

URGENT ACTION

DEMAND END TO FORESTING OF DESTROYED VILLAGE

The Bedouin village of al-'Araqib in the Negev, southern Israel, has been destroyed yet again, following eight demolitions in 2010. The Jewish National Fund (JNF), a semi-governmental organization, has started preparations for planting a forest on the village lands.

Israeli Land Administration (ILA) personnel arrived in al-'Araqib at 8.00 am on 31 January, accompanied by at least 25 police officers in full riot gear, and members of the Green Patrol (which falls under the authority of the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority). With two bulldozers, they destroyed over 20 makeshift homes which residents had rebuilt following the last demolitions, which took place on 16 and 17 January.

After the demolitions on 31 January, JNF workers – who have been located around the village for around two weeks – began digging irrigation ditches and building terraces in preparation for extensive tree planting on the village lands. A court injunction preventing the JNF from foresting the village land expired on 23 January, although the judge strongly recommended that all parties refrain from making “inalterable” changes to the land. Despite this, the JNF are pursuing their plans with the evident support of the Israeli authorities, who have taken no steps to engage al-'Araqib's Bedouin residents in genuine consultations in order to resolve their lack of access to adequate housing.

Israeli security forces are confining al-'Araqib residents to the village cemetery, the only part of the village left intact. Here, residents try to shelter from the wind and rain, with women and children taking refuge in the small mosque. The residents have no alternative housing and still hope to remain on their land and rebuild their homes.

Three residents and one of their supporters – Haia Noach, the Director of the Negev Coexistence Forum (NCF) – appeared in court on 1 February, charged with resisting the demolitions of 16 and 17 January. Four other villagers are expecting to be charged in the near future. During these previous incidents, at least 10 people, five aged under 18 years, were injured after police fired tear gas and rubber-coated and sponge-tipped bullets, in some cases directly at residents and their supporters at close range.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Hebrew, English or your own language:

- Urging them to put an immediate stop to the JNF foresting operations, as well as evictions and demolitions in the area, pending a resolution of relevant land claims and a solution based on genuine consultation with residents that guarantees their right to safe and adequate housing and enables them to continue their traditional livelihoods;
- Urging the Israeli authorities to ensure that residents are allowed to remain in the village and rebuild their homes pending a resolution of their land claims in the Israeli courts;
- Urging the Israeli authorities to respect the Bedouin population's right to their ancestral land and to officially recognize al-'Araqib and other “unrecognized” villages.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 MARCH 2011 TO:

Director-General of the Israel Land Administration

Yaron Bibi
Israel Land Administration
6 Shamai Street, PO Box 2600
Jerusalem 94631, Israel
Fax: +972 2 620 8427
Email: natalil@mami.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Director-General

Chairman of the JNF

Effie Stenzler
Keren Kayemet Yisrael Street
PO Box 7283, Jerusalem 91072, Israel
Fax: +972-2-6707500
Email: efis@kkl.org.il

Salutation: Dear Chairman

Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street, PO Box 187
Kiryat Ben-Gurion, Jerusalem, Israel
Fax: + 972 2 566 4838
Email: pm_eng@pmo.gov.il

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fourth update of UA 236/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE15/027/2010/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The village of al-'Araqib is one of more than 40 Palestinian villages in Israel not recognized by the Israeli authorities, despite the residents' Israeli citizenship and long-established claims to their lands. Residents of these "unrecognized" villages, many of which are located in Israel's Negev desert, lack security of tenure and services including water and electricity.

Al-'Araqib village was first demolished by the authorities on 27 July 2010, when residents were forcibly evicted by more than 1,000 riot police officers, and at least 46 homes and other structures were destroyed. Thousands of olive and other trees were uprooted, destroying the villagers' livelihood, and the villagers' possessions were confiscated by the police. On 4 and 10 August, makeshift shelters that the villagers had built were demolished and buried by bulldozers, supported by a large police force in riot gear. During Ramadan, on 17 August, while the residents were fasting, the authorities demolished the village. On 12 September at dawn, dozens of police arrived again at al-'Araqib with bulldozers and destroyed newly erected tents and other structures. On 13 October the entire village was again razed, and the director of the Negev Coexistence Forum was arrested and banned from entering al-'Araqib for 10 days. On 22 November approximately 30 structures were demolished in the village and some 1,600 olive trees located 2km away from the village and belonging to relatives of al-'Araqib residents were uprooted by the Israeli authorities. On 23 December, approximately 30 makeshift structures were again demolished, and the residents' water tank was confiscated. The village was destroyed on 16 January 2011 and again the following day after villagers re-erected temporary structures overnight. At this time police used rubber bullets and tear gas against the residents and their supporters, injuring at least 10 people, and arrested 13 people for protesting the demolitions and trying to rebuild homes.

In its concluding observations in July 2010, the UN Human Rights Committee stated its concern about "allegations of forced evictions of the Bedouin population based on the Public Land Law (Expulsion of Invaders) of 1981 as amended in 2005" and about what it described as the Israeli authorities' "inadequate consideration" of the agricultural and other traditional needs of the Bedouin population of the Negev, and the difficulties that they face in accessing "health structures, education, water and electricity" due to Israeli policies. The Committee called for the Israeli authorities to "respect the Bedouin population's right to their ancestral land and their traditional livelihood based on agriculture" and to "guarantee the Bedouin population's access to health structures, education, water and electricity, irrespective of their whereabouts" in Israel. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has also expressed concern about Israel's relocation of Bedouin residents of "unrecognized" villages to towns and called for their villages to be officially recognized, and for Israel to "enhance its efforts to consult" the villagers and seek their agreement or consent in advance of any process of relocation.

Despite an apparent governmental plan to regularize the status of some of the "unrecognized" villages, it was reported in the Israeli media in early 2010 that the Interior Ministry, the Israel Land Administration (ILA) and the police had decided to triple the demolition rate of Bedouin construction in the Negev, and the marked increase in the number of demolitions and demolition orders since 2010 accords with such reports. ILA Development Director Shlomo Zeiser told Hebrew-language media on 16 January: "we are preparing the ground for planting... and making an effort to find a final solution to what's happening in al-'Araqib".

In addition to the demolitions in al-'Araqib and other Palestinian communities inside Israel, during 2010 the Israeli authorities intensified demolitions of Palestinian homes located in the occupied West Bank. According to figures from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 430 Palestinian structures – homes, animal shelters, commercial structures, and water cisterns – in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were demolished by the Israeli authorities during 2010, a 60 per cent increase in demolitions compared with 2009. These demolitions in the occupied West Bank left almost 600 Palestinians homeless, half of them children, and affected a further 14,000 people who lost parts of their homes or structures crucial to their livelihoods.

Further information on UA: 236/10 Index: MDE 15/014/2011 Issue Date: 01 February 2011

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