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

To: Ms. Balakrishnan Rajagopal **November 26, 2024**
Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Subject: Submission on the Demolitions and Displacement in Umm al-Ḥīrān and Bedouin Communities in the Negev/Naqab.



Executive Summary: This report, prepared by the **Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF)**, examines the demolition of **Umm al-Ḥīrān**, alongside the broader issue of escalating demolitions across unrecognized Bedouin villages in the region. Submitted to **Ms. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**, the report aims to highlight systemic policies that perpetuate displacement and erode the livelihoods of Bedouin communities.

Key objectives of the report include:

- Showcasing the case of Umm al-Hiran as a stark example of the injustices faced by Bedouin communities in Israel.
- Documenting the broader trend of escalating demolitions, which threaten thousands of residents in unrecognized villages.
- Advocating for urgent intervention and systemic reforms to halt demolitions and address the structural discrimination faced by Bedouin communities.

NCF calls on the Special Rapporteur and the international community to:

- Intervene in the case of Umm al-Hiran to halt the demolitions and ensure the protection of its residents.
- Advocate for policies recognizing Bedouin land rights and guaranteeing access to adequate housing.
- Urge the Israeli government to cease discriminatory practices and incorporate Bedouin communities into sustainable regional development plans.

The demolitions in Umm al-Hiran and across the Negev are emblematic of systemic violations of the right to adequate housing and broader human rights. If left unaddressed, they set a dangerous precedent for other unrecognized villages, risking the further marginalization of Bedouin communities. This report underscores the urgent need for international attention and decisive action to ensure justice and equity for the affected populations.

1. Introduction

Umm al-Ḥīrān, an unrecognized Bedouin village in Israel's Negev/Naqab region, has persistently faced severe human rights violations, due to demolitions and forced evictions. Between November 11th and 14th, 2024, the village was completely demolished and its residents forcibly evacuated. The residents, members of the Abu al-Qi'an tribe, have lived on this land for generations. During legal hearings, they proposed to be incorporated into the new Jewish village of Hiran (later renamed Dror) as a compromise. Their proposal was denied[1]. Instead, they were relocated to Ḥūrah, a government-planned Bedouin township plagued by overcrowding and inadequate resources.

The destruction of Umm al-Ḥīrānn reflects a broader policy of displacing Bedouin communities from unrecognized villages to make way for Jewish community expansion and infrastructure projects. This systemic effort to erase Bedouin presence from rural areas is exemplified by the establishment of Hiran/Dror, now being built on the ruins of the demolished village.

2. Chronological Description of Events

Before its recent destruction, the village of Umm al-Ḥīrān was home to members of the Abu al-Qi'an tribe. It is located eight km northeast of Ḥūrah and had a population of about 500 residents in 2018. The tribe was originally displaced in 1948. In 1952, their lands in the northwestern Negev were seized for use by the Israeli army, forcing the tribe to relocate again. In 1956, they were displaced once more by Israeli authorities and moved to the Wadi Atir area. There, they built homes, cultivated the land, and established a functioning village known as Umm al-Ḥīrān.

2003: The Israeli Planning Authorities approved the construction of the **Hiran** (later changed to Dror) settlement on the land of Umm al-Ḥīrān. This decision marked the beginning of the displacement process for the Bedouin residents, who were issued eviction notices and demolition orders in 2004.

May 2015: The **Israeli Supreme Court** rejected the residents' appeal to cancel the eviction and demolition orders, allowing the Israeli government to proceed with its forced relocation of Umm al-Ḥīrān

[1] https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/9467

residents to Ḥūrah, a nearby government-planned township. However, Ḥūrah already suffers from overcrowding and lacks adequate housing for the displaced families.

August 2015: Construction to establish the **Hiran** settlement near the homes of Umm al-Ḥīrān's residents began. Demolition orders were issued for residents' homes, and they began to oppose the demolitions through **legal challenges** in Israeli courts, **public protests**, and **direct action**– physically attempting to block bulldozers and prevent the destruction of their homes. Additionally, they organized solidarity efforts within their community and sought international support to highlight their struggle.

