

Open Letter to EU High Representative and Foreign Affairs Ministers ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council on 5 October 2011

To: EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton,
The Foreign Affairs Ministers of the European Union
5 October 2011

Dear High Representative,
Your Excellencies,

As human rights NGOs concerned with the promotion and protection of human rights of Palestinian people, we, the undersigned organizations, urge you to stop the eviction of 30,000 Palestinians citizens of Israel living in 14 localities north, east and south of the town of Beer Sheba (Beer Al- saba').

On 11 September 2011, the Israeli Government approved the Praver Plan¹, which recommends the destruction of fourteen (14) villages in the Beer Sheba (Beer Al-saba') district located in the Negev (Naqab), effectively displacing 30,000 Palestinians from their homes. These plans for displacement cumulatively constitute an Israeli policy of forced population transfer against the indigenous Bedouin Palestinians. We urge you to call upon Israel to comply with its international human rights obligations with regard to its indigenous population.

The Praver Plan, named for its Head of Committee, Ehud Praver, a member of Israel's National Security Council and the head of the Strategic Planning Division in the office of the Prime Minister, seeks to implement the recommendations of the Goldberg Committee. The Goldberg Committee issued its recommendations to the Israeli government on 11 November 2008 and proposed that indigenous Palestinian Bedouins remain in their homes and on their lands. The Praver Committee, which did not include, nor consult, any adversely affected stakeholders, rejected these recommendations and proposed that 30,000 indigenous Palestinian citizens of Israel be forcibly removed from their homes and transferred to several recognized settlements, referred to by the Israeli government as "concentration towns".

The Praver Plan, referred to as the "final solution" for Israel's Bedouin population is a continuation of Israel's ethnic cleansing policies pursued since its establishment. The 180,000 Bedouins in the Naqab today are pastoral nomads who are the descendants of 19 tribes whose population was reduced to 11,000 in the aftermath of Israel's establishment. In 1953, eleven (11) of the nineteen (19) tribes were forcibly removed from their homes and transferred to a reservation in the northeast of the Negev known as the "Enclosed Zone" or the Sayig. As a result of the Absentee Property Law, the pre-1948 Bedouins lost 90% of their lands and property.

¹ The main recommendations of the Praver Plan are that over half a million dunums of Palestinian Bedouin land be confiscated through a variety of methods and that special legal, policing and administrative mechanisms be established to facilitate and accelerate this process.

Having confiscated the Bedouin's ancestral lands, the Israeli government then set about settling them sparsely throughout the Negev in order to make room for Jewish settlements and army bases. *The National Planning and Building Law (1965)* excluded Bedouins from official recognition despite their existence prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948. In 1966 the State released a Master Plan that did not recognize dozens of the Bedouin villages rendering them invisible to the government and denying them basic services like electricity, water, sewage systems, and health care otherwise provided by the State. Further, the Master Plan sought to Judaize the (Negev) and support the expansion of Jewish settlements, which enjoy substantial state funding allocated through building plans.

The State seeks to forcibly remove the population of 75-90,000 Bedouins living in 40 unrecognized villages from their ancestral homes and their agricultural livelihoods and into overcrowded townships characterized by urbanization. Its tactics have included denial of basic services to the Bedouins and in many cases it has involved the violent and repeated destruction of their homes, villages, and agricultural lands.

Israel views its indigenous population as trespassers. Consider the statement by Ortal Tzabar, the spokesperson for the Israeli Land Authority. In an interview with IRIN News Service regarding the repeated destruction of Al-Araqib, a Bedouin village in the Negev, Tzabar comments, "This case is not about demolitions; these people are criminals. This land has been deserted since 1950, when it was taken by Israel."²

The forcible displacement of indigenous Palestinian Bedouins violates several human rights provisions, including the right to self determination (common art. 1 to ICCPR, CESCR), the principle of non-discrimination (see art 2 of ICCPR and ICESCR and art. 1 CERD); the right to leave a country and to return to one's country (art. 12 ICCPR); the right to work (art. 6 CESCR); to education (art. 13 CESCR); and to adequate housing (art. 28 CESCR). Finally, the Plan amounts to ethnic cleansing deemed a crime against humanity by the International Criminal Court and the International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia.

We urge you to call upon Israel to refrain from its human rights violations, discrimination and plans to transfer the Palestinian Bedouin population of the Negev. We also urge you to call upon members of the international community to pressure Israel to disavow its recommendations enumerated in the Master Plan in accordance with human rights norms and obligations.

Organizations endorsing the statement:

- **BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights**
- **Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA)**

² Israel: Opportunity Gulf between Bedouin in the Negev, IRIN (14 August 2011) available at <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=93389>.

➤ **The Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (OPGAI) consisting of:**

- **YWCA-YMCA Joint Advocacy Initiative (JAI)**
 - **Alternative Information Center (AIC)**
 - **Alternative Tourism Group (ATG)**
 - **Defense for Children-Palestine Section (DCI)**
 - **Environmental Education Center (EEC)**
 - **Golan for Development (GvD)**
 - **Land Research Center-Jerusalem (LRC)**
 - **Arab Center for Human Rights in the Golan Heights Al-MARSAD**
 - **Union of Health Work Committees**
 - **Methaq for Development**
 - **Jerusalem Centre for Women (JCW)**
 - **The East Jerusalem YMCA- Beit Sahour Branch**
 - **Phoenix Center**
- **Cooperating Body of Palestinian Associations Operating in Lebanon/ Lebanon**
- **Popular Aid for Relief and Development/Lebanon**
- **Palestinian Refugee Executive Office**