman's lobby to the Ministry of Economy regarding Bedouin Women's employment gap.

MEDIA

During 2020, we intensified our work with the media, especially with mainstream media to raise awareness and influence public opinion. **Our work has been covered through different media outlets on at least 73 occasions in Hebrew (41), Arabic (22), and English (16).** Media outlets included Haaretz, the Washington Post, the Jerusalem Post, News 1, Panet, Kul al Arab, among others.

Some of the most influential articles publishes include:

- [If pandemic hits, unrecognized Bedouin villages could 'become like northern Italy'](#), +972 Magazine, Oren Ziv, 29.03.2020.

- [New Report Reveals Israel Demolishes Over 2,000 Palestinian Bedouin Homes per Year](#), MPN News, 03.08.2020.
- [Court Reduces Sum Bedouin Must Pay Israel for Demolition of Their Unrecognized Village](#), Haaretz, 24.11.2020.

Social Media:

In 2020, NCF continued to publish on **social media** relevant information and commentary as well as reports about the organization's different projects. On Facebook (9,300 followers), Twitter (1,188 followers in three accounts: English, Hebrew, and Arabic) and Instagram (640 followers) the organization's channels steadily grew. **We also distributed 31 newsletters in Arabic/Hebrew to a mailing list of 1,364 subscribers and 18 newsletters in English sent to 159 diplomats and 652 subscribers.**

In addition, we launched a special blog **#different_in_quarantine blog**, bringing the voices of the unrecognized villages under lock-down. Through a unique campaign, NCF received photos and videos from members of the Bedouin community as well as members of NCF's staff describing how they cope under quarantine. You can watch [Muhammad Abu Kwider's video](#), from the unrecognized village of az-Zarnūg, (Hebrew).

- You can see some of our blog posts on our [Facebook page](#).

The **"Wikipedia of the Unrecognized Villages"** presents a series of videos exploring key concepts and issues related to the unrecognized villages in the Naqab by volunteers. All videos are available to watch on our [YouTube channel](#).

PUBLIC OUTREACH & ACTIVISM

We put together 18 tours this year for more than 500 participants. Adapting to the new reality, one of them was in fact a virtual tour (see below). The tours allowed different crowds to get to know first-hand the reality of human rights violations, and to counter stereotypes.

Virtual tour: on the 30th of April, 30 students from the Ben Gurion University -enrolled at a program preparing them to become public servants at local government offices, participated in a virtual tour to the village of al-'Arāḡīb. Public Outreach Coordinator, Eve Tandler provided a lecture and showed one of Ṣabāḥ 'Abū Mdīḡim's films. A Bedouin leader took them on a virtual tour of the village, followed by a discussion.

Lectures & other events:

- **Lectures:** we facilitated 17 lectures with the participation of more than 648 people.

- **Land Day:** On the 30th of March the Multaka-Mifgash hosted an online event about Land Day, with videos from our partners in al-‘Arāgīb.
- **Visits:** 285 individuals participated at five solidarity visits, to Bīr Haddāj and ‘Arāgīb and Al Atrash near Khirbit al-Watan.
- **Solidarity with activists and detainees:** NCF was present on seven occasions to show solidarity and support to activists and political prisoners who are facing court trials.
- **Demonstrations and vigils:** On 39 occasions we supported demonstrations and vigils mainly at the village of al-‘Arāgīb with 5,000 activists.

LOCAL LOBBY

After three failed elections, the indictment of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and a third election taking place on 2 March 2020, Israel finds itself in political disarray. The Knesset has not been active for more than one year. Therefore, advocacy in the Knesset was limited, but we were able to expand advocacy at the local and regional levels.

1. Bedouin Women’s Employment

During 2020, unemployment in the Naqab increased. This while children’s education was in fact shut down, causing irreparable damage and the loss of the school year due to the poor quality or the lack of internet facilities in the villages, which relies on the cellular phone system.

Together with ANU (the Coalition for Birth Education) we organized a conference on the importance of Daycare centers in Bedouin communities to promote women employment and enable Bedouin women to contribute to the family income. We gathered several grassroots organizations, childcare workers and governmental representatives to analyze the challenges and obstacles the Israeli society and in particular the Bedouin society faces to maintain active childcare centers that aid families with low socio-economic resources.

We met with MK Aida Touma Silman and with Mr. Yariv Man, who oversees the five-year plan for the economic and social improvement of the Bedouin population in the Negev. During the yearly Negev-Day that is held in the Knesset under the auspices of MK Saeed Al-Kharumi, we presented up-to-date information about the employment of Bedouin women in the Naqab.