2017: The State began to actively transfer people from the village of Umm al-Hiran to the town of Hura. **Yaqub Abu al-Qi'an**, a respected member of the community, was killed by Israeli police during a demolition attempt.

Agreements signed with state representatives **in 2017 and the Supreme Court nullified 2018** because the chairman of the Bedouin Authority for Development and Bedouin Settlement lacked the necessary authority to approve them. Consequently, the residents were left in legal limbo with no official status, even after their relocation to Hura.

In **September 2024**, residents received **evacuation orders** from Israeli authorities set for the 10th to 24th of November 2024.

As of **November 2024**, the **entire village of Umm al-Ḥīrān** has been demolished and evacuated. All of the homes were demolished by the residents themselves so as to avoid the substantial fines imposed by the Israeli authorities for non-compliance with the demolition orders. The decision to **self-demolish** was painful, but the fines for demolition by state constructors would have been financially devastating. The last remaining structure, the mosque, the only building not self-demolished, stood until November 14, 2024, when it was demolished by Israeli authorities, marking the final destruction of the village. The entire community has been forcibly displaced, with no adequate housing alternatives provided.

November 14, 2024, at 3:00 am: **Raad Abu al-Qi'an**, head of the village council, along with two other council members, were **arrested by Israeli police** before the demolition of the Mosque and later released after several hours.

3. Number of Homes and Structures Demolished and Number of Displaced Individuals

- **Total homes and structures demolished in November 2024**: Approximately **35 homes**, the shelter, and the mosque of the village.
- **Number of displaced individuals**: we estimate that **200 to 350 residents** have been forcibly displaced. Many are now left without shelter, with no immediate housing alternatives provided by the Israeli government. (More over the past years, but it has proven difficult to confirm the numbers).

4. Authorities Involved in the Demolitions and Forced Evictions

- **Israeli Land Authority (ILA):** Issued the eviction orders and coordinated the demolition efforts.
- **Israeli Police (Blue Police):** Accompany the demolitions mainly in townships but also in the villages

- **Land Enforcement Forces**: Deployed to carry out the demolitions, evictions, and arrests, with a heavy security presence throughout the operations. The Authority for Land Law Enforcement moved in 2024 from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of National Security, under MK Itamar Ben Gvir's authority.
- **The Yoav Unit:** a paramilitary police force, plays a central role in executing demolitions in the Bedouin villages. Established in 2011, it operates under the Ministry of National Security and works in tandem with various state agencies, including the Israel Land Authority and the **Green Patrol.**[2] The Yoav Unit is tasked specifically with accompanying demolitions and enforcing land-use laws in Bedouin communities, which has drawn criticism for racial profiling and discriminatory practices.[3] (The Bedouins are the only ethnic group in Israel with its own authority and police division dedicated to them specifically).
- **Southern Administration for Land Laws Enforcement**, who decides about the demolition's priorities.
- **Local planning committees** like Abu Basma, Rahat, Arad, Beer-Sheva, and the Southern Planning Committee issue the orders.

5. Justification for the Demolitions and Forced Evictions

The Israeli government justifies the demolitions and forced evictions under the premise of **"illegal construction" and "development needs."** The land that Umm al-Hiran sits on is being repurposed to establish the **Dror (Hiran),** a Jewish village. The residents of Umm al-Hiran's homes were labeled as "illegal". However, it was the Israeli authorities who relocated the community to this site in the 1950s to serve as a protective barrier between Israel and Jordan, following their displacement from other ancestral lands in 1952. Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, as part of his law-and-order agenda, framed the demolitions as a necessary enforcement measure against what he termed "anarchy" in Bedouin communities.

