



AL ARAKIB

A BACKGROUND PAPER ABOUT THE DEMOLITIONS

Current as of July 31, 2011

The purpose of this background paper is to provide an accurate description of events in the unrecognized village of Al Arakib in the Negev-Naqab, the southern desert region of Israel since July 2010. These events mark a distinct turning point in the State of Israel's treatment of its Bedouin citizens and the future continues to look bleak.

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (the Forum) has supported the Al Arakib community for almost a decade in their struggle for recognition of land rights and has formed a strong working relationship with the village's leaders. Thus, members of the Forum are able to provide a first-hand account of the government's actions.

Al Arakib is located seven kilometres north of Be'er-Sheva. It is an unrecognized village and as such does not appear on any map, nor do any official signs mark its existence.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Heavy-handed response during the first demolition (July 27, 2010) | The assault on Al Arakib began during the early dawn of July 27, 2010 when an estimated 1,500 Israeli police, supported by helicopters and bulldozers, surrounded the village. Within three hours, the Israeli Land Authority (ILA) razed the entire village to the ground, leaving 300 people including women and children without shelter or water in the peak of summer in the desert. In total, 46 structures (including 30 homes) were completely destroyed along with sheep pens, chicken coups, orchards and olive groves—the source of the villagers' livelihood. More than 1,000 trees were uprooted and discarded. Residents were given no time to recover their belongings from their homes and assets such as generators, cars and tractors were seized.



All police were fully equipped with firearms, tear gas and stun grenades and hundreds of Special Riot Police (many of whom concealed their identity) wore full protection gear. There were a number of physical encounters between the police and activists and residents although no one required medical attention.

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Second and third demolitions (August 4 and 10, 2010) | Following the first demolition, many of the residents refused to leave the land that has been in their family for generations and began to immediately rebuild makeshift shelters despite police threats. Once again, during the second and third demolition (which was carried just one day prior to the commencement of Ramadan), everything was destroyed by government bulldozers and buried. Building materials were also removed to deter the residents from rebuilding. Further, the road to the village was seriously damaged to impede access and the unofficial road sign to the village was removed. Water trucks and tanks were confiscated.



The police were again dressed in full riot gear and supported by mounted police and water cannons to disperse the crowd. During the second incident many residents and activists (including members of the Forum) were severely beaten by the police and seven people were arrested. Four residents, among them the leader of the village, Sheik Sayach Al-Turi, were released under the condition that they do not return to Al Arakib for 10 days. He moved with others to live in the cemetery mosque.

Fourth demolition during Ramadan (August 17, 2010) | This demolition occurred during Ramadan, the holiest month for Muslims when the people of the village were fasting. Policemen and bulldozers arrived at dawn and began demolishing the makeshift shacks built by the villagers. This was an unprecedented act as the State of Israel has never before demolished houses belonging to its Muslim citizens during Ramadan. Historically, this was a period respected by the authorities. As the demolition took place during an extreme heat wave, many of the residents were forced to break the fast.

A government spokesperson declared on August 23 on national news that the attacks on the village would continue once Ramadan concluded. This did not deter the residents from remaining on their lands and once again rebuilding.

Fifth demolition (September 12, 2010) | This demolition immediately followed the three-day Muslim festival Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Dozens of policemen descended again on the village shortly before dawn with bulldozers to destroy the tents and all other structures in the village.



Sixth demolition (October 13, 2010) |

During this demolition, Haia Noach, Executive Director of the Forum, was violently assaulted by police and arrested upon requesting to see the court order authorising the demolition of the village. Ms Noach was ordered not to enter the village for a period of 10 days. The Forum suspects that this demolition was carefully timed to take place following the Jewish National Fund (JNF) conference in Atlanta, US, to minimise public scrutiny. The conference concluded just one day before the demolition.

Seventh demolition (November 22, 2010) | Following the week-long Muslim celebration of Eid al-Adha, Al Arakib was demolished. Four bulldozers arrived with officials from the ILA and

police officers equipped with riot gear at dawn to destroy 30 temporary structures. Again, no demolition or eviction order was presented to the residents. Additionally, an estimated 1,600 olive trees located 2km south from the village were uprooted. Many of the residents moved their few possessions to the village cemetery which has not been subjected to the demolitions and remained there until the forces departed.

