

30 August 2007

Israel: Multiple patterns of internal displacement affect several ethnic and religious groups

Internal displacement in Israel has been caused by conflict between Israel and its neighbours, as well as by Israeli policies towards its citizens. Several waves of displacement have occurred since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, affecting Arab, Bedouin and Jewish citizens. There is little information available on internal displacement in Israel, as few organisations work with internally displaced people (IDPs), and very few studies are available. There are no government or UN estimates of IDP numbers, but based on various calculations by IDP advocates and academics, between 150,000 and 420,000 people are currently displaced in the country.

This overview considers the background, pattern and response to four different situations of internal displacement in Israel: the displacement of Arab villagers and their resettlement following the creation of Israel, the displacement of Bedouin communities in the south and the threat of eviction they currently face, the temporary displacement from northern Israel during the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in mid-2006, and the displacement from the Israeli town of Sderot due to attacks from Gaza in mid-2007.

Map of Israel



Map No. 3584 Rev.2 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

Flight or eviction of Arab villagers and resettlement following the creation of Israel

Following the proclamation of the State of Israel in May 1948, armies from neighbouring Arab nations entered the former Mandate of Palestine and fought against Israeli military forces. The war ended in 1949, but no general peace settlement was achieved.

In 1948/1949, between 600,000 and 760,000 Arabs who had lived in the territory which became Israel were driven out or fled the country and became refugees (MERIP, 2001, "Palestinian"; Bligh, 1998, p.124). During this period another 46,000 to 48,000 Arab villagers were displaced throughout Israel. Today, estimates of the size of this group (including the descendants of the people originally displaced) vary widely, from 150,000 to 342,000 people (National Committee for the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel, February 2000; Nir, 8 January 2001; BADIL, May 2006, p.48). The vast majority (about 90 per cent) of IDPs are Muslim and most of the rest are Christian. The Druze community was spared from displacement for the most part (Al-Haj, September 1986).

In December 1948, the United Nations established the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to assist all those who were resident in Palestine in 1946 and who lost their homes and livelihoods. UNRWA assisted the internally displaced people within Israel from 1950 to 1952, when the government of Israel took over this responsibility. Following the war, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 194, which, while non-binding, affirmed the right of refugees to return to

their homes at the earliest practicable date, and to be compensated for lost property (UN GA, 11 December 1948).

Meanwhile the government of Israel created an institutional and legal land regime under which most of the properties of IDPs and refugees were appropriated by the state. One of the cornerstones of this system was the Absentee Property Law of 1950. According to this law the state acquired control of all the property left by the people who had fled their homes between 29 November 1947 and 19 May 1948, even if they had stayed in the country. As a result, most of the IDPs were declared "present absentees" and the government acquired their unoccupied properties (Schechla, October 2001).

In 1949 the Israeli government started to rent land to the displaced people. While in some cases this happened without any problems, in many others they faced opposition from their Jewish neighbours. Many also feared that renting land in the area of displacement would compromise their claims to their original property (Cohen, December 2000). At the time, the IDPs lived under Israeli military administration like the vast majority of the Arab population in Israel, and their freedom of movement was severely limited as a result. The ending of the military administration in 1966 improved their situation but did not allow them to regain their lost properties.

Hopes for returning home have been disappointed

Many local non-governmental organisations promote the rights of the Arab minority in Israel, including those of the internally displaced people. IDPs, supported by local organisations, have ap-

pealed to Israeli courts against land confiscation, but the process has been slow and the displaced have generally viewed the level of compensation as insufficient. An element complicating this process is that new houses and roads increasingly occupy their land.

In June 2003, the Israeli Supreme Court turned down a petition by people displaced from the villages of Kafar Bir'em and Ikrit in northern Israel. During the 1948 war, the inhabitants of these villages were ordered by the Israeli army to leave their homes. They were promised that they would be able to return within two weeks, but were never actually allowed to do so (Ettinger, Ha'aretz, 27 June 2003). After six years of hearings, the Israeli Supreme Court accepted in 2003 the state's claim that Israeli interests, based on a combination of the current security situation and the Palestinians' persistent demand for the right of return of refugees, could not justify the return of the displaced petitioners unless there was a change in the political situation.