6. Availability of Alternative Housing

Israeli authorities have failed to provide adequate housing for displaced Bedouin families. All are relocated to Hura, an overcrowded township lacking the infrastructure to support them. While some land may be allocated to some families, building permits are never granted, leaving them unable to legally construct homes and at risk of further demolitions. The relocation to government-planned townships forces Bedouin families to abandon their traditional lifestyle, agricultural practices, and social networks.

7. Vulnerable Persons Affected

The demolitions have especially affected **vulnerable groups**, including:

- **Women**: Facing deep emotional and psychological distress, as they lose their homes and community.

[2] Israeli Police Force Website, "The Negev Land Enforcement Unit", The Unit's Purpose, https://www.police.gov.il/join/yoav [Hebrew]
[3] https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/10193

- **Children**: Many children have witnessed the destruction of their homes and are suffering from trauma and disruptions to their education.
- **Elderly and Disabled Persons**: These groups face heightened challenges due to mobility difficulties and lack of access to basic services in the relocation sites.

8. Broader Context of Bedouin Displacement in the Negev/Naqab

The demolitions in **Umm al-Hiran** are part of a **larger pattern of displacement** affecting Bedouin communities across the Negev/Naqab. In the first six months of **2024 alone**, over **2,000 homes** and structures have been demolished across Bedouin villages, of them three entire villages were erased. These demolitions are the result of Israeli policies that do not recognize the unrecognized villages, label all houses as illegal, and prioritize Jewish community expansion, disregarding the rights of Bedouin communities to adequate housing. The reasons behind the systemic demolitions and displacement of Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab are rooted in a combination of legal, political, and ideological factors; Minister Itamar Ben Gvir has framed demolitions as part of enforcing "law and order," stigmatizing Bedouin communities as destabilizing elements.

- Villages Under Threat from Infrastructure and Development Projects[4]

In addition to systematic demolitions, Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab face displacement from large-scale infrastructure projects, which, under the guise of 'development,' prioritize Jewish communities while erasing Bedouin presence in the region.

Villages Under Immediate Threat: Several villages face imminent displacement due to infrastructure and development projects:

- **Al-Mkimin and ʻAwajan**: Impacted by the Goral Railway Line, these villages will lose access to land and resources.
- **Rakhamah**: The Dimona-Yerucham Railway threatens homes and restricts future development.
- **Umm Ratam and Al-Zarnouq**: At risk due to the expansion of railway lines and the proposed establishment of Jewish settlements.
- **Ghazzah and Al-Furʼah**: Facing home demolitions and agricultural losses from both railway projects and future phosphate mining operations.
- **Al Buqea** and **Umm Badun** received eviction orders.
- **Ras Jaraba** received eviction orders and the Regional Court ordered the inhabitants to leave at the end of the year 2024 in order to expand the city of Dimona eastward.
- the recognition of **Wadi al Naʼam** north of its place will cause future demolitions.
- **Tal Arad** (Arad) received eviction orders effective in June 2025.

Key Infrastructure Threats:

- **Railway Expansion Projects**:

Beʼer Sheva – Dimona – Tzefa – Rotem Railway: Covering over 14,000 dunams (3,460 acres), this project threatens to destroy 350 structures and displace residents in villages such as Khashim Zannih,

[4] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/bbfbf46fb07144a68b1f62280e967a98

Al-Zarnouq, Bir Al-Mshash, Al-Sdeer, and Umm Ratam. These demolitions risk destabilizing communities by eliminating homes, agricultural infrastructure, and livelihood spaces.

Be'er Sheva – Arad newly planned Railway Line: Impacting around 50,000 residents, the proposed railway will block access roads and destroy agricultural land. Villages like Al-Fur'ah, Al-Za'arourah, and Ghazzah will suffer significant disruption, including home demolitions and restrictions on future development.

Dimona – Yerucham Railway Line: Targeting the village of Rakhamah, this project obstructs residents' access to services, farmland, and family connections, exacerbating socio-economic vulnerabilities.

