

**LPHR Event:**

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015

Garden Court Chambers

Chair: **Elizabeth Jadon**

Co-Events Officer at LPHR

**KHALIL ALAMOUR**

Adalah researcher & Board Member of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality

**JEFF HALPER**

Co-founder and director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions.

---

**KHALIL ALAMOUR**

Khalil Alamour began by introducing the concept of 'unrecognised villages', villages which do not formally exist according to the state of Israel, and cannot be found on any official state maps. Today there are 35 unrecognised villages, but 11 are in the process of 'recognition'. Approximately 100,000 Arab Bedouin citizens of Israel live in the 35 unrecognised villages of Israel in the Negev. The total area of the Negev is 12,800 square kilometres in size or roughly 60 per cent of the total land of Israel. It is a relatively empty place given that only 10 per cent of the population of Israel live there. Mr Alamour suggested that in light of this fact you may initially wonder why such a problematic state of affairs exists for the Bedouin citizens of Israel.

**Phase One: The Nakba and relocation to the Siyag:**

Mr Alamour explained that the Bedouins inhabited the Negev for many years, from as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In or around the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Bedouin ceased to be a nomadic group having built houses and other permanent structures in the villages. In 1948 the 'Nakba' disaster occurred, where from a population of 91,707 only 11,000 Bedouin remained in Israel. The rest were expelled to Jordan, Egypt, the West Bank and Gaza. This explains why there are Bedouins who live in Area C of the West Bank. Mr Alamour explained that those who remained in Israel following the Nakba were concentrated in the Siyag, which is ten per cent of the Negev. The word 'Siyag' roughly translates to 'fence', and this is the reservation that the survivors lived in and were unable to leave from without explicit permission from the military commander between 1948 and 1966 as they were under

military rule. Mr Alamour refers to this history as the 'Phase One' of the 'Israeli Government Initial Policy of Displacement'.

Mr Alamour described the status of the Arab Bedouin's historically and explained that the Ottoman empire respected and honoured the Bedouin ownership of the land which passed through generations verbally. Similarly in the years 1917-1948 the British Mandate also recognised the Bedouin ownership of the land. Mr Alamour explained that in many houses you can find deeds and textbooks which show that the Bedouins paid taxes to the British government and Ottomans.

In 2007 the Goldberg Committee was established by Israel in order to decide how to solve the problem created with the Bedouin community, in a way admitting the forced internal displacement to the Siyag that had occurred. The concluding recommendation of the Goldberg Committee was that Israel "should make all efforts to recognise the unrecognised villages". Mr Alamour has explained that unfortunately Israel did not take up the recommendations made by the Committee and the Israeli courts have not upheld Bedouin titles to the land.

### **Phase Two: Urbanisation**

Mr Alamour proceeded to explain what he describes as 'Phase Two' of the process, which entails a process of urbanisation. In the 1960's Israel created "urban" townships for the Arab Bedouin community. These townships are accordingly 'recognised' by Israel. The first township was called 'Tel el-Sabe', and over the next 30 years a further 6 communities were made. Currently there are 7 of these towns and 85 per cent of their residents are internally displaced persons. Within these towns the communities have the lowest economic ranking in Israel, with the highest rates of unemployment, highest areas of violence, no investment, no factories and no education.

In 1982 a military airport was created which confiscated 20,000 acres of land. In other areas military expansion has also taken up land. The 10 per cent of the Siyag which was used by the Bedouin community is shrinking to 5 percent, and there is more land confiscation to come.

Mr Alamour explained the government policy that has allowed Israel to confiscate Bedouin land is a conscious initiative by the government to create dispute over the land through the lack of recognition on maps, the building of settlements and the production of plans for the creation of new Jewish towns. The Israeli government's justification for confiscating Bedouin land is that the Bedouins community are no longer undertaking agricultural works and so there is no need for the land.

### **Phase Three: Praver Plan**

The Praver plan was an initiative set up to implement the Goldberg recommendations. Mr Alamour explained that whilst this was the initial aim the Praver plan has in fact created a new framework for immediate displacement. The Praver plan has enabled the suspension of constitutional rights and current laws and limited the jurisdiction of the legal system to play a role in the accountability of the actions of the Israeli government. The Praver committee was established in 2009, with no Bedouin representatives and no public hearings or consultations. Mr Alamour informed the audience that the final Praver Plan, approved by the government in 2011, was far more hardline than the Goldberg recommendations, and was identified by international bodies as racially discriminatory.

Mr Alamour explained that the impact of the Praver Plan will be the destruction of 35 unrecognised villages and the displacement of 70,000 Arab Bedouin citizens. The plan, which is intended to be fully implemented within 5 years, will dispossess the Bedouin community to their titles to the ancestral land. The plan intends to move people to the 7 urban 'recognised' townships.

