

**Recognition Forum —
Coalition of Organizations Calling for the Recognition of Unrecognized Bedouin
Villages in the Negev**

Public Statement — Introduction

During the past year, Israeli governmental institutions have intensified the pressure borne by Bedouin citizens residing in the Negev, in particular by means of the Jewish National Fund (JNF).

In the past, all Israeli governments have tried to force upon the Bedouins coercive measures, whether by “regulating settlement” of unrecognized villages by their residents, or by offering “arrangements” pertaining to claims of land ownership, measures that leave no real options open to the Bedouin claimants.

In this historical context, the Bedouin community of the Negev is currently conducting an unremitting and uncompromising struggle demanding their full inherent civil rights as individuals and the return of their stolen lands and honor. This just struggle has been joined by additional forces from both the Arab and Jewish populations of Israel. The “Recognition Forum” and the “Negev Coexistence Forum” are partners in this struggle.

The policy of discrimination, malice, and injury conducted by the State of Israel against the Bedouin of the Negev has been brought to the attention of the general public and communications media in the country, but these generally exhibit indifference in the best of cases and outright hostility in the worst towards the issue of the deprivation of Bedouin rights. This phenomenon obliges all forces striving for justice and equality, inside Israel and abroad, to take up the struggle for the rights of this community.

During the past year, a Popular Committee has been established in the unrecognized village of el-Arakib to fight against the theft by and transfer of their lands to the JNF for afforestation. This specific campaign has been entirely ignored by the Jewish communication media in Israel. The “Recognition Forum” and the “Negev Coexistence Forum” have joined this struggle for the return of these lands to their legal owners. Among the initiatives undertaken by these organizations as part of their planned information campaign are paid advertisements in the press, holding of rallies, the preparation and distribution of printed material, and demonstrations of solidarity including organizing water transports, sowing of grain, planting of olive trees, and more.

Naturally this campaign requires a good deal of money, but unfortunately our present financial backing is virtually nil; without such support we will increasingly encounter difficulties in undertaking the various project that we want to and are capable of performing.

We ask you to sign the petition that appears below and to contribute as much as you can to help us realize the aims of our campaign.

**Checks and bank transfers should be made to the “Negev Coexistence Forum,
POB 130, Omer, Israel. Account No 176050. in Bank HaPoalim in Branch 570, SWIFT
code poalilit. IBAN:090125700000000176050**

Member organizations of the “Recognition Forum”: Association of Forty – Association for the Recognition of Unrecognized Arab Villages, Bustan, Gush Shalom (Israeli Peace Block), Association for Assistance and Defense of Bedouin Rights in Israel, Center for Alternative Information, Yesh Gvul, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Negev Coexistence Forum, New Profile, Coalition of Women for Peace, Rabbis for Human Rights, Ta’ayush – Arab Jewish Partnership

Negev Coexistence Forum, Mobile: 972-50-7071118/9, POB 130, Omer, Israel 84965

www.dukium.org, email: info@dukium.org

**Association of Forty, Tel. 972-4-8362381, Fax 972-4-8362361, www.assoc40.org,
email: assoc40@assoc40.org**

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General Background:

In 1948, the Bedouin population in Israel's Negev numbered approximately one hundred thousand persons. Following the war of 1948-1949, most of these individuals were expelled to Gaza, Jordan, or the Sinai Peninsula, even though they took no part in hostilities against Israel. Throughout the Negev, only about 11,000 Bedouin remained. Following international diplomatic pressure, relatively small numbers of expelled Bedouin were allowed to return to Israel.

Before the war, Bedouin lived in all parts of the Negev (an area of approximately 13 million dunams, or 3.25 million acres) and earned their livelihood by raising sheep and goats throughout the region, as well as by agriculture, growing wheat and other grains, on an area of approximately 2 million dunams (about half a million acres).

At the beginning of the 1950's, the State of Israel decided to evict from their lands most of the Bedouin then residing in the central and western Negev, both fertile and well-watered areas, and resettle them in the eastern Negev, a barren area with very little rainfall.