- **Highway 6 Extension**: The extension of Highway 6 southwards will displace approximately 2,500 to 3,000 residents, affecting 400 buildings across villages like Khashim Zannih and Bir Al-Hamam. This plan has faced significant opposition due to its devastating impact on Bedouin communities.
- **High-Voltage Power Lines**: The right-of-way for these power lines covers 18,200 dunams (4,500 acres) and will lead to the demolition of buildings and expose residents to environmental hazards in villages such as Wadi Al-Mshash, Al-Sirr, and Wadi Al-Na'am.
- **Military Installations and Firing Zones**: The Ramat Beka military-industrial zone will displace thousands of residents, destroying over 1,200 structures across villages like Wadi Al-Mshash, Wadi Al-Na'am, and Abu Tlūl. This project also imposes severe environmental and safety risks on the remaining residents. it was privatized and no longer belongs to the state as a weapon testing site!
- **Afforestation as a Tool of Displacement:** The Jewish National Fund (JNF) utilizes afforestation projects as a means of displacing Bedouin communities. While presented as environmental conservation, these projects often serve as a guise for land expropriation. The village of Atir is currently under threat from such afforestation activities. In a previous instance, the village of Al-Araqib was demolished in 2010 to make way for JNF forests. This tactic further dispossesses Bedouin communities and restricts their access to ancestral lands.

9. Legal Framework and Policies Governing Demolitions in Bedouin Communities

The demolitions in Umm al-Hiran and other Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab are rooted in a legal framework that criminalizes Bedouin construction and facilitates forced displacement:

1. **Planning and Building Law (1965)**: This law mandates construction permits, which are unattainable for Bedouin villages due to their exclusion from State zoning frameworks. Even recognized villages face restrictive planning processes. This law underpins demolition orders and is enforced by the **Southern Administration for the Coordination of Land Laws** and the **Yoav Unit**.
2. **Kaminitz Law (2017)**: This amendment increased fines and expedited demolitions, disproportionately impacting Bedouin families who cannot obtain permits or rebuild after demolitions, deepening poverty and displacement.
3. **Land Acquisition (1953) and Absentee Property Law (1950)**: These laws facilitated state expropriation of Bedouin lands under Ottoman-era classifications, stripping communities of land rights and labeling their presence as "illegal."
4. **Systemic Zoning Discrimination**: The refusal to recognize Bedouin villages leaves them outside planning frameworks, branding homes as "illegal." Zoning policies prioritize Jewish settlement expansion, enabling demolitions without compensation or relocation options.

These policies violate **ICESCR Article 11** (adequate housing) and **UNDRIP Articles 10 and 31** (protection against forced eviction and land rights), reinforcing cycles of displacement and marginalization.

11. Conclusion and Call for Action

Beyond Umm al-Hiran, the broader pattern of infrastructure and development projects in the Negev reflects a deliberate strategy to displace Bedouin communities under the guise of "progress." The refusal to recognize Bedouin villages, coupled with plans for roads, power lines, and other infrastructure to cut through these communities, prioritizes the construction of Jewish Communities while intensifying the marginalization and displacement of Bedouin citizens.

The demolitions in Umm al-Hiran and across the Negev highlight systemic challenges that perpetuate cycles of poverty, loss of livelihood, and the erasure of Bedouin cultural and historical ties to their land. This situation demands urgent action.

We call on the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing to:

- Intervene in the case of Umm al-Hiran and halt demolitions in other Bedouin villages.
- Advocate for equitable policies that recognize Bedouin land rights and ensure access to adequate housing.
- Urge the Israeli government to cease discriminatory practices and to include Bedouin communities in sustainable regional development plans that respect their cultural heritage and human rights.

Contact Information at the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF):

- Haia Noach, Executive Director: hn.dukium.org, **+972 50-770-1119**
- Chloé Portheault, International Advocacy: intl.advocacy@dukium.org, **+972 (0) 535293829**
- Huda Abu Obaid, Local Advocacy: advncf@gmail.com, **+972 54-338-7208**