

United Nations Working group on Indigenous Populations

23rd session, Geneva, 18-22 July 2005

Agenda Item 7(c): "the human rights situation of indigenous peoples in States and territories threatened with extinction for environmental reasons".

Joint statement of: Negev coexistence Forum

AlSalamu Alykoom....

Thank you Mr. Chairperson for giving me the opportunity to speak

Bedouin....this word is derived living in the desert.....and the Bedouin is the one who lives in the desert.....his entire life depend* on the land. Any problem in this land simply means disruption of his life, which is closely connected to the [and. In the case that a country does not recognize his father and grandfathers land rights, it usually takes legal or illegal action to expel them from that land.

With the establishment of the state of Israel, the Bedouins lost most of their land, more than 90%. However this was not the only shock that Bedouin experienced, their numbers decreased from about 950,000 (cited from the British mandate documents!) to 7000-13.000 according to Israeli data. They either fled or were expelled from their land. Consequently they lost their economic livelihood and their tribal structure and their leadership. Only Children and the elderly remained behind.

Today, after 57 years, the Israeli state does not recognise the right of the Bedouin Indigenous people of the Negev and act against them by demolishing their houses and spraying dangerous chemicals to destroy the crops. This hurts the environment.

The Negev area has been used as a dump. This environmental risk threatens all the Negev citizen; Bedouins and Jews. The Bedouins have been suffering as result of the production of chemicals at Romat Hovav chemical plants. A Bedouin tribe living close to this area have been complaining against air pollution which is the cause of a high rate of respiratory and dermatology diseases. The only solution offered by the authorities is for the population to leave their land.

In the absence of local authorities, garbage disposal is not done. Therefore Bedouin areas have been more of a dump, polluting the air and increasing reptiles, scorpions and rats. A number of children and the elderly have had to go to hospital because of the injuries inflicted upon them by these reptiles.

Bedouin areas have been receiving the sewage of Jews and Arabs cities. In the area where I live, there is a canal for this sewage refuse of Israeli towns and settlements in the west bank and Hebron city. That represents an environmental danger to the population and nature. Many of us have had to cross this canal either to go to schools or to go the other side of the area. Many children have to wade across this dirty water to go to school. Many of them have suffered from dermatological and allergic diseases. The area is mosquito-infested, not to mention the offensive smells. All appeals to solve this problem have gone unheeded. The population were left with no alternative but to go to Israeli high court where this problem has been discussed for 5 years with no light at the end of the tunnel. All these environmental problems are meant to exercise pressure on the people to leave their land, give up their culture and abandon their way of life. Thus the land will be evacuated from the indigenous population. All of this is but one example. There are many other similar problems.

Thank you for your kind attention.