Today many of the people displaced in 1948 and their children live, like the rest of the Arab population in Israel, in Arab towns with little or no Jewish population, or otherwise they live in mixed Arab-Jewish towns. Generally, the government does not provide Arab Israelis with the same quality of education, housing, employment, and social services as Jews. Tensions between Arab and Jewish communities have increased since the second intifada and the general elevations of regional tensions after 2000.

Eviction of Bedouin from their land in the Negev

Since the creation of the State of Israel, the Bedouin have been pressured to leave their land in the Negev region, in the south of the country. Successive Israeli governments enacted a series of laws and regulations facilitating the confiscation of Bedouin land. Dispossession was made easier by the fact that the Bedouin generally held no land titles.

In 1949 many Bedouin were ordered to move into a closed area under military administration. Following the ending of military rule in 1966, most of them continued living in the former closed area. From the 1970s to the 1990s, the government built seven towns for the Bedouin in the Negev. According to human rights advocates, the Bedouin were not sufficiently involved in the planning of the towns and not enough consideration was given to their lifestyle and traditions. Furthermore, the compensation received for giving up their land in exchange for a new house in the towns was considered too low. While the seven towns do offer better access to services than the traditional Bedouin settlements, the quality and level of services is still inferior to those in Jewish towns (Lithwick, 2000). Also, according to the US Department of State, government planners have noted that funds to complete the seven towns were far from sufficient (USDoS, February 2005).

Today, about half of the 140,000 Bedouin in the Negev live in the seven towns. The rest live in "unrecognised villages", which were declared illegal by the National Planning and Building Law of 1965. About 45 villages of displaced Bedouins are viewed as illegal by the

government and lack public water and electricity infrastructure as well as educational, health and welfare services. Children in unrecognised villages are 2.4 times more likely to suffer from malnutrition than youngsters living in other Bedouin villages (Sinai, Ha'aretz, 7 February 2005). Close to 31 per cent of school-age children in those villages are illiterate (Ha'aretz, 24 June 2004). Overall, the Bedouin are the poorest community in Israel, and entire regions in the Negev have become hubs for drugs, violence and serious crime (Ha'aretz, 24 June 2004). Bedouin infant mortality rates have also increased by 50 per cent over from 1997 to 2003 (Lavie, Ha'aretz, 30 January 2004, part I).

Permanent settlement plan leading to renewed displacement

In April 2003, the Israeli government adopted a five-year plan to build permanent settlements in the Negev region for the Bedouin living in the villages it considered illegal. The programme also provided for the compensation of displaced Bedouin. The plan was poorly received by the Bedouin, whose leaders complained about the lack of consultation with their community, in particular regarding the price set for their land and the percentage of land exchanged. The Israeli government began in 2004 to implement the plan, which includes intensification of house demolitions, destruction of crops and filing of eviction suits (ACRI, June 2004). Due to the resistance to the plan from affected Bedouin communities, clashes between authorities and residents escalated in 2004, resulting in the killing of one Bedouin resident of the village of Atir (Hasson, Ha'aretz, 22 March 2004; Ha'aretz, 24 June 2004). One of the measures used from 2002 to early 2004

to displace the Bedouin was the spraying of crops to discourage land cultivation. This measure was halted in March 2004, following a temporary injunction from the Israeli Supreme Court (Yoaz, Ha'aretz, 16 February 2005). In April 2007, the Court in its final ruling ordered that the spraying of fields in the Negev cease, due to the damage caused to the health of inhabitants and their livestock (Adalah, June 2007).

