

The Bedouin Story

The Negev (Naqab) Bedouins once owned and freely used huge tracts of land, with ownership deeds going back to Ottoman times and a way of life as old as the Bible: settled villages, cultivated land, herding and extended seasonal pasture created both a home base and a wider community bonded by their famous hospitality. Every house boasted its *diwan*, a special room for receiving travellers.

From 1948 everything changed. Large numbers were driven into exile. For the next 20 years, all Israeli Arabs including the Bedouin lived under martial law. Internally displaced people (who had never left the country) trying to return to their homes, crops and animals could be shot as "infiltrators". During the 1950s most of the remaining Bedouins were forced by the army into a fenced area called the Siyag near Beer Sheva. And the state laid claim to all the remaining lands of the Negev, which it handed to the Jewish National Fund (JNF) to run, by proxy, exclusively for Jewish use.

It also used the weapon of house demolitions that has gained in pace ever since, and many bureaucratic devices to manage, control, and move people around like objects. In the 1960s and '70s a policy of concentration and urbanisation pushed many more into seven townships. They are the poorest towns in all of Israel, set in a barren, rocky landscape with few amenities or benefits of urban living, and notoriously sub-standard infrastructure services (water, power, garbage collection and sewerage), poor schools and public health: miserable places of little hope and no future, they too suffer punitive demolitions.

About 45 Bedouin villages survived, all but ten deemed "unrecognised", another bureaucratic excuse for neglect, lack of basic services, demolitions and fines. Officially a "problem" requiring reports and inquiries, they now face "the Law for the Regulation of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev". Ominously set up to deal with the Bedouins "once and for all", it could be the biggest forced eviction in present-day Israel. **A recent tripled rate of demolitions suggests that the Land Authority and JNF are already acting, ahead of the law.**



ACTION POINT Al Arakib is a village on the front line of this struggle, totally demolished dozens of times to make way for a JNF eucalyptus forest.. An international campaign seeks to STOP THE JNF, which in the UK is a registered charity! See www.stopthejnf.org

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality

Get publicity tools, newsletters, updates and a record of all demolitions, crop destructions and invasive tree planting via the NCF, www.dukuim.org. Based in Beer Sheva, UN-recognised, its work spans legal and political actions, protest, advocacy and education, social and support projects, emergency help with tents and building materials to sustain the resistance, and actions to create an "Arab Jewish partnership". The site also provides a print-ready exhibition kit : all you need is a local printer and a wall. (All these photos and banners are their work.)



AL-ARAKIB:

DEMOLISHED NEARLY SIXTY TIMES BUT STILL NOT BROKEN



Jews for Justice for Palestinians, representing the views of nearly 2000 British Jews, believes that the humanitarian values of Judaism have been corrupted by the Israeli state's human-rights abuses and affirms that Jews need to speak out for Palestinians' human rights

Most Jews in Europe and America descend from families that were displaced and driven west in the 1890s by Russia's racist pogroms, after being concentrated in the Pale of Settlement. Declared a problem, slandered and persecuted, their villages were demolished and burned, their way of life destroyed. Today such displacement of a whole people is considered a criminal act in international law.

We Jews who stand for Justice for Palestinians have the right and the duty to say: do NOT do this to the Bedouin, and do NOT do this in the name of Jews. Whether the Praver plan is an aberration, or proof of a deeper malaise, it is unacceptable. Please stand with us and with the Bedouins.

You can help: see action and links at jjfp.org

- * Support Rabbis for Human Rights financial appeal to fight the evictions
- * Lobby Foreign Secretary Hague to stop the Praver Plan
- * Support the Amnesty appeal: "Don't evict Bedouin citizens"
- * Sign the Avaaz petition
- * Get your MP to sign EDM 306: 'Ethnic Cleansing of Bedouin People in Israel'
- * Support boycott actions against the Praver law and its perpetrators

International law flouted

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) has ruled that the “Praver law” is discriminatory and would legalise racist practices.

It expressed concern about “the increasing difficulties faced by members of these communities in gaining access on a basis of equality with Jewish inhabitants to land, housing, education, employment and public health.”

UNCERD said the law legalised “racist practices” and “the ongoing policy of demolitions and forced displacement of the indigenous Bedouin communities”. UNCERD’s call for the withdrawal of the Praver plan is binding in international law.