Mr Alamour described the motives behind the Praver Plan and the government policy of displacement. He explained that the intended use of Bedouin land includes the establishment of new Jewish towns, the planting of new forests, and the building of new military facilities and roads. He emphasised that the planting of forests will create irreversible state dispossession, and the creation of military facilities and roads could in fact be done in alternative locations.

The situation in **Umm el-Heiran** is illustrative of the situation faced by many Bedouin citizens. Those initially displaced in 1956 were moved to the villages of Attir and Umm el-Heiran. The Israeli government is now revoking the permits of these citizens and attempting to move them elsewhere notwithstanding the fact that many businesses and lives will be disturbed or destroyed. The plan already approved by the government is to build a city on the ruins of Umm el-Heiran, a new exclusively Jewish town of 'Hiran'. In good humour Mr Alamour explained to the audience that in Arabic 'Umm' means 'mother' and 'Hiran' means 'camel', an ironic acknowledgement that the government policy will remove the mother of the land.

In the town of Attir, plans are in place to demolish the town and expand the Yatir forest by planting 1 million trees in the ruins of the town.

Israel's current position on this is as follows: *"There is nothing wrong with planning a town to be built on and registered in the name of the state, just as there are plans to house Arab Bedouins there are plans to house Jewish communities."*

Adalah has submitted applications to the Israeli court system in relation to demolition orders that have been served by the Israeli government on the residents of Umm el-Heiran and Attir. The applications have recently been dismissed at the Supreme Court and it appears all legal means have been exhausted.

Mr Alamour has explained that there is no hope or expectation in relation to a further possible application to Israeli courts as he is sure in reality that they are counting down to the time of demolition for both villages.

The European Union gave its formal position on the Praver Plan in a resolution in June 2012, which called for an end to the Praver Plan and the commencement of negotiations with the Bedouin community.

In real terms, Mr Alamour explained what non-recognition means in his day to day life. It includes the fact that he is unable to give people his home address, unable to vote in the local council elections and is living under the constant threat of home demolition. It also means that he lives in a village with no access to running water and with an infant mortality rate that is 4 times that of the Jewish population.

Finally Mr Alamour explored the strategy moving forward, and spoke of the need for the Bedouin citizens to strengthen their own communities by building mosques, day cares, water pipes and power generators themselves for their use. He emphasised the need to go to court and continue using the legal system to resist demolitions and evictions, notwithstanding the little trust that is had for the system itself.

## **JEFF HALPER**

Jeff Halper expanded the topic of the displacement of Arab Bedouins by explaining that the forcible displacement is a symptom of a much wider ongoing oppressive situation. He stated that a slogan in Israel amongst the right wing is “We Never Finish 1948”, which infers that too many Arabs still exist within Israel. Mr Halper then explained that the Nakba is very much ongoing.

Mr Halper stated that the official term used by the government for this practice is ‘judaisation’, and it is used in the context of the term ‘judaising the land’. Mr Halper explained that it is an official government term and not a word used merely to be accusatory. The process has already been undertaken by naming towns and villages Hebrew names, and has contributed to a policy of ethnic cleansing.

Mr Halper explained that house demolitions took place in Israel from 1947 as the main vehicle of displacement. At least 52,000 homes were demolished during the Nakba from 1947-1948, and in later years house demolitions have been occurring in a systematic way. Mr Halper emphasised that these demolitions are not being carried out “in the heat of a battle” but rather in an organised manner. During the Nakba, Palestinians had fled from their villages and were not allowed to return, and the process of house demolitions was an effective way to systematically prevent entire groups of people returning home.

Mr Halper referenced the research done by Salman Abu Sita, who claims that 85 per cent of the land that has been taken from Palestinians is still available as a recreational area, and therefore the right to return is an actual possibility as the land is physically available.

Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) estimate that since 1967 around 46,000 houses have been demolished in the occupied Palestinian territory. Mr Halper explained that Israel doesn’t use the term ‘houses’ so it is hard to document. The Israeli government uses the term ‘structure’ when documenting demolitions, and this is hard to use for statistics as a structure could be an apartment building housing hundreds of people or it could be as insignificant as a chicken coup. ICAHD has only documented the numbers they know about and so the statistics they have are at 46,000.

When asked by a member of the audience about the different categorisations used for demolitions, Mr Halper explained that although there are legal reasons given by categorising demolitions as punitive, administrative or military necessity, the underlying reality is that it amounts to ethnic cleansing. Mr Halper stated: Israel does not lack the ability to dip into law and to find excuses for demolishing homes.