

11th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues

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Presented by Mansour Nsasra on behalf of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

My name is Mansour Nsasra and I will speak on behalf of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality. I wish to draw your attention to State of Israel's intensified efforts to displace the indigenous Bedouin in southern Israel from their ancestral land, and in particular, to the government's recently passed Praver-Amidror Plan, which would displace 30,000 Bedouin citizens from their homes and villages throughout the Negev, Israel's southern desert area.

Since the creation of Israel in 1948, part of the Bedouin have lived as internally displaced citizens within Israel and until 1966 in a closed zone subject to military rule. Today, there are an estimated 200,000 Bedouin living in both "unrecognized villages" and government-planned townships in the Negev. Unrecognized villages aren't on any official maps and receive little-to-no basic services such as electricity, water, telephone lines, rubbish collection or educational, health or welfare facilities.

The Praver-Amidror Plan seeks to transfer an estimated 30,000 Bedouin citizens from these unrecognized villages and concentrate them into government-planned townships. These towns already sit at the bottom of all social and economic indicators in Israel, and don't have the infrastructure needed to accommodate such a large influx of new residents. Built without taking into account Bedouin cultural traditions, urbanization has also disrupted the social fabric of Bedouin communities and denies the Bedouin the right to continue living their indigenous way of life.

There was no consultation process with the Bedouin community regarding the formulation of the Praver-Amidror Plan. In other words, there was no opportunity for the affected indigenous community to provide their input. Furthermore, it seems clear that the Israeli authorities are prepared to use aggressive force to carry out the Plan, especially given a recent report that the Israeli police established a unit of 200 officers to enforce evacuations and demolitions of Bedouin homes and villages.

The Praver-Amidror Plan violates numerous articles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including most notably Article 10, which states that, "indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories" and that "no relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned."

In its Conclusion Observations, released in March 2012, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended that Israel abandon the Praver-Amidror Plan since it would "legalize the ongoing policy of home demolitions and forced displacement of the indigenous Bedouin communities." The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality endorses this position, and urges the state to cancel the Plan.

As a Bedouin myself, I am compelled to remind the Forum about these challenges facing the indigenous Bedouin in Israel, and the seriousness of the state's actions against its own people, which are in clear violation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We documented more than 1,000 homes and structures that were demolished in Bedouin communities throughout the Negev in 2011. Should the Praver-Amidror Plan go ahead, we can expect many more demolitions, one of the most painful and destructive aspects of Israel's policy of forced displacement of its Bedouin citizens.

Ultimately, any implementation plan that, like the Praver-Amidror Plan, is forcefully and unilaterally imposed upon the already disadvantaged Bedouin community will only further undermine the delicate social fabric of the Negev and inflame Arab-Jewish relations. We are calling for the urgent intervention of the international community to avert this possible outcome.

Thank you.