

AI Index: PRE01/067/2012  
08 February 2012

## **Israel: Cancel Plan to Forcibly Displace Jahalin Bedouin Communities**

Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak should cancel military plans to forcibly displace around 2,300 Bedouin residents of the West Bank to an area beside the Jerusalem municipal garbage dump, Amnesty International said today in a new briefing paper.

In *Stop the Transfer: Israel about to expel Bedouin from homes to expand settlements* the organization calls on the Israeli military to order an immediate halt to all demolitions in the 20 communities affected by the plan.

Amnesty International said that verbal promises made by Israeli military officials last week not to implement pending demolition orders in Khan al-Ahmar, one of the Bedouin communities targeted for displacement in the Jerusalem district of the occupied West Bank, are insufficient.

“Thousands of Bedouin living in some of the most vulnerable communities in the West Bank are facing the destruction of their homes and livelihoods under this Israeli military plan. Many are registered refugees and some have been displaced multiple times since 1948,” said Ann Harrison, interim Deputy Director for Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.

“The Israeli authorities must guarantee the right to adequate housing for residents in all 20 communities, along with Palestinians throughout the occupied West Bank. This means protecting them from forced evictions and conducting genuine consultations with all of the communities.”

In July 2011, Israel Civil Administration officials first told UN agencies of a plan to evict some 2,300 residents of 20 Bedouin communities in the Jerusalem district to a site approximately 300 metres from the Jerusalem municipal garbage dump.

The communities are all currently located near illegal settlements in the Ma’ale Adumim settlement bloc, many of them in areas targeted for settlement expansion.

The Israeli military considers most structures in these communities – located in Area C of the occupied West Bank, where Israel retains authority over planning and zoning – to be built illegally without the required permits. However, construction permits are almost impossible to obtain for Palestinian communities in Area C. Most of the structures in these communities have demolition orders against them, including homes, kitchens, external toilets, animal shelters, and two primary schools.

The Israeli military authorities have not consulted representatives of the Bedouin communities about the displacement plan. Community representatives have told Amnesty International that they reject the plan because it would be impossible for them to maintain their traditional way of life if they were moved to a restricted area near the garbage dump.

Israel forcibly moved Bedouin families to the same area in the late 1990s, placing homes as close as 150 metres to the garbage dump. Bedouin who live there have told Amnesty International that the site was unsuitable to their way of life, that they had had to sell off their livestock due to a lack of grazing areas, and that they suffered high rates of unemployment. Some have returned to the areas from which they had been displaced.

According to the Israeli Ministry of Environmental Protection, the dump receives up to 1100 tons of garbage per day, most of it from Jerusalem. The ministry has stated that the dump site creates air pollution, ground pollution, and possible water contamination, is improperly fenced-off, and poses a “danger of an explosion and fires” due to untreated methane gas produced by the decomposition of

garbage.

Although disposal of waste at the site is due to cease later this year, no rehabilitation plan has been agreed, which means that the environmental hazards will likely remain for years.

Israeli officials have emphasized that the displacement plan envisions connecting relocated Bedouin communities to the electricity and water networks. They have not explained why Israel can provide such services to illegal settlements and unrecognized settler outposts in the West Bank, but not to longstanding Bedouin communities.

The 20 Bedouin communities have created a “protection committee” to coordinate their response to the displacement plan. The committee’s stated preference would be to return to their lands in Israel’s Negev desert from which they were displaced by the Israeli authorities in the 1950s, in accordance with their internationally recognized right to return.

The Bedouin communities say that their second option would be for Israeli authorities to recognize their rights to remain in their current homes, connect them to water, electricity and road networks, and lift arbitrary restrictions on their movement. Due to these restrictions, many Bedouin must buy animal fodder for sheep and goats that they were formerly able to graze, forcing them to sell their livestock.

As the final option, the Bedouin would be willing to negotiate the possibility of relocating again, if the Civil Administration treated them as equal negotiating partners.

Major-General Eitan Dangot, Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, visited the Khan al-Ahmar community last week, and reportedly promised residents that their homes and community school would not be demolished, and that they would not be transferred to the site next to the garbage dump. He said that the community would be moved to a different site in the occupied West Bank.

But Amnesty International said that was not enough.

“Israeli military officials are putting a gloss on their plans by portraying them as a way of providing Bedouin with basic amenities such as water and electricity, but in fact such forcible relocation of Bedouin would merely perpetuate years of dispossession and discrimination and could constitute a war crime,” said Ann Harrison.

“Informal promises are not enough for these communities. The Israeli Minister of Defence must issue a formal cancellation of this policy.”

Background

Building in illegal Israeli settlements increased by 20 per cent in 2011, according to the Israeli monitoring group Peace Now, and the Israeli authorities moved to recognize 11 new settlements, home to some 2,300 settlers, by legalizing outposts built without governmental authorization.

Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank forcibly evicted almost 1,100 people in 2011, an 80 per cent increase over 2010 and more than any year since the UN began keeping comprehensive records in 2005. Ninety per cent of the demolitions occurred in vulnerable farming and herding communities in Area C, including demolitions in several of the Jahalin Bedouin communities. The Netanyahu government is also seeking to implement the E1 plan to expand settlements between Jerusalem and Ma’ale Adumim. More than half of the Bedouin communities targeted for displacement live in the area designated for this plan, which would effectively divide the northern and southern West Bank if implemented.