Eighth demolition (December 23, 2010) | This demolition was carried out by dozens of police and bulldozers just one day before the beginning of a two-week vacation for the children.

Ninth and tenth demolitions (January 16 and 17, 2011) | Just before 9am on January 16, the ILA's bulldozers and police returned to Al Arakib to once again level it to the ground. These demolitions, however, were different to those that preceded them. In order to cleanse the land of any indication that people once lived there, everything was removed to a nearby municipal dump. No building materials or personal items whatsoever remained for the residents to salvage in order to rebuild the village, nor were families given the opportunity to rescue their belongings.



Additionally, the police resorted to the use of tear gas and rubber bullets for the first time which were aimed directly at the residents. Leading Israeli newspaper, [Ynet](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4014380,00.html), incorrectly reported that pepper spray was used rather than tear gas and that the bullets fired at the residents were paint balls (http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4014380,00.html). Five people were hospitalized as a result including two 13-year-old children.

The following day, January 17, the ILA and police returned again to finish clearing away the rubble and to destroy the temporary structures that had been erected overnight (with new, purchased materials) to protect the families from the wintry desert conditions. During the day, residents and activists were concentrated into Al Arakib's cemetery. Police prevented anyone from leaving this location and confiscated identification documents. The road into Al



Arakib was also closed to prevent further supporters from arriving throughout the day.

On the same day, Ms Noach, Mumtaz Khateeb (Forum employee) and a further 10 residents and activists were arrested. They were held overnight at "Ohaley Keidar" detention prison and not released until the afternoon or late evening the following day. Four were released with no

charge while the other four (three residents and Ms. Noach) were charged with disobeying a court order against rebuilding in the village (although no one had any knowledge of this order) and holding real estate. One resident was also charged also for attacking a police officer.

Over the course of these two days, the area was completely flattened by bulldozers and heavy earth moving machinery to remove any trace of the village and a new road for the JNF's forestation activists was prepared.

The Forum has long held the view that the JNF's forestation activities are behind the demolitions. This was confirmed by the [Ynet](http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4014318,00.html) article of January 16, 2011 (in Hebrew, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4014318,00.html>). The ILA Development Director Shlomo Tsizer is quoted as saying, "We are making an effort to find a final solution to what is happening in Al Arakib," and that the area is being prepared for planting which directly implicates the JNF in the ongoing attacks on Al Arakib.

Injunction (January 18 and 23, 2011) | On January 18, the Be'er-Sheva District Court issued a temporary injunction stopping all further work by the ILA and the JNF in Al Arakib. On January 23, Judge Nechama Netzer "recommended" to the JNF not to "rush" the afforestation of Al-Arakib, but failed to order the Israeli Government, the ILA and the JNF to stop their efforts to wipe out the village. The judge also awarded 10,000 NIS to the JNF in legal costs.

Eleventh and twelfth demolitions (January 31 and February 1, 2011) | Predictably the demolitions recommenced on January 31. Shacks built that night were again demolished the following day and JNF continued to prepare the ground for planting.

Thirteenth to sixteenth demolitions (February 7 to 10, 2011) | A period of poor weather gave the residents a brief reprieve before four consecutive days of demolitions. On February 8, a total of 12 temporary structures which had been built the night before were demolished.



Several trucks also returned to continue removing rubble.

For the first time on February 9, we witnessed bulldozers clearly marked as belonging to the JNF [destroying tents](#) (photographed here) that had been erected overnight by the residents (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLADU_3b9L4). The JNF can no longer claim to have no involvement in the repeated destruction of Al Arakib.

On February 10, an a provocative attack by policemen on a group of women and children led to [violent clashes](#) after the men ran closer to the group trying to protect them and some even may have thrown stones out of shock and fear that the women's dignity was assaulted. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTfa04td5fQ&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL).

The police used tear gas, pepper spray, sponge-tipped bullets and plastic bullets. Several residents were hurt and taken by ambulances to Soroka Hospital in Be'er Sheva, however, many refused to go. Three residents



(including a youth) and three activists were also arrested in the scuffle. The minor and three activists were released at midnight, however, the two residents were detained until a hearing on February 11 and then a further hearing on February 14 where it was decided that they would be detained until the end of the proceedings. All three activists were ordered not to enter the village for two weeks, however, upon appeal this was reduced to 10 days.

