



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



Enforcing the Invisible Barrier: *Police violence during January 2022 protests of KKL-JNF Afforestation Projects*



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Cover photo: Police officers detaining a minor during the January 2022 protests in the Naqab, by Walid Aloubra.

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Abstract

The following report is an exposé on police brutality during the protests of January 2022 in the Naqab. The protests were part of a mass resistance to the State's recognition of land ownership of Bedouin lands by KKL-JNF, under the guise of afforestation and land restoration. In this case, KKL-JNF initiated a project to plant trees upon lands surrounding the villages of Sa'wah and Khirbit al-Watan, which part of them are claimed by the villagers in the seventies land claims and ongoing court cases. Importantly, these lands serve the essential subsistence of the community and are part of their ancestral identity.

Together with activists from around Israel, Bedouin residents from all over the Naqab organized nonviolent demonstrations to demand recognition and intervene on behalf of Sa'wah and Khirbit al-Watan. In the same tone, they objected to the wider policy of planting KKL-JNF forests on top of Bedouin communities.

On January 13th, community members and activists from around the region voiced their objections to the extra-judicial appropriation of these lands. In response, they were met with unprecedented police brutality. Multiple testimonies document how, several minutes after the beginning of the protest, police violently repressed the demonstration. In the following weeks, police detained, investigated, physically attacked, and otherwise terrorized Bedouin citizens in the surrounding communities.

In this paper, we attempt to cover some of the methods used by the Israeli police to detain, arrest, investigate and subsequently violate the rights of the Bedouin citizens of Israel. Methods we have documented include: live-fire of rubber bullets -- which cause serious traumatic injury -- the use of horses to trample and intimidate protestors, unnecessary and extreme physical violence, and firing tear gas from drones. These methods remain legal and can be used at liberty by the police, no matter the outcomes. It is important to stress how,

ultimately, the object of these measures was to repress unarmed Israeli citizens from exercising their legitimate right to protest. The long-term psychological impact is clear. Five months later, some of the protestors are still under arrest, while others experience post-traumatic stress and fear.

As a result of the international advocacy work NCF has been carrying out to denounce Police violence during protests in the Naqab in January 2022, the UN Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance have sent a communication to the State of Israel, requesting observations regarding the international human rights law, relevant to these allegations (Special Rapporteur on minority issues, July 3, 2022).

Background: KKL-JNF Afforestation and Sa‘wah

Interviewer: Why did you come to the demonstration?

“To voice my voice, my will, to exercise my right as a citizen. I'm aware that KKL is trying to plant trees in the lands that are still legally disputed. The court has yet to determine the ownership of the government and of KKL. I'm sad to see more and more Bedouin villages uprooted, that you see more and more Jewish villages developing. You feel discrimination. I came because I support the struggle of unrecognized villages.”

- **Bashir Al Zayadni**, Bedouin activist and law student at Sapir College (Kremer, Jan. 2022)

"We condemn and reject the work and damage to the source of income of the Arab families in the area.”

- **UAL Chairman Mansour Abbas** (Khoury et al., Jan. 10th, 2022).

“These people, they have no alternative land, and they have been on their land since before the country was founded. The country needs to look at the Bedouin with a wider view – how to invest in the villages and concentrate them inside [residential areas], but to give them public areas too, shopping centers, educational and health systems.”

- **Salameh al-Atrash**, Head of the Al-Kassom Regional Council (Khoury et al., Jan. 10th, 2022).

The Keren Kayemeth L'Yisrael - Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF) was founded more than a century ago to acquire and manage lands for the development of a Jewish state. One of their major activities since 1948 has been afforestation. Throughout the last decade, the KKL-JNF has planted trees throughout the Naqab, targeting areas around Bedouin villages (Meir, 2017).

The stated purpose of these projects is “to preserve the land,” arguing that such afforestation will preserve natural areas and provide a needed source of greenery (Fabien, Jan 13th, 2022). Most other environmental organizations in Israel dispute these claims, and have even taken KKL-JNF to court: providing evidence that such plantings actually damage arid ecosystems by introducing

many kinds of invasive species (Adalah, January 16th, 2022; Prime Minister, February 27th, 2017; Moussa, Jan. 20, 2022).