Following coordination with MK Al-Kharumi, the Committee for the Advancement of Women and

Photo by NCF staff members, August 2020

Gender Equality, chaired by MK Aida Touma-Suleiman, discussed the state of Bedouin women's employment in November. In the words of MK Iman Yassin Khatib: "For a family to get out of the cycle of poverty, there must be two breadwinners, and in Bedouin society there is hardly one." NCF member Huda Abu-Obeid briefed the committee on the issue and prepared a presentation that was later shared with all 30 members of the committee.

We continued working with MK Touma-Sliman. On the 12th of May we submitted to the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality a joint position paper with Sidreh Association demanding that the government prepare a plan to promote employment of Arab Bedouin citizens from the Naqab, with an emphasis on women living in unrecognized villages.

2. Home demolitions:



Demolition in az-Zarnūg. Photo by Amal Abu Kwider, az-Zarnūg, 15.09.2020

On March 19, NCF along with 22 civil society organizations, sent an urgent letter to Mr. Avichai Mandelblit, Attorney General, demanding immediate action. The organizations warned that demolition of homes and crops will have a devastating economic impact on the Bedouin people, one of Israel's most impoverished communities. Although the Attorney General's instruction to stop demolitions in Bedouin localities as well as reducing distribution of demolition warrants and Police presence during the Pandemic, the number of demolitions during 2020 reached its highest number historically: 258 6 demolition of

structures.

In July 2020, NCF published the Annual Report documenting Home Demolitions in the Bedouin Communities. The reports' findings were presented by NCF's Local Lobbying Coordinator, Huda Abu-Obeid, in two different Knesset committees. She presented the findings in the Special Committee on the Rights of the Child, headed by MK Yousef Jabareen. The discussion focused on the impact of demolitions on the wellbeing of Bedouin children and youth's mental health.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Interior's Sub-Committee discussed the issue of development in the Bedouin Communities, where Huda presented data about demolitions from 2012-2019 and their wider impact on the communities.



Huda Abu Obaid, NCF's local advocacy coordinator, presenting the impact of Covid-19 pandemic in the Bedouin population in the Knesset. 17.11.2020

3. Health:

On the 26th of March, NCF and the Arab Medical Association in the Negev (along with 17 civil society organizations) sent an urgent letter to the Ministry of Health, demanding immediate action to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic in the Arab Bedouin villages in the Naqab.

On April 14th, NCF joined a petition by Adalah to the Supreme Court, demanding immediate access to Coronavirus testing in Bedouin villages. On the 14th of April the Supreme Court rejected our petition on the grounds that it will not intervene with the Ministry of Health's work. However, one of the judges made important comments in which he noted that testing should be done in unrecognized villages. While the petition was denied, the pressure led to the placement of mobile testing facilities on the main junctions in the Naqab and in the city of Rahat, according to the Arab Medical Association in the Negev. Moreover, the Israeli HMOs started to facilitate testing in clinics located in the villages – in which the process to receive a test was much more lenient and culturally sensitive.

In May, we joined a petition submitted by Adalah on the 21st of May requesting that the government find appropriate and satisfactory isolation solutions for Arab Bedouin women living in the Naqab villages. Women from these villages live in homes that offer no real isolation. As of the end of 2020, no isolation facilities were established in the Bedouin townships, and the offered solutions were unsuitable for Muslim Bedouin women from the Naqab.

4. Internet Connection is a right:

On March 17th, 2020, Arab Bedouin students from Ben-Gurion University, supported by NCF, sent a letter to the university requesting a suitable solution for hundreds of Bedouin students who are not connected to electricity and / or internet services – which prevents them from accessing the distance-learning system. In response to their letter and following multiple conversations with university staff, BGU acquired around 40 net sticks and modems for Bedouin students living in the townships. NCF helped distribute the electronic devices.

Later on, in cooperation with students from various campuses, we sent an urgent letter to the Council for Higher Education, requesting the provision of mobile modems, computers, close guidance to students in need, and a plan to help students complete their school year. We were delighted to hear that Sapir College is already providing a variety of solutions to their students. We have urged other colleges and universities to do the same.

The Achva College in the Naqab also sent a similar letter, urging the Council to provide extra funding to purchase computers and other electronic devices for its Bedouin students.