As a result of this week of demolitions, the place where the village formerly stood is now covered with terraces ready for planting and a number of dams.

Seventeenth and eighteenth demolitions (February 16 and 17, 2011) | On February 16 and 17, the JNF, ILA and Yassam riot police returned to Al Arakib. After a brief few days of relative peace in the village, the residents had erected approximately 15 temporary wooden structures in between the terraces of earth that had been created by the JNF. These were again demolished by the ILA's bulldozers while the residents, including the children who had not yet left for school, were detained in the cemetery by police. The JNF then continued its work preparing the ground, simply shoving the wreckage to the side.

On February 16, even in the face of peaceful resistance, a variety of ammunition (including what is suspected to be FN303 bullets) was used by the Yassam police force on the residents and activists. An 11 year old boy and his grandfather were hospitalized as a result of shock and a fall respectively. Others who were injured from bullets refused to go to Soroka Hospital out of fear that they would either be arrested or not allowed to return to Al Arakib. One man visiting from Rahat was arrested.



The following morning, the JNF began earlier than usual to continue its work preparing the ground around the cemetery in Al Arakib under the heavy protection of about 40 Yassam police officers. At around 11 am, approximately 60 residents from the neighbouring Bedouin city, Rahat, attempted to enter Al Arakib to show their solidarity with the residents and pray with them, however, were refused entry by the police. While trying to negotiate with the police at the turn-off to the village from Route 40 (the main road into Be'er Sheva), the police began to shoot at the group (that included women and children) with sponge-tipped bullets.

Dr. Awad Abu-Freich, a well-known resident and spokesperson of Al Arakib, and five others from Rahat were detained. A number of charges were laid against Dr Awad including the serious charge of "incitement to violence or terror". He was held overnight and released the following day.

Nineteenth demolition (March 7, 2011) | ILA bulldozers destroyed about half a dozen temporary wooden structures in Al Arakib and whilst police were present, there were no confrontations with the residents.

JNF work site dismantled (March 24, 2011) | Ahead of Land Day on March 30, the JNF vacated their work site close to Al Arakib and situated on land normally used by the villagers to sow crops.

New JNF work site (April 3, 2011) | The JNF returned their equipment to the Negev in an apparent move to continue their afforestation activities around Al Arakib. Seven bulldozers, a container (as an office) and a generator were dropped off near Givaot Bar. This is not the same location as the previous work camp. However, the new work camp is very close to the land of the Abu-Freich Family of which Dr Awad Abu-Friech is a member. Dr Awad has had a very high profile in the campaign against JNF's activities.

Twentieth demolition (April 6, 2011) | The residents of Al Arakib were largely living within the confines of the cemetery with all their belongings and animals, however, ILA bulldozers demolished the few shacks in the villages.

JNF work site dismantled (April 14, 2011) | Just before the start of the Passover break, the new JNF camp near Givaot Bar, was dismantled presumably because the workers planned to take an extended holiday. Before vacating the area, the JNF continued to plant large tracts of land with mostly eucalyptus trees.

JNF returns (April 26, 2011) | The JNF returned to the area around Al Arakib and built a new work camp located north-west of the village. This is close to the land belonging to the Abu Freich and Abu Jaaber families who are gravely concerned about this latest move.

Twenty-first demolition (May 11, 2011) | During a day of demolitions across the Negev, structures in Al Arakib but also Umn Ratam, Al Rara, Al Zamog and Al Bchera were demolished by the ILA.

Green Patrol demolitions (May 31, 2011) | Two shacks in Al Arakib were demolished by the ILA's Green Patrol.

Twenty-second demolition (June 21, 2011) | After a comparatively long pause, six shacks outside of the cemetery were destroyed.

Twenty-third demolition (July 12, 2011) | Half a dozen shacks outside of the cemetery were destroyed.

Twenty-fourth demolition (July 25, 2011) | Following a weekend of building by activists and residents to mark the 12 month anniversary of the first mass demolition of the village, the police returned to Al Arakib to demolish all the new structures.

