

URGENT ACTION

PROMINENT BEDOUIN LEADER IMPRISONED BY ISRAEL

On 25 December 2018, 69-year-old human rights defender Sheikh Sayyah Abu Mdeighim al-Turi, started serving a 10-month prison sentence for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly. Sheikh Sayyah is the head of al-'Araqib, a Bedouin village in the Negev/Naqab that is unrecognized by the Israeli authorities. He is currently held at Maasiyahu Prison, in the city of Ramle in central Israel. He is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President Reuven Rivlin
President of the State of Israel,
Office of the President
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Jerusalem 92188, Israel
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Email: public@president.gov.il
president@president.gov.il

Dear Mr. President,

On 25 December 2018, Sheikh Sayyah Abu Mdeighim al-Turi began to serve a 10-month sentence for his role in building structures in his village. Sheikh Sayyah is a prominent leader of the non-violent struggle for Bedouins' rights, as well as the head of the Bedouin village of al-'Araqib in the Negev/Naqab in southern Israel which the Israeli government considers illegal. On 24 December 2017, the Beersheba Magistrate Court convicted him of 19 counts of trespassing, 19 counts of unlawful entry into public land and one count of breach of law and sentenced him to 10 months in prison, five months' probation and a fine of 36,000 ILS (9,700 USD). On 21 November 2018, Sheikh Sayyah's appeal was rejected by the Israeli Supreme Court.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Sheikh Sayyah as he is a prisoner of conscience and is imprisoned solely for peacefully defending his human rights and those of his community; to immediately stop all demolitions in the village as they systematically violate the Bedouins' right to adequate housing; and to respect the Bedouin population's right to their ancestral land and to officially recognize al-'Araqib and other "unrecognized" villages.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sheikh Sayyah Abu Mdeighim al-Turi, 69, was born in al-'Araqib village in southern Israel. He is a prominent leader in the fight for the right of al-'Araqib residents to adequate housing, and for defending Bedouins' land in the Negev/Naqab at large.

The village of al-'Araqib is located north of Beersheba in southern Israel's Negev/Naqab Desert, in the middle of a large reforestation project expanding over 172 acres, by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), a semi-governmental Israeli organization. According to the Negev Coexistence Forum (NCF), an Israeli NGO focusing solely on problems confronting inhabitants of the Negev, the village of al-'Araqib was established during the Ottoman period on land that was purchased by the village's residents at that time. In the early 1950s, residents of al-'Araqib were forcibly displaced from their village after it was declared a military zone. In the 1970s, residents submitted multiple claims of land ownership to the Israeli government, but they were all rejected. In the early 2000s, residents returned to live on their lands in al-'Araqib without permission from the Israeli authorities, making the village unrecognized. On 27 July 2010, the entire village of al-'Araqib was demolished by Israeli forces, and since then the village has been destroyed at least 134 times. At least 400 people lived in the village before its demolition, according to the NCF. The population has since decreased and residents now live in an area nearby, where they were forced to move after the repeated demolitions.

As no health and education services are provided in the village, residents travel to the city of Rahat, which is six kilometres away, to access such services. The village is also disconnected from the Israeli water and electricity grids, forcing residents to rely on private generators, solar panels and purchasing water brought in trucks at a much higher price.

For nine years, residents of the village have been peacefully protesting on a weekly basis to demand government recognition of their ownership of their lands and to commemorate the demolition of their village. Sheikh Sayyah was leading the movement, which led to members of his family being detained and interrogated several times on suspicion of trespassing and unlawful use of state lands. Two of Sheikh Sayyah's sons Saif and Aziz are currently on trial for similar offences.

The charges against Sheikh Sayyah were part of a years-long struggle between the State of Israel and the Negev Bedouins. The village of al-'Araqib is one of more than 40 Palestinian villages in Israel, many of which are located in Israel's Negev desert, not recognized by the Israeli authorities, despite the residents having Israeli citizenship and long-established claims to their lands.

Human rights defenders in Israel and the OPT have long been the target of Israeli smear and harassment campaigns aimed at delegitimising their activities. The Israeli authorities actions in al-'Araqib systematically violate the villagers' right to adequate housing, a human right, enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which is legally binding on Israel. Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned demolitions that aim to forcibly evict residents of al-'Araqib from the land they have lived on for generations.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Hebrew or Arabic

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 4 March 2019.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Sheikh Sayyah Abu Mdeighim al-Turi (him/his)