In addition, NCF reached out to the Parents' Committees in Bedouin villages. Together, we sent a letter to the Director General of the Ministry of Education, Mr. Samuel Abuhav, requesting that they ensure distance learning services in Bedouin communities in the Naqab.

5. Education for children:

Even though thousands of children in the Bedouin villages had not yet returned to school for many months, the Supreme Court rejected our petition on May 20th, 2020, demanding solutions for 100K students who cannot study online. The petition was dismissed by the Court, despite the fact that the education system in most localities in Israel returns to full function, while the education system in Bedouin localities is on halt.

As part of NCF's work to promote the accessibility of distance learning, we sent an urgent letter to the CEO of the Ministry of Communications, urging them to improve cellular network in Bedouin villages and townships. The Ministry was quick to respond and on a tour in the Bedouin townships, declared that they will accelerate their efforts to bridge the technological gaps. Nevertheless, as far as NCF is aware, no solutions have been offered for the unrecognized villages.

In a second letter to the Ministry of Communications (03.05.2020) NCF demanded the immediate provision of cellular and internet services to the unrecognized villages and provided clear options on how to provide a quick answer to this problem.

NCF, in cooperation with several organizations promoting human rights and equal access to education, initiated a petition that was sent to the Minister of Education, Minister of Communications, Minister of Social Equality and the Minister of Finance. The petition calls for the distribution of educational tools among students with the highest socio-economic needs, both Arab and Jewish. The petition was signed by close to 300 people. In November 2020 we were informed that only 14% of Bedouin children received computers. There are plans to provide more computers in March 2021. We are following closely this issue.

6. Socio-Economic needs and anti-poverty action:

From a quick needs' assessment, we identified the urgent need for the provision of basic products to families in the villages, such as flour, rice, sugar, oil, pasta, and more. These are relatively inexpensive products that can meet the needs of many in the community. In our letter to the Ministry, we asked that these products will be supplied to Bedouin families, especially during the month of Ramadan.

Also, in a joint letter with Sidreh Association, we contacted the Israeli Post Office and the Ministry of Communications, requesting the reinforcement of the Post Bank branches especially during the days of receiving salaries and allowances. The shortage of bank branches is always an obstacle for Bedouin citizens, but during an economic crisis, when many more were added to the poverty cycle and unemployment, this becomes an urgent need. We have also witnessed large gatherings of people in-front of Post Bank branches, increasing the possibility of Covid-19 contagion.

Moreover, in the outset of the pandemic, the Social Security Office distributed debit cards to elderly citizens, giving them the option to withdraw their pensions from any ATM. In a research conducted by our Local Advocacy Coordinator, NCF found that majority of the recipients were unable to use the card at all. Moreover, information on how to use the card was not distributed in Arabic and people found it highly complicated to reach costumer services in Arabic.

In November, assisted by MK Touma-Suliman, NCF issued an appeal to MK Shmuli, the Minister of Welfare and Employment, regarding the need to expand the training of Bedouin social workers, in view of the prominent shortage of manpower in the field, and the lack of an adequate response to the needs of the poorest communities in the Negev. A month later, NCF received an official response from the Director General of the Ministry of Welfare, who reviewed the actions taken so far and expresses pessimism in the face of the failure of these actions.

7. Analysis of the Five Year Development Plan for the Bedouin Localities

NCF has issued a special briefing report, alongside Sidreh and Shatil, analyzing and criticizing the implementation of the Five-Year Development Plan for Bedouins, focusing on Bedouin women's employment. The report addresses a variety of issues in the field of employment, including the operation of Ryan centers, the establishment of employment zones, the Eshbal project.

In November 11th, the briefing report was presented to Yariv Mann, Head of the Socio-Economic Division of the Ministry of Economy, in charge of implementing the government five-year plan for Bedouin society, and with Michal Chernovitsky, Assistant Director General. The meeting took place with the assistance of MK Touma-Suliman.

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

We believe it is important to support the Arab Bedouin community in representing itself at the UN level and in other international and regional bodies as well as to meet diplomats in their visits to the Negev/Naqab or abroad. Through our international advocacy program, we also facilitate networking with communities that face similar challenges around the world. In addition, we develop initiatives that will allow Bedouin representatives to present the impact of state policies and international agreements and plans on their lives to the international community.

Tours: During the reporting period, **three tours took place with 30 representatives of the international community and diplomats**, including: American diplomats, Swiss diplomats, and representatives of Amnesty UK.