Though often framed as benign public works projects, these forests serve no ecological purpose. Rather, they are a tool for dispossession: planting trees on the land destroys Bedouin means of subsistence and displaces the communities within. Croplands are leveled, grazing is prohibited, and entire villages are demolished as part of this “beautification” process (Abu-Ras, 2006; Moussa, Jan. 20, 2022; Orenstein, 2011).

In January 2022, KKL-JNF began to plant forests over the lands of the Al-Atrash family in the villages of Sa‘wah and Khirbit al-Watan. This project, the “communal seeding of trees,” targeted 5,000 dunams (1,250 acres) along the Anim stream which runs to Beer Sheva wadi. Local Bedouin farmers from the villages had just planted wheat on the land one month prior. These crops would be destroyed (Khoury et al., Jan. 11th, 2022). According to Salameh al-Atrash, head of the Al-Kassom Regional Council, the land has been continuously cultivated for decades (Khoury et al., Jan. 10th, 2022). Local activists, politicians and NGOs began to raise awareness about the project, as it would prevent local people from using lands upon which they have resided and claimed for decades (Keinon, Jan. 13th, 2022).

Parts of the lands in question are coincidentally the subject of an unresolved legal battle. The al-Atrash family, among others, have ownership claims to the lands plotted for afforestation dating back to the seventies. The government disputes these claims. However, at the time of the KKL-JNF’s activities, these disputes had not even been resolved by local courts. Important figures in Israeli politics began to join the calls to respect and honor Bedouin claims of the land. MK Mansour Abbas, member of the Bennett Coalition, appealed to have the project deferred “while we work on a decent plan that would grant Bedouin citizens honorable lives and livelihoods” (Awad, 2022). Foreign Minister Yair Lapid called to halt the works on Tuesday, January 11: “Like the Netanyahu government stopped the forestation projects in 2020, we can stop and reassess,” (Khoury et al., Jan. 11th, 2022).

All of these factors were categorically ignored by KKL-JNF, which is deeply tied to Israel’s law enforcement agencies. The police took great lengths to

support and defend this extrajudicial land grab, and became quite active in provoking tensions with the local communities. Hundreds of police escorted the JNF workers as they began work on January 10th. Police also established checkpoints limiting movement for the village's residents, limiting childrens' access to school and residents' access to their homes and jobs, and demolished a tent constructed by protestors on the lands allotted for development (Adalah, January 16th, 2022). Hessin Al-Rafia, a local activist and a former chairman of the Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages said that police were trying to escalate the situation and actively harassing residents. Three Bedouin women who had nothing to do with the situation were arrested that day, and one person was reported to be injured (Khoury et al., Jan. 11th, 2022). Nas Radio Journalist Yasser Okbi was also detained, despite presenting his press card to the police (Khoury et al., Jan. 10th, 2022). It is under these circumstances that community leaders decided to hold a demonstration along the highway.

Events of January 13th

Overview and Witness Testimony

“We had recruited volunteers at a demonstration that had been formally allowed by the authorities. I arrived at 3:15 and we started, we were on the road, they gave us permission to protest. After just a few seconds, we were told to disperse the demonstration. We were told ‘you have ten minutes to clear the road.’ Just forty seconds later, someone shouted that ‘10 minutes had past.’ They immediately started firing rubber bullets and spreading tear gas. They wouldn't let us out. It seemed planned. Tear gas, drones, rubber bullets and violent tools... I don't understand why. I was there and no one was throwing stones. I didn't see anyone who was armed.”

- **Hanadi Shaer**, Arab woman activist; works at the grassroots organization Ajeec as advocacy coordinator (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“On Thursday I was at a demonstration, very unpleasant. It was hard, because I came in and knew it was legal. They had organized everything in advance with the police. I found children and women, old people who attended the demonstration because they thought it was an unprovocative

legal way for them to express their needs. After 15 minutes, I saw the police talking to former MK Taleb –al Sana I heard them say we had to evacuate because the demonstrators had blocked 2 roads -- leading to the Dead Sea and Beer Sheva. They said we had 10 minutes to evacuate. Well, 2 minutes later, the scene suddenly becomes a war zone: stun grenades, tear gas, shooting. It didn't surprise me very much.”