Legal action by state (July 26, 2011) | The state filed a claim for 1.8 million NIS against 34 residents to cover expenses associated with repeatedly destroying the village. Read Amnesty International's report for further information (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/israel-sues-bedouin-villagers-cost-repeated-evictions-2011-07-29>).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Current situation and fears about what the future holds

The demolition on July 27, 2010 was the largest mass demolition that has ever occurred in the Negev-Naqab. In the face of increasing hostility towards the Bedouin population, there is now great fear among residents of other unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev-Naqab that the events being witnessed in Al Arakib mark the beginning of brutal and unrelenting campaign to displace them from their ancestral lands. There is speculation that this heavy handed response is a trial run for other villages. In the government's attempt to compel Bedouins to relocate to government-planned towns (which suffer from high unemployment

and crime rates and a severe housing shortage), it is feared that thousands of other Bedouins will experience the same fate.

For months on end, many of the residents, including dozens of children, have been living in the village's cemetery in temporary shacks covered by tarpaulins. The demolition orders on which the government is relying to level Al Arakib do not extend to the cemetery and thus this is viewed as a somewhat of a safe haven. The cemetery's mosque remains the only structure left standing and most of the social life now centres around the mosque. Some of the residents have returned to their tents in the village and continue to live there.

The government's defence

The government has defended its actions by saying that the villagers lost their case before the courts according to *Public Land Law (Expulsion of Invaders)* of 1981 and that they must evacuate and remove all possessions including the structures which were illegally built. However, the residents of Al Arakib, like the other 45 unrecognized villages scattered across the Negev-Naqab, have no hope of receiving building permits. As their villages are considered illegal by the government and lack development plans, they have no option but to resort to illegal construction.

The Forum believes that the government's actions against the residents of Al Arakib are connected with a statement by Prime Minister Netanyahu during a cabinet meeting held the day before the first demolition. Netanyahu sounded a warning about "a situation in which a demand for national rights will be made from some quarters inside Israel, for example in the Negev, should the area be left without a Jewish majority. Such things happened in the Balkans, and it is a real threat." The Bedouin citizens of Israel have been branded as 'a real threat' in order to legitimize the expulsion of Israel's Bedouin citizens from the Negev and to 'Judaize' the region.

International media & footage

- [BBC](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10777040) (UK), July 27, 2010 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-10777040>)
- [Haaretz](http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/police-destroy-dozens-of-buildings-in-unrecognized-bedouin-village-in-negev-1.304443) (Israel), July 28, 2010 (<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/police-destroy-dozens-of-buildings-in-unrecognized-bedouin-village-in-negev-1.304443>)
- [The Guardian](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/28/ethnic-cleansing-israeli-negev) (UK), July 28, 2010 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/28/ethnic-cleansing-israeli-negev>)
- [Human Rights Watch](http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/08/01/israel-halt-demolitions-bedouin-homes-negev), August 1, 2010 (<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/08/01/israel-halt-demolitions-bedouin-homes-negev>)
- [Haaretz](http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/amos-oz-situation-of-bedouin-in-negev-is-ticking-time-bomb-1.308671) (Israel), August 18, 2010 (<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/amos-oz-situation-of-bedouin-in-negev-is-ticking-time-bomb-1.308671>)
- [The New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/26/world/middleeast/26israel.html?_r=3&pagewanted=1&emc=eta1) (US), August 25, 2010 (http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/26/world/middleeast/26israel.html?_r=3&pagewanted=1&emc=eta1)
- [Amnesty International Urgent Action](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/027/2010/en/4a6cf034-0fd8-44d6-b151-9ed00a3ef37/mde150272010en.pdf), November 12, 2010 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/027/2010/en/4a6cf034-0fd8-44d6-b151-9ed00a3ef37/mde150272010en.pdf>)
- [The Forward](http://forward.com/articles/135320/) (US), February 9, 2011 (<http://forward.com/articles/135320/>)

Further reading/photos

- [Israel 'declares war on its people'](http://english.aljazeera.net/photo_galleries/middleeast/2010106113512196166.html) (Al Jazeera), by Mya Guarnieri (http://english.aljazeera.net/photo_galleries/middleeast/2010106113512196166.html)

