

Item 7. Future work of the Permanent Forum, including issues considered by ECOSOC and emerging issues, specifically challenges related to pandemics and responses to them

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The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality has been advocating for the rights of the Arab Bedouin indigenous people and their civil and human rights for more two decades, in collaboration with non-government organizations and local stakeholders. Nevertheless, women, men, boys and girls of all ages continue to face unprecedented challenges to education, health, employment, and effective social and civil participation. The Bedouin residents of the Negev/Naqab are an indigenous minority with a distinct way of life and other special characteristics. Members of the Bedouin community in the Negev/Naqab are also an integral part of the Arab Palestinian minority, as well as citizens of the State of Israel. The Negev/Naqab's Bedouin consists of 280,000 citizens, residing in three forms of settlements: seven government-planned townships, eleven villages recognized by the State, and 35 villages that the State refuses to recognize. All Bedouin residents suffer from wide-spread discrimination and violations of their human rights and are, in fact, marginalized from mainstream Israeli society.

Amid a worldwide pandemic, with four elections in two years, the human rights situation of the Arab Bedouin residents of the Naqab has become even more vulnerable.

The number of house demolitions in the Naqab in 2020 reached an historic peak. This, despite the instruction of the Attorney General to reduce demolition warrants and Police presence in the Naqab, after NCF with other civil society organizations sent an urgent letter requesting a halt in demolitions during the pandemic. In addition to the increasing discrimination and exclusion supported by the Kaminitz Law (2017) and the Nation State Law (2018), the Arab Bedouin residents have experienced extreme adversity connected to the increasing presence of the Police in their villages, tractors that plough their lands and demolition of their houses. This conjuncture of circumstances reflects that instead of protecting the rights of its citizens, the State of Israel has taken advantage of this dire situation to continue urbanizing the indigenous population of the Naqab through forced eviction and a series of actions that systematically violate their human rights. The economic crisis has created severe difficulties still unresolved at a national level, that affected the Bedouin society deeply. This, mainly due to the denial of infrastructure and basic services on behalf of the State.

Unemployment has raised significantly, and the state of the education is much more severe for the children of unrecognized villages compared to the rest of the country due to the lack of internet and electrical systems, that in addition to shortage in computers have make remote learning quite impossible. Although the academic year for nearly 142,000 children is lost, the State chooses to focus on repression and violence instead of responsibly investing on education and resources for a population that 72.9% of them live under the poverty line. Considering that 46% of the Arab Bedouin population are under 14 years old, and unable to continue with their studies, an urgent response on behalf of the State is needed.

2020 has been a uniquely challenging year for the Bedouin communities, as the impacts of Covid-19 echoed existing gaps and worsened the already-struggling communities' access to human rights and social resources. Israel's use of demolitions as a mechanism for the forced displacement of the Bedouin population in the Negev/Naqab has continued despite the pandemic. In 2020, 2,586 structures were demolished by the authorities in Bedouin localities in the Naqab. Tens of thousands of Bedouins in the Negev/Naqab currently live in homes that are subject to demolition orders due to

the lack of approved building plans for their villages, but in both the recognized and unrecognized villages such plans are effectively never approved by the state to begin with. Since March 2020, and in spite of the state of emergency and the government's instruction to home confinement, the authorities continued to distribute demolition warrants and plough up hundreds of acres of fields in over a dozen Bedouin villages, both recognized and unrecognized by the state. 2020 had the highest number of demolitions recorded and illustrates the continuation of the policies implemented in 2019, with a large monetary investment in enforcement of land laws against the Bedouins. The wide range of demolitions were carried out contrary to the General Attorney's commitment to freeze demolitions during the pandemic. Out of the 2,586 structures that were demolished in 2020, more than half (1,437) were carried out by the owners. This indicates the intensity of the intimidation campaign that the state leads against the Bedouin citizens, notably high fines, the criminal sanctions and the price paid by those who refuse to accept a forced settlement or a forced evacuation.