- **Bashir Al Zayadni** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“It was a demonstration approved by the police. No one blocked the highway or even stepped off the sidewalk. Everyone was behind the guardrail, until the officer in charge used a megaphone to say we could block the highway for ten minutes. It was only then that people began moving onto the highway. We didn’t throw stones or anything, but then I was surprised to hear the officer calling for the highway to be cleared...

Before [the policeman] finished speaking, we heard three stun grenades exploding. That’s how it started, with kids, older people and women on the highway. Suddenly they began firing gas as well as bullets at people. I started going back to the area near the road and told the young people who had already been hit by the police not to throw stones. I have it filmed. I immediately saw three people fall after being hit. I saw an older man lying by the roadside, along with a younger guy.”

- **Bassem Abu-Rabia**, resident of Hūrah to Haaretz (Yefet, Feb. 7th, 2022).

On January 13th, 2022, thousands of Bedouin residents and other activists gathered on Road 31 to protest the KKL-JNF activities on lands of the Al-Atrash family. The police had approved the demonstration. Then, at the scene, they arranged a sudden, brutal attack against the protesters. Witnesses wonder whether the attacks were premeditated as a way to suppress future demonstrations, and stifle the growing political activism against the JNF, led by Bedouin civil rights leaders (Adalah, Jan. 16th, 2022; ABC News, Jan 13th, 2022; Yefet, Jan. 18th, 2022).

In contrast to all eye-witness reports, the police issued a statement: “Dozens of protesters began throwing stones, endangering the lives of motorists and

the police at the scene.” Therefore, they responded “in compliance with police procedure.” (Yefet and Hasson, Feb. 7th, 2022; Fabien, Jan 13th, 2022).

Arrests

During this demonstration, the police arrested sixty minors (Abu-Obaid, February, 2022), including a 10-year-old boy (Khoury et al., Jan. 11th 2022). Other reports suggest the numbers of arrests climbed to 85, 96, and 155 in the followed days (Adalah, Jan. 16th, 2022; Yefet, Jan 18, 2022). The Israeli Security Agency Shabak detained and investigated six to eight people in what is considered an “anti-terror” campaign (Times of Israel Staff, Jan. 14th, 2022).

Twenty-six Bedouin women were arrested, along with dozens of male activists and protestors. Among them was 25-year-old Nawal Abu Kaf, a student at Sapir college. She was arrested and beaten in full view of cameras. According to a number of eye-witnesses, she was standing beside other activists and was not threatening the officers in any way (Salaime, Jan. 19th, 2022).

By July 2022 the number of criminal charges has reached thirty eight (Abu Freih, 2022) and there are still a number of detainees in custody to date. Hundreds of Bedouins have been arrested in the weeks following the demonstration, often without cause or warrant (Abu-Obaid, February, 2022). By July 2022 there are 4 minors under house arrest, all in with restraining orders from the center of the country, and another 4 adults in custody until the end of proceedings. A security indictment was filed against all of them (Abu Freih, 2022). Whether this is actually a direct result of behavior at the protests is questionable, given the massive scale of arrests. It is, on its face, an attempt by Israel’s security establishment to sew fear in the Bedouin communities, and suppress further protests.

Injuries

“Anyone who couldn’t escape was hurt... I wanted to run away, but MK Sami Abu Shahda was next to me and could not run away, so I decided to help him. He managed to jump and during that time I was shot on my leg. I felt something enter into my leg but I did not want to see because

I wanted to run away. I started to run and fainted. After two hours I was taken to Soroka Hospital.”

- **Hanadi Shaer** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

Interviewer: “Do you believe the shooting was intentional?”

“Yes. I was alone, no one around me. I did nothing wrong. I was looking for shelter, a safe place I could be. All my friends had dispersed. I fell and had a hard time getting up. I felt I had to run away because it was full of tear gas. I was hit on the shoulder, there are still marks. For the past two weeks I could not move it and thought it was a fracture. I do not know yet, I have a test at the end of this month [March.] The doctor said there is a risk of fracture.”

