

URGENT ACTION

BEDOUIN LEADER REJECTS CONDITIONAL RELEASE

Prominent bedouin leader Sheikh Sayyah Abu Mdeighim al-Turi's early release was scheduled on 15 May 2019. However, on that day Israeli police requested from the Israel Prison Service to include two conditions for release. First, a pledge from Sheikh Sayyah not to live in his village of al-'Araqib in the Naqab/Negev, in southern Israel. Second, to remain under a night-time house arrest regime at his family's house in the city of Rahat until October 2019, when his original prison sentence ends. The first condition was dropped following his lawyer's intervention, and Sheikh Sayyah refused the second condition, and, therefore, has been not released from prison.

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
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Dear Mr. President,

Sheikh Sayyah Abu Mdeighim al-Turi was granted an early release from Maasiyahu Prison, in the city of Ramle in central Israel. On 15 May 2019, the scheduled date of his release, Israeli police requested from the Israeli Prison Service to include two conditions for release. First, a pledge from Sheikh Sayyah not to live in his village of al-'Araqib in the Negev/Naqab in southern Israel, which the Israeli government considers illegal. Second, to remain under a night-time house arrest regime at his family's house in the city of Rahat, in southern Israel, until the end of his original prison sentence in October 2019.

Sheikh Sayyah's lawyer, Adv. Shehadeh Ibn Bari, appointed by the Israeli organization Human Rights Defenders Fund (HRDF), negotiated with the Israeli police that the removal from his land cannot be used as a condition for release, resulting in the withdrawal of the first condition. The second condition, however, remained in place. Sheikh Sayyah rejected any conditions for his release, and therefore, remains imprisoned until the end of his original sentence in October 2019.

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

Kind regards,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

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. The court sentenced him to 10 months in prison, five months' probation and a fine of 36,000 ILS (9,700 USD). On 21 November 2018, the Israeli Supreme Court rejected Sheikh Sayyah's appeal. On 25 December 2018, Sheikh Sayyah Abu Mdeighim al-Turi began to serve a 10-month sentence for his role in the non-violent struggle for Bedouins' rights in Israel.

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 144 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 conviction and imprisonment of Sheikh Sayyah are 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.

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: 5 July 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 (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/9702/2019/en/>