- [Open Letter to the Jewish National Fund: Equal rights, sustainability, and development for Israel's Negev – not dispossession of the Bedouin!](http://bedouinjewishjustice.blogspot.com/2010/10/open-letter-to-jewish-national-fund.html), October 11, 2010 (http://bedouinjewishjustice.blogspot.com/2010/10/open-letter-to-jewish-national-fund.html)
- ["GOD-TV" evangelical Christian channel funds Israeli ethnic cleansing](http://www.redress.cc/palestine/ngordon20101204) by Neve Gordon, December 4, 2010 (http://www.redress.cc/palestine/ngordon20101204)
- [Eight times Al-Arakib has fallen, and it will arise eight times](http://www.rhrna.org/?m=201012&paged=2) by Rabbi Arik Ascherman, December 24, 2010 (http://www.rhrna.org/?m=201012&paged=2)
- [Open Letter to the Jewish National Fund – Just say No!](http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=206127) (JPost), by Rabbi Arik Ascherman, 1 February 2011 (http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=206127)
- [Al Arakib in photos](http://www.flickr.com/photos/activestills/sets/72157624469524255/), Flickr, by Activestills (http://www.flickr.com/photos/activestills/sets/72157624469524255/)

Recent criticism by the United Nations

The State of Israel carried out these demolitions despite the fact that it was scrutinized by Human Rights Committee (HRC) as recently as in July 2010 for its mistreatment of Bedouins. Forum board member, Mr Khalil Alamour, attended the 99th session of the HRC to report on how Israel fails to fulfil its responsibility to respect and protect its human rights obligations without discrimination towards its Arab-Bedouin citizens in the Naqab-Negev. In its Concluding Observations handed down two days after the first mass demolition in Al Arakib on July 27, the HRC stated that it was "concerned at allegations of forced evictions of the Bedouin population based on the Public Land Law (Expulsion of Invaders) of 1981 as amended in 2005." It continued by stating that Israel **"should respect the Bedouin population's right to their ancestral land and their traditional livelihood based on agriculture" and to "guarantee the Bedouin population's access to health structures, education, water and electricity, irrespective of their whereabouts" in Israel.**

Israel's actions also attracted criticism at its previous review before the Human Rights Council in 2007 during the 70th session:

The Committee recommends that the State party enquire into possible alternatives to the relocation of inhabitants of unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab to planned towns, **in particular through the recognition of these villages and the recognition of the rights of the Bedouins to own, develop, control and use their communal lands**, territories and resources traditionally owned or otherwise inhabited or used by them.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay recently conducted a six day visit (from 6 to 11 February) to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In her [press release](#) of February 15, 2011, the High Commissioner expressed her concern at the repeated demolition of "unrecognized" Bedouin villages in the Negev (http://pretoria.unic.org/news-a-media/1-latest/1634-statement-by-united-nations-high-commissioner-for-human-rights-navi-pillay).

The history of Al Arakib

The residents of Al Arakib were evicted from their historic lands in 1951 by the Israeli army under the pretext that the lands are needed for training. Army officials promised the leaders of the village that they will be able to return to their lands after six months. The promise, however, was never kept and the people of the village are still waiting to return to their lands which were confiscated in the 1960s for purposes of security and settlements. The army never

used the lands, nor was it used for other purposes. The lands remained almost vacant and the villagers, although living in other places, continued to bury their deceased in the cemetery.

During the years the Al Arakib people made attempts to claim back their land from the state but all their requests were denied. Some of the people lived not far from their lands for years and some have been living since 1958 on the village's lands. Some people chose to move temporarily to Rahat in order to lead a normal life, raise children and care for their education, hoping that in the future they would be able to establish an agricultural village on their lands. It was not an easy decision to move to Rahat and the Al Arakib people never gave up on their lands. Their claims to ownership of the lands are still before the courts.

In 1998 when the JNF began to show interest in Al Arakib lands, villagers were afraid they would lose the land to a forest. Thus, they returned in order to defend their land from afforestation activities.

The continual destruction of the village is carried out despite ongoing legal proceedings regarding the ownership of the land before the Be'er Sheva District Court. Residents of Al Arakib are neither squatters nor invaders as commonly portrayed in the media.