

Tenth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

(New York, 16 to 27 May 2011)

Presented by Sana Ibn Bari on behalf of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality

Thank you Madam Chair.

I am Sana Ibn Bari and I will speak on behalf of Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality. I wish to draw your attention to State of Israel's efforts to displace the indigenous Bedouin from their ancestral land. Since the creation of the state in 1948, Bedouins have lived as internally displaced citizens within Israel.

Today nearly 80,000 indigenous Bedouin live in so-called "unrecognized villages" which are characterized by a lack of basic services. They are denied running water, electricity, telephone lines, paved roads, schools, medical services and other public institutions.

Further, the Bedouin are not secure in their own homes. All buildings in these villages (about 50,000 structures) are considered illegal by the government even though it is impossible for the Bedouin to apply for building permits. Thus homes can be demolished by the government at any moment, increasing poverty levels and inflicting great hardship on the most vulnerable who are the women and children. In the last 12 months alone, the unrecognized village of Al Arakib has been demolished 21 times, leaving 300 residents exposed to the hot days and bitterly cold desert nights. The recent spike in the number of homes lost this year seems to be in line with the government's policy decision early last year to triple the demolition rate.

As a Bedouin myself, I am compelled to remind the forum about these challenges facing the unrecognized villages and the seriousness of the state's action against its own people. The Arab-Bedouin face the harshest consequences of discrimination through laws as well as policy and practice.

I draw your attention in particular to a new government plan to deal with the Bedouin. The plan resulting from the Praver Commission, established to implement the recommendations of a previous commission, is yet to be publicly released. However, portions of the leaked document reveal that the government will recognize less than a third of the area claimed by the Bedouin under the Israeli legal system to be recognized as their traditional land. Additionally, thousands of Bedouin will be displaced when their villages are transferred to new locations. The implementation of this Praver Commission will have a serious detrimental impact on the Bedouin population in southern Israel. It has become clear to us that the government is moving to disinherit the Bedouin from their ancestral land.

Thank you for turning your attention to these issues.