The European Parliament passed a resolution in July 2013 calling on Israel to withdraw the legislation. Human rights groups have called the resolution unprecedented. Adalah said that “achieving recognition by the European Parliament that the Israeli government practices the same policies of displacement and dispossession against Palestinian citizens of Israel as it does against Palestinians living under occupation is a tremendous step forward.”

The resolution explicitly refutes the Israeli state’s view of the Bedouins as nomads and “invaders” with no legal land rights, and its propaganda that re-location will be beneficial. It affirms that the Bedouins “are indigenous people leading a sedentary and traditionally agricultural life on their ancestral lands and are seeking formal and permanent recognition of their unique situation and status” and that the Praver law would undermine their livelihoods and include “forced transfer of a particularly vulnerable population”.

And it also calls also for the protection of the West Bank Bedouin communities, who are facing the same treatment under the Occupation’s military rule, and condemns “any violations e.g. house demolitions, forced displacements and public service limitations”.

Action Point: lobby your MEP to press for EU action to enforce this resolution

This leaflet is published by Jews for Justice for Paletinians at www.jffjp.org

“The work that Jews for Justice for Palestinians has done is of profound importance for ... reaffirming the long association between Jewish people and the struggle for human rights everywhere.”

Francesca Klug OBE

Profiting from stolen property

An Ottoman law from 1858, intended to increase cultivation, enabled the state to impound any “dead land” left unworked for 3 years. Israel, having taken control of the land in 1947-48, emptied and often razed some 540 villages and prevented the exiles’ return. It then used this “dead land” law to seize the land, handing over 90% of it to the Jewish National Fund “in trust” for Jewish-only use.

That only left the moral prohibition, as spelled out in 1950 by orthodox rabbi and Zionist (of a different sort) Yehoshua Radler-Feldman, writing as “Rabbi Benjamin”: “The return of the Arab refugees based on love and equality will revive the economy of the state, and will serve as the foundation of economic, cultural, and moral flourishing together. Until that return has been arranged, any honest man who uses the abandoned property (houses, fields, movables, etc.) should know that this is essentially stolen property and prepare to return it at the first opportunity to the rightful owners, as befits an honest man who is careful not to profit from highway robbery.”



Thousands of Israel’s Negev Bedouins face forced round-up

More than three dozen entire Bedouin villages in Israel’s Negev region are condemned to be flattened. A special police force is in training to enforce the removal of **30-40,000 people** from their traditional lands into government townships. Their homes will be bulldozed and their age-old culture and way of life brought to an end.

This humanitarian disaster is the “Praver Plan”. If not stopped by international pressure, it could be carried out in 2013-14.

The UN has condemned the plan. The European Parliament has urged Israel to withdraw it. Adalah (NGO for the legal rights of Israel’s Arab minority) said it was a “declaration of war” against the Bedouin. Rabbis for Human Rights is running a major campaign against it and 65 British rabbis say it is a “great injustice”.

The residents of the first village to be targeted, Al-Arakib, have resisted over a two year period, camping out in their cemetery and re-building their homes more than 50 times.

These people are full, law-abiding citizens in the heartland of Israel. There is no pretence that it is about security.

Blueprint Negev, initiated by the Jewish National Fund, aims to settle 250,000 Jews in racially exclusive farms and settlements by 2015. Even with compensation payouts, this massive real estate prize will be a colossal bargain. A biased tourism industry also wants to re-package the Negev with heavily nationalistic PR.

Such exclusive Jewish settlements replacing Palestinians on the land are not about the 1967 occupation, nor a leftover from Israel’s early days. They continue to be built and extended throughout Israel: the Negev is the latest frontier.

This State “re-settlement” plan recalls Apartheid era South Africa’s notorious Group Areas Act, and involves segregation and ethnic discrimination that are outlawed in the UK and EU.

FACTSheet

A state master plan of 1965 for the development and urbanization of the Negev was done without consulting the Bedouins, did not recognize their land ownership, and claimed that most Bedouin land was state-owned.

Under this master plan, buildings in these areas were dubbed “illegal” and not connected to infrastructure facilities like water or electricity and liable to demolition.

Every year the government demolishes 300 Bedouin homes. In August 2013 the village of Al-Arakib was demolished 3 times in 11 days.

The Bedouin are 30% of the Negev population. Their claims add up to 5% of the land. Praver would force them into less than 1% of the Negev.