- **Bashir Al Zayadni** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“I have a face injury that I will suffer from for my entire life. I have three fractures in my jaw. Everything is shattered. I had metal plates inserted under general anesthesia at Soroka. I still have stitches and require lengthy treatment. It’s difficult to talk since I can only bring my teeth together on one side. That will be sorted out only after several teeth are extracted and others implanted in their place.”

- **Bassem Abu-Rabia** (Yefet, Feb. 7th, 2022; Hasson and Yefet, Feb 7th 2022).

Dozens of activists were severely injured during the attack. Among them was 44-year-old Bassem Abu-Rabia, who was struck in the head with a rubber sponge-tipped bullet, and suffered fractures to the jaw and face. Another man, 39-year-old Taleb Sa’ida, required neurosurgery after his face was mangled by a rubber sponge-tipped bullet. He also suffered from multiple fractures to the skull. Two young men from the Al-Batihah family, 17-year-old Obeideh and Uday, 20, of the unrecognized village of Al-Ghara, were also shot in the face. They both lost teeth and required stitches (Yefet, Feb. 7th, 2022).

Since 2014, police have replaced use of 30-gram sponge-tipped bullets with denser ones weighing twice as much. This denser version is far more dangerous, having the capacity to cause extensive trauma and even death. Despite being linked to numerous police killings within Israel and the West

Bank, this bullet remains in use today (Yefet, Feb. 7th, 2022; Hasson and Yefet, Feb 7th 2022).

There are a number of restrictions on their use, which is supposedly limited to the most serious of circumstances. Restrictions direct the police to aim for lower extremities, and not to fire at pregnant women, children, or the elderly (Yefet, Feb. 7th, 2022). All of these restrictions were ignored on January 13th, where witnesses report indiscriminate fire to the face and head, and two elderly men were struck (Yefet, Feb. 7th, 2022; Hasson and Yefet, Feb 7th 2022).

On February 7th, Public Security Minister Omer Bar Lev called for an investigation after a Haaretz report revealed that five individuals suffered traumatic head injuries within a period of 10 days. All these incidents were due to police operations in Bedouin communities. On January 23rd, police entered the village of Tarābīn aṣ-Ṣānī‘ to search for weapons. After a group of children threw stones at them, the police began a full-scale assault on the entire area. During this assault, 16-year-old Abdullah Tarabin, lost an eye after being hit by a sponge-tipped bullet, while attempting to hide in his home (Yefet, Feb. 7th, 2022; Hasson and Yefet, Feb 7th 2022).

Media Coverage

Multiple testimonies describe the protest as nonviolent and legally allowed by the police. Protesters did nothing to incite violence. However, mainstream media in Israel did little to cover the violent police response. Rather, media attention was dominated by reports of violent unrest and acts of terror; for example, an attack on a Jewish journalist in Ṣġīb as-Salām, several days before (Times of Israel Staff, Jan. 14th, 2022; Khoury et al., Jan 11th 2022; JNS, Jan. 13th, 2022).

Coverage of the protests mostly centered around police accusations of stone throwing, such as in a Times of Israel article dated January 14th, 2022:

“Recent days have seen daily violent protests in the south over the controversial tree-planting project by the Jewish National Fund. On Thursday night police said several cars were damaged from stones hurled by protestors in multiple locations in the northern Negev. A police officer was

lightly hurt and hospitalized in one such incident near the Nevatim airbase. In other locations, tires were set on fire and placed on main highways. Police said 13 people were arrested” (Fabien, 2022; Times of Israel Staff, Jan. 14th, 2022).

Not only does this article fail to mention the protest in Sa’wah the previous night and the police response, it fixates all attention on Bedouin assaults of police officers.

Another example of misinformation is offered by the Jerusalem Post, which reported on January 14th:

*“Some 2,000 Bedouin citizens demonstrated against the tree planting in January, blocking Highway 31 near Bedouin encampments. At least 13 protesters were arrested, and at least three were **lightly injured**. They threw stones at police, who responded with anti-riot rubber bullets, shock grenades and a water cannon”* (Hoffman, 2022).