In 2005, the government said that it was in the process of establishing seven new Bedouin towns and expanding existing towns, in close consultation with representatives of the Bedouin communities (CERD, 23 July 2005). In November 2005 the government adopted the National Strategic Plan for the Development of the Negev for 2006-2015, known as "Negev 2015", which failed to acknowledge or plan for unrecognised villages. As of mid-2007, however, the implementation of the plan had not started, and in the absence of official recognition of the Bedouin villages, homes continued to be demolished, and no services had been provided to the villages considered as illegal by the state (ADVA Center, January 2007; ADALAH, June 2007).

In April 2005, following an appeal to the Israeli Supreme Court by several organisations representing unrecognised Bedouin villages in the Negev, the Interior Ministry began the process of granting recognition and providing municipal services to one of the unrecognised villages, Um Batin (Rinat, Ha'aretz, 28 April 2005). But eviction from other unrecognised villages continued, and even accelerated in 2006 (Adalah, June 2007). In May 2007, some 100 residents of the village of Al-Twayil were made homeless when the Israeli authorities demolished

their tents and shacks (Ha'aretz, 8 May 2007).

Temporary displacement from northern Israel during Israel-Hezbollah conflict

Several hundred thousand people fled northern Israel for the centre and south of the country during the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in July and August 2006. The fighting began after the Islamist militia attacked across the Lebanese-Israeli border and captured two Israeli soldiers. Israel retaliated with a month-long military offensive targeting Hezbollah strongholds all over Lebanon, which also caused heavy damage to civilian infrastructure. Over 1,000 Lebanese people died, and close to a million were displaced due to Israeli attacks (AI, 23 August 2006). Meanwhile, Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets into northern Israel, a region which is home to 1.5 million people. Most of the Hezbollah rockets appear to have been directed at civilian areas, and pedestrians, hospitals, schools, homes and businesses were hit (HRW, 5 August 2006). At least 43 civilians died in northern Israel, seven of them children, and over 300,000 fled their homes (Israel MFA, 23 August 2006; Brookings, 15 August 2006, p.2).

Most of the people displaced left for the centre and south of Israel. In the absence of a government evacuation system, people who fled the north left under their own steam, or with the help of NGOs (JBI, 15 August 2006). In addition, up to one million either stayed in bomb shelters, hid at home or alternated between the two (Brookings, 15 August 2006). Many of the shelters were described as crowded, with little or no fresh air, and dirty (JBI, 15 August 2006; IRIN, 12

August 2006). Those who stayed behind did so because of their work, because they refused to be chased out by Hezbollah, or because they were too weak or too old to leave (AFP, 4 August 2006). The situation of Arab Israeli residents in towns hit by the rockets was particularly difficult. Most did not have relatives to stay with in safer parts of the country, and many could not find safety in their towns, as Arab towns generally lack public infrastructure, including bomb shelters (NYT, 31 July 2006; IRIN, 6 August 2006; ADALAH, June 2007). IDPs without relatives elsewhere found refuge in the centre and south of the country with strangers who opened their homes, and also in hotels and in tents (IRIN, 15 August 2006).

The government primarily relied on Israeli NGOs, international Jewish voluntary agencies and individuals to assist the displaced. About 40,000 children from the north were taken to special summer camps in central Israel, to keep them out of harm's way (Jewish Agency, 20 August 2006).

Following a cessation of hostilities on 14 August 2006 based on UN Security Council resolution 1701, most IDPs and those living in bomb shelters cautiously returned to their homes in northern Israel (IRIN, 17 August 2006). Those too weak or too old to return on their own were assisted by organisations like Magen David Adom, a member of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (MDA, 24 August 2006). Once home, many had to cope with the trauma of their displacement. Economic and social life had been paralysed during the month of conflict, and many businesses were reportedly going to close down because of the level of

physical damage sustained. Thousands of homes, schools, businesses, synagogues and cars were damaged or destroyed by Hezbollah rockets, and many crops were lost (JBI, 15 August 2006).

Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, facing criticism for his government's handling of the war in Lebanon, promised \$2 billion to rebuild the northern Israeli towns hardest hit by Hezbollah rockets (Reuters, 24 August 2006). Following the war, the Israeli government settled some 25,000 claims by individuals and businesses who had suffered direct or indirect damage (UNGA, 2 October 2006). The Prime Minister's Office appointed a Coordinator for the Reconstruction of Infrastructures and Institutions in Haifa and the North to liaise with ministries and local authorities. The Coordinator completed his work at the end of 2006 (Israeli Prime Minister's Office, 26 December 2006).

In June 2007, rockets were launched from Lebanese territory into northern Israel, but no casualties or instances of displacement were reported as a result.

Displacement from the Israeli town of Sderot due to attacks from Gaza

Since 2000, the Israeli town of Sderot, close to the Gaza border, has been the target of rocket attacks, killing eight residents, including two children. In May 2007, Palestinian militant factions, including Hamas, stepped up the rocket fire from across the border, and many Qasam rockets landed in or around the town. Israel responded by targeting Hamas military sites in Gaza and attacking groups it believed to be involved in the attacks (NYT, 1 June 2007). According to the mayor of Sderot, some 10,000

people fled the town in mid-May 2007 (IRIN, 18 May 2007). A minority was evacuated by the Israeli government, and most left independently (Israel National News, 17 May 2007). Thanks to private funding, over two thousand of them found refuge in hotel rooms in the southern town of Eilat, while several hundred others stayed for ten days in tents in the city of Tel Aviv (Ha'aretz, 5 June 2007; IRIN, 18 May 2007).

Many schools in the city were closed temporarily, with some students leaving the town, and others afraid to leave their homes (IRIN, 29 May 2007). Meanwhile, mental health workers set up a 24-hour emergency centre to treat Sderot residents suffering from panic and anxiety attacks (IRIN, 18 May 2007). The Israeli Supreme Court ordered the government to reinforce all Sderot schools to withstand attacks, but the government said it would only be able to complete the Court's demand within one to three years (Ha'aretz, 12 June 2007; Ha'aretz, 23 July 2007). An Israeli Parliamentarian Committee asked the Finance Ministry to compensate both Sderot workers who showed up at work, and those missing days of work for fear of attacks, but the Ministry responded that such a provision did not have a legal basis (Ha'aretz, 6 June 2007). Sporadic attacks against Sderot from Gaza continued as of August 2007 (Y Net, 6 August 2007).

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Israel. The full country profile is available online [here](#).

Sources:

Adalah (Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel), **June 2007, On the Margins: Annual Review of Human Rights Violations of the Arab Palestinian Minority in Israel 2006**

ADVA Center, 2007, Current Plans for Developing the Negev: A Critical Perspective, By Shlomo Swirski

Agence France-Presse (AFP), 4 August 2006, Northern Israel exodus leaves old, weak and poor to face rockets

Al-Haj, Majid, September 1986, "Adjustment Patterns of the Arab Internal Refugees in Israel", in Internal Migration, vol.24(3)

Amnesty International (AI), 23 August 2006, Israel/Lebanon: Evidence indicates deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure

Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), June 2004, The State of Human Rights in Israel 2004, by Naama Yashuvi

BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, May 2006, Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, Survey of 2004 - 2005

Bligh, Alexander, 1998, Israel and the Refugee Problem: From Exodus to Resettlement, 1948-52, in Middle Eastern Studies, Vol.34, No.1, pp. 123-147

Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, 15 August 2006, Seminar Displacement, Protection of Civilians and the Law of Armed Conflict in the Current Middle East Crisis

Cohen, Hillel, December 2000, Années 50: Israël loue leurs terres aux Arabes, in Revue d'Etudes Palestiniennes, vol.(74) 22

Ettinger, Yair (in Ha'aretz Daily), 27 June 2003, IDF told villagers they'd be home in two weeks

Ha'aretz, 8 May 2007, 30 structures in unrecognized Bedouin village in Negev demolished

Ha'aretz, 5 June 2007, Arcadi Gaydamak dismantles tent city, By Yigal Hai

Ha'aretz, 12 June 2007, Reinforcement for Sderot schools won't be ready by September, by Mijal Grinberg

