Nagabiya
Bedouin Society Knowledge and Research Hub

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

Existence in the Shadow of War: A Conference held at the Marcus Campus, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in Be'er Sheva, on July 8, 2024.

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF) hosted the Conference in partnership with Ben-Gurion University. It focused on crucial issues within the Bedouin society in the Negev since the onset of the war on October 7, 2023. Nagabiya, NCF's Bedouin Society Knowledge and Research Hub, presented groundbreaking research and data about the often-overlooked conditions in unrecognized Bedouin villages, focusing on Bedouin women. About 100 Bedouin and Jewish people attended the conference, which was also covered by various press outlets: Davar (Hebrew), Makan, and Radio Nas (Arabic).

The opening panel of the conference began with a session led by Haia Noach, NCF's Executive Director, with Prof. Amar Abu Karen, Head of the Economic Division, and Talal Alkernawi, Mayor of Rahat. They shared insightful perspectives on the consequences of the war on Bedouin society, protection measures within the community, and the significant damage to employment among the Bedouin population in the Negev-Naqab.

The following session focused on the Emergency Framework. Huda Abu-Obaid, NCF's Local Advocacy Coordinator, spoke about the economic consequences of these times of conflict for the Bedouin society. Dr. Manal Hreib, Director of the Nagabiya Knowledge Hub, presented groundbreaking research and findings on the economic challenges, employment patterns, and demographic shifts within the Bedouin community, particularly during the war. She detailed the significant loss of income, the destruction of small businesses, and the demographic changes resulting from displacement and migration within the community. This session was followed by testimonies of women from unrecognized Bedouin villages about the war. Amira Abu Aduba from the village of Abu Tlul and Salima al-Ṣaġāyreh from Rakhamah shared their personal stories and highlighted the challenges faced by their communities, including lack of basic services, lack of wartime protection, and threats of home demolitions. They spoke about their resilience and community-driven initiatives aimed at improving wartime living conditions and advocating for recognition and long-term solutions.

The next panel, Government and Civil Intervention in Times of Emergency and War, was moderated by former "Haaretz" journalist Mr. Nati Yafet, former Haaretz reporter and communications director of the Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev. The panelists, Mickey Gitzin, Director of the New Israel Fund in Israel, accountant Ziad Abu G'anem, consultant to the Council of Arab Local Authorities, and Fouad Ziadneh, Head of the Rahat Community Center and the Emergency Room in Rahat, shared their insights on wartime interventions and on ways to mitigate the adverse effects that worsened the situation of the Bedouin society in the Negev.

The final panel focused on prospects for the Bedouin community. It was moderated by Prof. Sarah Hellman from Ben Gurion University, with panelists Prof. Sarab Abu Rabia-Queder from Ben Gurion University and Mr. Suleiman Elamour, co-Chair of AJEEC-NISPED.

A special feature of the conference was the exhibition of our photo project, which documents the daily lives and struggles of Bedouin women in unrecognized villages. Funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, the photos provided a powerful visual representation of the issues discussed and were prominently displayed throughout the event.

The conference was very successful and marks the first event organized jointly by Nagabiya and Ben Gurion University. Two government officials, one from the Home Front Command which is responsible for civilians' wartime protection, and the Head of the Southern District Employment Service Centre, had agreed to participate as speakers but failed to attend following political pressure and orders from their Ministers. Haia Noach, Head of NCF, said: "At a time when we are fighting for equality and human rights, we faced anti-democratic efforts to cancel this conference. We insist on our right to present information and discuss it critically. Freedom of expression is the essence of democracy. It is our right to have an open and respectful democratic discourse."