This report and others adopt the police narrative of stone-throwing, despite the unanimous record among eye-witnesses who report there was no prompt for the violence, and that the crackdown was sudden and brutal (JNS, Jan. 13th, 2022; Times of Israel Staff, Jan. 14th, 2022). Furthermore, one must wonder, what the press considers a “light injury,” given the record of facial trauma and fractures suffered by protesters.

The Aftermath: Police investigation and inquiry

“I don't want to be taken in on a [journalistic] investigation [of the police], because they arrested so many people after the demonstration: children, minors. I didn't even go to Soroka and they told me I shouldn't. I slept on it [a fractured shoulder] last night. My sister took care of me. I didn't know it was that serious. I woke up feeling terrible on Friday and went to a private hotline and paid 50 shekels [for medical advice.]”
- **Bashir Al Zayadni** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“Families, women, senior citizens, teens all came to the demonstration legitimately, but police are trying to deter the Bedouin community from exercising its democratic right to demonstrate. We’re protesting outside

the court in Beer Sheva every morning until the detainees are freed and the arrests stop.”

- **Talal Alkernawi**, Bedouin activist, protest organizer (Yefet, Jan. 18th, 2022).

Police response to the demonstration was not a matter of addressing illegal behavior, but of suppressing unwanted civil disobedience. During the weeks and months following the protest, police continued a wholesale indictment of Bedouin “suspects:” searching through unrecognized villages, imposing criminal fines, and arresting people en masse. In a statement issued by the Shin Bet, on January 14th:

“The Shin Bet and Israel Police take all involvement of Israeli citizens in terrorist activity very seriously, and will continue to work to bring to justice those who work to harm the security of the state's citizens and security forces,” (Jerusalem Post Staff, Feb. 10th, 2022).

As part of this “work for justice,” it is quite easy for the police to charge Arab minorities with criminal offenses and even terrorism without evidence. These basic, unquestioned tenants of police control are built on a judicial system which blindly trusts police officers and upholds systematic discrimination based on ethnic segregation (Kremer, July 29th, 2021).

For example, on Tuesday, January 18th, police arrested 30 people – all Bedouin – who were part of the protest. According to the police, they were suspected of “rioting and throwing stones.” They did not have to present evidence to the courts to support these claims. According to the police, 96 Bedouin activists had been arrested since the beginning of the demonstrations (Fabien, 2022), though the number may be as high as 155 people, 40% of them minors (Abu-Obeid, Jan. 2022). They were identified by posts on social media (Salaime, Jan. 19th, 2022).

Yet for most individuals taken into custody, it was merely their association with the protest which warranted arrest. According to Marwan Abu Freih, Field Coordinator of Adalah’s Negev division, the police repeatedly sought to extend detentions for “minors and adults alike,” sometimes three times in a row, without completing investigations linking the individuals to illegal

activities. The courts, without question, granted local police the authority to extend detentions still without investigation, as part of the wider “anti-terrorism” purge. The detentions, according to Abu Freih, are unlawful and violate the civil protections granted to all of Israel’s citizens – as police are generally obligated to support their claims in court, yet “haven’t conducted any investigative activities,” (Yefet, Jan. 18th, 2022). Yet when it comes to “preventing” unrest from Israel’s Arab minorities, it is clear that not every citizen has the same rights.

Psychological Impacts

" People were hurt not only physically but mentally. It's still ongoing."

- **Anonymous** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“I came out distressed– I do not sleep well... I still remember people’s faces, the smell, the cold. Every time I leave my house, I remember things. I tried to get back to routine, but I’m not so done with that.”

- **Nawal**, a Bedouin woman resident of the recognized village of Umm Bafin. She was detained and spent several nights in prison (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“Now, when my older boy goes to the grocery, I’m afraid of what might happen, due to the racism. I’m even afraid when he takes his daughter to the doctor. We’re no longer citizens. We’re viewed differently. But we’ve been here from before the country was established and I am a citizen of the State of Israel.”