Ha'aretz, 23 July 2007, Despite ruling, no money for Sderot reinforcement, by Mijal Grinberg

Ha'aretz, 24 June 2004, Civil solutions for the Bedouin

Ha'aretz, 6 June 2007, Panel urges compensation for working Sderot-area residents, By Zvi Zrahiya

Hasson, Nir (in Ha'aretz Daily), 22 March 2004, Bedouin petition court against ILA crop spraying

Human Rights Watch (HRW), 5 August 2006, Israel/Lebanon: Hezbollah Must End Attacks on Civilians Rocket Attacks on Civilians in Israel Are War Crimes

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 12 August 2006, Israel: A month in bomb shelters takes its toll

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 18 May 2007, ISRAEL-OPT: Residents of Sderot flee Palestinian rocket barrage

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 18 May 2007, 'I don't sleep at night because I am afraid for my children'"

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 29 May 2007, Israel-OPT: Low attendance as schools reopen in shell-shocked Sderot

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 6 August 2006, ISRAEL: Conflict boosts generosity

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 15 August 2006, ISRAEL: Tourism industry also a casualty

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 17 August 2006, ISRAEL: Displaced return to homes in the north

International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 23 June 2005, Thirteenth periodic reports of States parties due in 2004, Addendum, Israel

International Herald Tribune (IHT), 31 July 2006, Israelis rally to aid displaced

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Israel MFA), 23 August 2006, Israel-Hizbullah conflict: Victims of rocket attacks and IDF casualties

Israel National News, 17 May 2007, 2,500 Leave Sderot, Govt. Evacuation Stops
Israel Prime Minister Office, 26 December 2006, Haifa and North Reconstruction Team Headed by Amos Yaron Concludes its Work

Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights of the American Jewish Committee, 15 August 2006, Israel Under Rocket Attack: A Profile of Displacement and Destruction 12 July – 15 August 2006, prepared by Professor Frances Raday

Jewish Agency, 20 August 2006, Summary of Jewish Agency for Israel Relief Efforts during the war

Lavie, Aviv (in Ha'aretz Daily), 30 January 2004, Diagnosis: poverty (Part 1)

Lithwick, Harvey, 2000, An Urban Development Strategy for the Negev's Bedouin Community

Magen David Adom, 24 August 2006, MDA Youth Volunteers prepare the home return of the town elders and incapacitated population

Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), 2001, Palestine, Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, The Palestinian Arab Refugees

National Committee for the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel, February 2000, Presentation of the organization

New York Times (NYT), June 2007, Rockets Fray Nerves in Israeli 'Bull's-Eye' City, By Isabel Kershner

Nir, Ori, 8 January 2001, Focus / 'Internal refugees' demand their rights too in Ha'aretz Daily Newspaper

Reuters, 24 August 2006, Olmert promises \$2 bln to rebuild northern Israel

Rinat, Zafir (Ha'aretz), 28 April 2005, Interior Ministry to grant recognition to Bedouin village in Negev

Schechla, Joseph, October 2001, "The Invisible People Come to Light: Israel's 'Internally Displaced' and the 'Unrecognized Villages'", in Journal of Palestine Studies, Autumn 2001 (Vol.31, No.1, Issue 121), pp.20-31

Sinai, Ruth (Ha'aretz), 7 February 2005, Survey: 1 in 6 Bedouin 1st-graders suffers from malnutrition

U.S. Department of State (U.S. DOS), 28 February 2005, Israel and the occupied territories, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2004

United Nations General Assembly (UN GA), 11 December 1948, Resolution 194

United Nations General Assembly (UN GA), 2 October 2006, Mission to Lebanon and Israel (7-14 September 2006)

Y net, 6 August 2007, Qassam lands in Sderot kindergarten, by Shmulik Hadad

Yoaz, Yuval (Ha'aretz), 16 February 2005, Senior ILA official admits using non-approved chemicals to spray Bedouin crops

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

Media contact:

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 03

Email: jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Ballexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701