

11th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues

(United Nations, New York, 7-18 May 2012)

Presented by Dr. Mansour Nsasra on behalf of the Negev Co-Existence Forum for Civil Equality

Thank you Mr. Chairman

My name is Dr. Mansour Nsasra (a lecturer at the University of Exeter, Department of Politics) and I will speak on behalf of the Negev Co-Existence Forum for Civil Equality. I wish to draw your attention to the Israeli authorities intensified efforts to displace and relocate part of the indigenous Arab Bedouin in southern Israel from their ancestral land, and in particular, to the government's recently passed Praver-Amidror Plan, which would displace 30,000 Arab Bedouin citizens from their homes and villages throughout the Naqab/ Negev and Beersheba, Israel's southern desert area.

The Negev and Beersheba region was inhabited for centuries by indigenous Bedouin tribes, mainly semi-nomadic pastoralists. After the establishment of the State of Israel, in the Naqab/ Negev, and allegedly for "various reasons", the majority of the Bedouin who stayed under Israel's rule after 1948 were evicted from their original land and were concentrated in an enclosed zone 'siyaj' in north east of Beersheba. The expulsion mainly took place in the western area of the Naqab/ Negev, which became a closed zone. The majority of the remnant Bedouin were never allowed to return to their original.

Since the creation of Israel in 1948, part of the Bedouin have lived as internally displaced citizens in Israel. Today, there are an estimated 200,000 Arab indigenous Bedouin living in both "unrecognized villages" and government-planned townships in the Naqab/Negev and Beersheba region. A significant part of the indigenous Bedouin citizens of Israel live in 46 "unrecognised" villages. These are Bedouin villages in the Naqab/Negev, which Israel does not recognize as legal; the villages are deprived of basic services like housing, water, electricity, education and health care.

The Praver-Amidror Plan seeks to re-locate an estimated 30,000 Arab indigenous Bedouin citizens from these unrecognized villages and force them to live in government-planned townships. These towns already sit at the bottom of all social and economic indicators in Israel, and don't have the infrastructure needed to accommodate such a large influx of new residents. Built without taking into account indigenous Arab Bedouin cultural traditions, forced urbanization has also disrupted the social fabric of Bedouin communities and denies the Bedouin the right to continue living their indigenous way of life.

There was no consultation process with the Arab Bedouin community regarding the formulation of the Praver-Amidror Plan. In other words, there was no opportunity for the affected indigenous community to provide their input. Furthermore, it seems clear that the Israeli authorities are prepared to use aggressive force to carry out the Plan, especially given a recent report that the Israeli authorities established a unit of officers to enforce evacuations and demolitions of Arab Bedouin homes and villages.

The Praver-Amidror Plan violates numerous articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including most notably Article 10, which states that, “indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories” and that “no relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned”.

The Plan also violates Article 8 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states that indigenous peoples “have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture” and should be protected from “any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights”.

In its Concluding observations, released in March 2012, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that Israel abandon the Praver-Amidror Plan since it would “legalize the ongoing policy of home demolitions and forced displacement of the indigenous Bedouin communities.” The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality and the Bedouin community endorses this position, and urges the state of Israel to cancel the Plan.

As a member of the Arab Bedouin community myself, I am compelled to remind the Forum about these challenges facing the indigenous Arab Bedouin in Negev/Israel, and the seriousness of the state’s actions against its own citizens, which are in clear violation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It has been documented that more than 1,000 homes and structures were demolished in Arab Bedouin communities throughout the Naqab/Negev and Beersheba region in 2011. Should the Praver-Amidror Plan go ahead, we can expect many more demolitions, one of the most painful and destructive aspects of the Israeli authorities policy of forced displacement of its Arab Bedouin citizens.

Article 26 of the Declaration also states that, “Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or other-wise used or acquired.” We also urge that land ownership of the Bedouin must be recognized and house demolitions must be stopped.

*Ultimately, any implementation plan that, like the Praver-Amidror Plan, is forcefully and unilaterally imposed upon the already disadvantaged Arab Bedouin community will only further undermine the delicate social fabric of the Negev and inflame Arab-Jewish relations. We are calling for the urgent intervention of the international community to avert this possible outcome.*

Thank you.

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