- We have been in regular contact with over 60 representatives of international organizations and diplomats, including 15 embassies. NCF kept in close contact with the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the Special Rapporteur on Housing.

International Advocacy Events and Actions:

- In March 2020, NCF and Adalah hosted an international webinar on the impact of the Coronavirus on the human rights of Bedouin citizens of Israel. More than 25 representatives participated, including the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues; First Secretaries from the Russian and Colombian Embassies; Amnesty International & the Norwegian Refugee Council.
- In June 2020, we participated at a **webinar hosted by the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign** titled "Palestinians and Israel: Between Dispossession and Discrimination". Amir Abu Kweider represented NCF and spoke of the specific policies affecting the Bedouin citizens.
- **In relation to Bedouin communities, we successfully amplified their voices and supported their self-determination efforts:** The organization Front Line Defenders, provided a grant to the human right defenders from Al-'Arāgīb for their protection which enabled the purchase of devices that would increase the residents' security to be connected and protected, and being able to document Police harassment. This enabled the remote learning of the children of the Human Rights defenders in their village. NCF supported Bedouin HRDs to submit this application.
- **UN Special Rapporteurs** expressed serious concerns regarding Israel's continuing violations of Arab Bedouin's human rights mainly with its home demolitions policy during pandemic and the persecution of the Arab Bedouin human rights defender Sheikh Sayah Abu Madhi'm A-Turi. In October 2020, as a result of our work with the UN Special Procedures, Special Rapporteurs on adequate housing along with the Special Rapporteurs on indigenous peoples, minorities, human rights defenders, internally displaced persons and cultural rights, have emitted a communication to the State of Israel expressing their concern on forced evictions and home demolitions in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Naqab, as well as the use of criminal and administrative sanctions to Human Rights defenders, including Sheikh Sayah Abu Madhi'm al-Turi and other members of the family from Al-'Arāgīb. The letter is the result of ongoing international advocacy by the Negev Coexistence Forum and the Human Rights Defenders Fund. [Read the letter sent by UN Special Rapporteurs to the State of Israel.](#)
- In December 2020, we participated at the **OHCHR Roundtable** for Israeli civil society organizations; and took part in the **meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on Housing** with Bimkom and Adalah, where we presented relevant and urgent matters connected to demolition of structures and forced evictions in the Naqab.

SHARED SOCIETY

Our Shared Society Program aims at promoting a socially cohesive society that is diverse, tolerant, and safe and where all those living in the Negev/Naqab feel at home. We promote a society that respects everyone's dignity and human rights while providing every individual with equal opportunities.



Photo by NCF staff members. Exhibition in Tel Aviv hosted by the EU Ambassador and other diplomats

One of the main venues for NCF to promote a shared society is enabling spaces of dialogue between the Bedouin communities, the international community and the civil society.

Due to the restrictions on operations of the *Arab-Jewish Multaka-Mifgash Cultural Centre* due to the pandemic, we facilitated online and physical mobile places to allow different public to meet and discuss human rights. For instance, the mobile exhibition “Recognized” offered such spaces for discussion with the artists and different publics.

Enhancing the use of Internet Communication Technologies among Arab Bedouin women living in unrecognized villages: This year, it became very clear that the shared spaces for most of society shifted online. But what does that mean to communities that are largely disconnected from the internet?

Since the end of April, NCF has been working on the ground to increase the connectivity of several unrecognized villages. We were able to improve internet connection of 40 families in unrecognized villages through routers and sim cards.

- We provided computers and digital literacy skills training to women from the unrecognized villages of Wādi an-Na‘am, al-Fur‘ah, az-Zarnūg, al-Baggār, ‘Awajān, Sawawin and Khašim Zannih. They now act as trainers and mentors for other women in their villages, and support them in receiving social services online and gain access to their rights.

CONNECTING AND LEARNING VIA ZOOM

It is important to mention that we have already seen an important outcome of this intervention: we were able to have a Workshop on Human Rights with Dr. Rawia Aburabia via Zoom. Participants were women from three unrecognized villages meeting in a virtual space for the first time.

Dr. AbuRabia gave information about the human rights framework for the abuses in the unrecognized villages. She talked about how villages struggle to exercise or implement their rights and gave concrete examples from different villages. She described the different organizations that are working on different legal or other strategies. The women asked about house demolitions that continue even when there is a corona pandemic and if there is anything to be done to stop the phenomenon of house demolition.

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منتدى التعايش السلمي في النقب من أجل المساواة المدنية
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