Despite the fact that Israel used force and deceit to transfer these Bedouin from their lands and villages to the area of the eastern Negev, governmental officials did not bother to allocate other lands to them as compensation, nor did they see to it that these persons were provided with basic services and employment as was done for millions of Jewish immigrants who arrived in Israel during the 1950's and 1960's. Today, this sad and disgraceful situation still remains the lot of half of the Bedouin residents of the Negev, who reside in 45 unrecognized villages entirely lacking infrastructures for water, electricity, roads, education, and health care. An additional 95,000 Bedouin reside in seven towns that Israel set up for their settlement, but in which everyday living conditions are extremely difficult, with high rates of unemployment and inferior municipal services in comparison with the Jewish settlements in the Negev. These seven Bedouin towns are located statistically at the bottom of the socio-economic scale of all settlements in Israel.

Israel has cloaked the injustice of the eviction and theft of the Bedouin lands in a sophisticated and impervious system of laws, regulations, orders, closed military areas, and allocation of park lands, all of which were designed to prevent them from receiving legal redress that would return to them both their land and their honor. Despite the Bedouin appeals to allow them to choose for themselves the type of settlements in which they will live — whether urban, rural, or community-based — the State of Israel insists on settling the Bedouin in newly established towns clearly inappropriate for the Bedouin way of life. The reason for this is Israel's desire to settle the Bedouin in as small an area

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as possible, in order to free for Jewish-only settlement the bulk of the Negev to be populated.

In most of countries of the world, the rights of indigenous peoples are recognized; the UN General Assembly has ratified a decision pertaining to the personal and collective rights of indigenous peoples. Israel neither enforces this decision of the UN General Assembly, nor returns to the Bedouins the lands that were appropriated from them.

In fact, Israel does not maintain equal civil rights for all of her citizens, but rather allocates practically all of the physical, economic, and cultural space of the country to the Jewish majority.

If this were not enough, recently the State of Israel has used the Jewish National Fund (JNF) to further the eviction of Bedouins in the Negev by planting trees on lands which the latter have claimed ownership of for more than three decades. Israel has intensified the injustices against the Bedouin community by means of various oppressive measures such as the theft of lands, demolition of homes, destruction of crops, preventing of grazing, and a general attack against the daily social fabric of the Bedouin.

The Bedouin community is conducting an unrelenting struggle to obtain its full civil rights and the return of its stolen lands, and calls upon all those concerned with human rights and democracy in Israel and abroad for your support.

**Following is the text of the petition that we want to print in
the Israeli press.**

Hands off Bedouin Lands at el-Arakib!

At the beginning of the 1950's, Israel evacuated by force the Bedouin living in el-Arakib, north of Beer Sheba. The evacuation was done deceitfully, as the evacuees were promised that within six months they would be allowed to return to their village, a promise that was subsequently not kept. Instead, by means of the Land Purchase Legislation of 1953, various government agencies used the forced absence of the Bedouin from the area to steal their lands and transfer ownership to the State.

During the 1970's, when given the opportunity to do so, the people of el-Arakib, like 3,200 other Bedouin landowners, filed claims of ownership for lands covering approximately 900,000 dunams in area (today the outstanding claims pertain to 650,000 dunams) out of a total of 13 million dunams over which the Negev extends. Today, after decades, most of the claims for ownership have still not been brought to court, most of the witnesses to the ownership of the lands have died, the lands have not been returned to their owners, and the unjust theft has been left uncorrected.

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During all the time the Bedouin have been waiting for justice to be done, a few years ago, in a clandestine move, the Israel Land Administration (ILA) transferred by lease the lands of el-Arakib to the Jewish National Fund (JNF) for the purpose of afforestation. This transfer was done illegally, as it was performed prior to convening discussion on the claims of ownership and before the issue of ownership was decided. During the last few months, following approval authorized by the ILA, the JNF has begun land works of unprecedented proportions on the lands of el-Arakib resulting in massive changes in the region's topography and the afforestation of these lands.

We maintain that the JNF, in executing the works at el-Arakib as an agent of the ILA, is doing so deceitfully, not in order to perform afforestation but rather to steal the lands of the Bedouin, an act that will deepen the conflict in the Negev between Arabs and Jews and transform the Negev into a place in which no one can live — not Arabs and not Jews!

We demand from the State of Israel and the Israel Land Administration that they annul the lease given to the Jewish National Fund and that the latter immediately cease work at el-Arakib, and that the lands there be returned to their Bedouin owners.

Please confirm your support for these demands by signing this petition. Do so by sending email to manor12@zahav.net.il

For further details, contact Yaacov Manor, Telephone: 972-9-7670801, Mobile
050-5733276

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