- **Bassem Abu-Rabia**

The shootings and arrests perpetuated by the police compound a constant sense of criminalization felt in the Bedouin society, which is barely portrayed in the media. After this incident, many Bedouin residents and activists chose not to continue protesting and stayed at their homes. Many people concluded that demonstrating for their rights may not be worth it anymore. For example, jail time prevents university students from attending class and threatens their academic standing (Salaime, Jan. 19th 2022). The risk of having open criminal charges in an Israeli Court for Bedouin students can be costly for

their future, their jobs and their reputation. This form of oppression is not only anti-democratic but also quite psychologically damaging.

The psychological toll of police violence and cultural erasure, combined with the precarious burden of life in unrecognized village are destructive to the health and wellbeing of Bedouin citizens. State Welfare services did not offer any type of psychological services after these violent events occurred (Kremer, Jan. 2021; Kremer, July 29th, 2021). Thus, the mental health of entire communities has suffered as a result of police violence.

Unrepresented, Unrepresentable: Isolation from Israel's Legal System

“I decided I couldn't keep quiet, even though it could scald me, I wanted to sue the State. I realized there was nothing else to do. They say there are claims of throwing stones. I realized they could have nothing on the record for this. I contacted a few people, to see what we could do. Last week, I talked to a lawyer, he said if you sue, you won't get anything. Leave it, he told me.”

- **Hanadi Shaer** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“I asked the lawyer what he thought about filing a complaint with the police. He said it was not worth complaining. We would just ask that no writ of summons be opened. The judge's argument is that they believe the cops”.

- **Nawal** (Salaime, Jan. 19th, 2022).

“The State of Israel does not differentiate between citizens and non-citizens in Arab society. A sensible person would think that an Israeli citizen who is also a resident of Israel is in a better position... but this is not true. State institutions treat us the same way. To them, we are a security and demographic threat. It's sadder when the person is a citizen. The State aims to concentrate and reduce as many Arabs as possible in as little space as possible.”

- **Bashir Al Zayadni** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

Interviewer: “Have you ever considered going to the police with a complaint?”

“No, because someone – many people – did it. There was no minister who opposed it. In the media, everyone's talking about how the egos [of politicians] got wild. There was no communication of ours that was covered extensively. There is nothing we could say that the media or police would respond to... it's hard to believe that a governmental body would take it seriously.”

- **Bashir Al Zayadni** (Kremer, Jan. 2022).

“I'm sorry there are no rights for people who have come to be helpless. I would like to have the support of such a body that protects people who are harmed by the state's institutions. The fact that there is no such thing, is very frustrating.”

- **Nawal** (Salaime, Jan. 19th, 2022).

None of the Bedouin activists and protesters we interviewed for this made a complaint to the police, despite having real reasons to do so. In the case of Hanadi Shaer, she wanted to file a complaint, but her lawyer advised her not to. Each and every one of the people we interviewed was advised not to go to the police or the courts to voice their concerns about the abuse of their rights as citizens. Bashir Al Zayadni was also told to stay away by a lawyer. Unfortunately, these individuals continue to be defenseless before the courts and before the police.

Conclusions

How could it be that citizens of Israel are unable or afraid to assert their rights as citizens, and demand accountability from the police? An easy answer is to point towards the racist antagonization of Arabs so endemic in Israeli society—perhaps some of the police officers truly meant to cause harm based on hatred of this kind.

However, the problem goes deeper; it has roots in the original appropriation of Bedouin lands – an act which to this day, the State refuses to recognize. Because Bedouin claims to land are illegitimate in Israeli society, the existence of Bedouin communities upon these lands is also considered a liability, a “problem” for the State. The fact that Bedouin residents of these villages, Sa’wah and Khirbit al-Watan, have a legitimate history on the land presents a problem for the police, for the security establishment, and for Israel’s “democratic” institutions (Amara, 2013; Moussa, Jan. 20, 2022).

Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon neatly summarized this problem in December, 2000 with an article to the journal *Land*:

“In the Negev, we face a serious problem: About 900,000 dunams of government land are not in our hands, but in the hands of the Bedouin population. I, as a resident of the Negev, see this problem every day. It is, essentially, a demographic phenomenon... Out of weakness, perhaps also lack of awareness about the issue, we, as a country, are doing nothing to confront this situation... The Bedouin are grabbing new territory. They are gnawing away at the country’s land reserves, and no one is doing anything significant about it. (Mair, 2008, p. 11; Abu-Ras, 2006, p. 1)”

Racist overtones aside, it is obvious that the people Sharon is speaking of clearly do not belong to the same country as those whom he is addressing. One would think this is some secret mafia, a class of foreigners ‘stealing’ State resources. And yet he is speaking of Israeli citizens, a whole ethnic group. This is the attitude of the police. It is the unanimous opinion of Israel’s justice system: Bedouin citizens expressing their rights constitute a fundamental threat to law and order.

Since 2000, Israel's policies have done much to isolate Bedouin citizens from their own government, from the court system, and from basic civil protections (Kremer, July 29th, 2021). The police are at liberty to use whatever means "necessary" to repress the voices of Bedouin activists – whether it be smashing people's skulls, suffocating conscientious objectors with tear gas, charging towards women and the elderly with horses, or shooting those who attempt to flee. Detaining youth without cause, holding civilians in prison for indefinite periods without evidence, court sanctioned police violence – all of these options are on the table. And yet, it is ill-advisable for any of the victims to seek an investigation, a lawsuit, or even to file a police complaint.

NCF stands in unison with the victims of police violence. We demand a thorough investigation of police tactics on unarmed, legal protestors. We question the grounds for arresting 155 Bedouin citizens for simply appearing at a demonstration. We recognize the right of Israel's Bedouin communities to raise their voices against policies which systemically antagonize them. We demand an end to the collective denial of Arab-Bedouin civil rights in the State of Israel.

It was community members, Bedouin residents, members of the Al-Atrash family and their supporters who organized these demonstrations. The protest came about because these communities live without government recognition, in villages the government refuses to place on maps. The aim of the demonstrations was to raise public awareness of their status in society, and also, to demand a change: investment, infrastructure, recognition.

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The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF) is an Arab-Jewish organization established in 1997 by Arab and Jewish residents of the Naqab, to provide a platform for a shared society in the Naqab. The Forum recognizes the neglect of Israeli governments and their authorities, who have denied the Bedouin community in the Naqab full rights and recognition of the villages, and acts to prevent further affliction and harm to recognized and unrecognized villages. The Forum's activities are varied and include local and international advocacy, research, community activities, public protests, social media, work with Israeli and foreign media, and more. All activities are based on Arab-Jewish partnership. *In accordance with the Israeli 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”.



The Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages (RCUV) is a democratically elected body, chosen to represent the Arab Bedouin community residing in more than 35 unrecognized villages in the Negev/Naqab. The residents of each village elect a local committee of 37 persons, who become members of the general assembly of the RCUV. The primary goal of the RCUV is unconditional governmental recognition of the Arab Bedouin (unrecognized) villages in the Negev/Naqab, which have been completely excluded from any form of governmental support or recognition. This recognition, however, must translate to more than municipal services. "Recognition" implies social, economic, and cultural equality with all citizens of Israel.



Alhuquq Center is an independent, non-governmental, non-partisan association founded to benefit the Arab Bedouin citizens of the Negev/Naqab living in both recognized townships and unrecognized villages in Israel. The Center works to protect their legal, social, human, economic and civic rights in the face of increasingly discriminatory governmental policies. Improving education, stabilizing housing, ensuring voting rights, and fostering self-advocacy are among the Center's top priorities.



Sidreh Association is a non-profit organization established in 1998 in al-Lagiyiyh with the mission to support the Palestinian-Bedouin woman in the Negev in her pursuit of the full realization of herself and her rights as well as those of her community. Sidreh focuses on 4 main strategic objectives: Access to knowledge; Access to resources; Gender equality and participation; Sustainable development. Sidreh's vision is a society in which the Palestinian-Arab woman has full ownership over herself and decisions, fully enjoys her rights, enjoys safety and stability, feels pride regarding her cultural heritage, and realizes her place as an active member in her society, bringing sustainable development to her community.

