



# The Negev Coexistence Forum Newsletter

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## A word from the editor

This is the 17th Newsletter of the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality. As in previous issues, this newsletter presents a summary of events that have occurred in the Negev in recent months. In the previous newsletter, we noted that queries could be submitted about the memorandum regarding the "2012 Bill for the Regulation of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev" known as the "Prawer Plan". Since representatives of the Bedouin were not involved in drawing up the plan, Minister Benny Begin was appointed by the government to be in charge of the plan, and he began to meet with representatives to listen to their reservations regarding the plan. Minister Begin is presently holding explanatory meetings in which few people participate, and it appears that the majority of the community is vehemently opposed to the plan.

Visit our website, Facebook, and Twitter to keep informed of current events and activities organized by the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality.

We wish to thank the many volunteers who support the NCF's activities and those who have shared their thoughts and efforts to help prepare and distribute this newsletter.

We hope that this newsletter will help you keep informed of events taking place in the Negev.

## Taking the Camera in Hand

By Michal Rotem

During the last years there has been increasing awareness to the fact that professional photographers are not the only people who can use photography as a tool for protest and exposing injustice. More and more activists and organizations now understand that providing basic photography skills and equipment will enable people who are engaged in protest to document their struggle and photograph events in their lives that are ordinarily hidden from the camera's eye.

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality has been conducting during the last couple of years photography workshops for children

in the Negev in cooperation with villages committees, Israeli and foreign photographers, and other organizations. Photographs from these workshops have served the struggle of the community and have been displayed in exhibitions in Israel and abroad. The latest of these workshops is a video workshop that was conducted in the village of Al Arakib. The video workshop followed a still photography workshop that was held in the village of Al Arakib last year, in cooperation

with the village committee, and was led by professional photographers who volunteered to assist with the project.

Hundreds of still, video, amateurs, and press photographers have visited



Children of Al-Sira during the photography workshop in the village, January 2012

Al- Arakib and have documented the numerous house demolitions that have occurred repeatedly in the village throughout the past two years. Children from the village warmly received the photographers, who expressed interest in their lives, and began to ask for cameras so that they could take pictures of their village from their own standpoint. The still photography workshop brought about amazing results, which were exhibited in Israel and abroad. The children's photos allow observers to

view the village and its determined struggle from the standpoint of the children who live there.

The workshop was initiated following the children's demands to take up video cameras in hand and make films by themselves, and was held in the village during December and January, when the children were on vacation from school. Children learned to hold and operate video cameras and to film at night and during the day. They quickly began to make short video films, describing their complex lives. The films include movies of children playing in the cemetery, which the young children use

as a playground, and films of the weekly demonstration in Lehavim junction that has also become an inseparable part of their lives. Other films are serious "news story" in which children interview themselves and other residents of the village about their struggle. Other documentary films show how traditional Bedouin bread is prepared, with explanations of each step.

The films were made with the understanding that photography

has become one of the most effective and powerful tools for documenting life in the village in general and the village's struggle in particular. The workshop provided children with the knowledge and tools they needed to create films that told their stories. By insisting on learning the art of filmmaking, children have been transformed from objects that were photographed to subjects - photographers who document things that they feel are significant. By doing so they offer us the opportunity to see and understand the world from

their own point of view. The films were edited by Yosra Abu Kaf, who organized the workshop, and are being used to support the struggle of the village. The films have also been sent to various international children's film festivals.



Alia Salim Abu Medigem at the closing event of the photography workshops in Al-Arakib and Alsira at the Multaka-Mifgash, June 20, 2012

**A Review of News in the Negev, February – June 2012**

**February** February 6th – JNF tractors began working in the fields belonging to residents of Al Arakib, who are still contesting their land ownership in courts. The work began despite the recommendation by Judge Nechama Netzer of the Be'er Sheva Regional Court that the state should not make any irreversible changes on land that is still being discussed in court. Sheikh Sayah Al Turi, the village leader, requested workers and supervisors to halt the work, and the work was consequently stopped.

February 10th - Wikileaks exposed a document stating that the Israeli government had been considering the idea of a compulsory, massive transfer of the Bedouin in the Negev long before the Praver Plan was proposed. The plan ostensibly involved cooperation with the United States government. "The plan would involve several government ministries and would call for forcibly transferring approximately 65,000 Bedouin living in unrecognized villages between Be'er Sheva and Dimona," the Wikileaks cable stated.

February 16th – Recognition Forum sent in January a letter to Mr. Eliezer Shaked, CEO of El-Al Airlines. The letter protested El-Al's agreement with the JNF through which a tree would be planted for every passenger who purchased a ticket to London. A response was received from Mr. Ofer Gat, El-Al's Vice Sales Manager, stating that the airline had decided to terminate their agreement with the JNF.

February 28th – The Secretariat of the Negev Coexistence Forum sent a letter to the Minister of Justice Yaakov Neeman stating that the Praver Plan, which will be presented to the Knesset, is in contradiction to decisions made by the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The letter lists recommendations made by various United Nations Committees that are in contrary to the bill's memorandum.

Since February, residents of the unrecognized Bedouin villages that are not connected to the water system are receiving high water bills and

consequently informed of an increase of 65% in the price of water. The high water bills were issued despite the fact that residents were forced to fill tanks directly from a few faucets located along pipelines belonging to the Mekorot Water Company. Attorney Rawia Aburabia, from the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, sent a letter to the Water Authority, but the price of water remained unchanged.

**March** March 9th – The United Nations Committee for Elimination of Racial Discrimination published its conclusions on the report submitted to the committee by the State of Israel. Recommendation Number 20 refers to the issue of the Bedouin in the Negev and states, among other issues, that "the Israeli government must withdraw the discriminatory law for the regulation of Bedouin settlement in the Negev, which will legalize house demolitions and forceful eviction of the indigenous Bedouin population."

March 21st – A women's march took place in the city of Be'er Sheva. The march, which was attended by approximately 150 women and organized by local women's organizations, began at the municipal square, continued towards the Negev Center, and ended in front of the offices of the Regulation of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev Authority. The march was held in protest of the Praver Plan and the government's policy of house demolitions.

March 21st – The Negev Coexistence Forum published a report in commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The report discussed the extent of government services in Bedouin towns in the Negev. It reveals

a dismal and discriminatory picture regarding services in the Bedouin townships, which are only partial or nonexistent. The report also reveals that there has been no increase in the number of Arabs employed in government services in the Negev or in the rest of the country.

March 23rd – The Negev Coexistence Forum published the organization's position paper regarding the memorandum of the Praver Plan. The paper presents the main problems that were identified in the memorandum, and cites the reasons for NCF's opposition to the plan, which is designed to forcibly evict tens of thousands of people from their homes. The paper also discusses the future negative repercussions of the plan regarding the entire population of the Negev and the Bedouin population in particular.

March 28th – Residents of the village of Umm Al-Hiran appealed to the High Court of Justice through Adalah, demanding to be connected to the national water system. The appeal was submitted after the Water Court and the Water Authority rejected a previous request made by the village - despite the fact that the High Court of Justice ordered that the village would be provided with minimal accessibility to water.

March 30th – The main event commemorating Land Day in the Negev took place in the unrecognized village of Wadi Al-Na'am. Approximately 1,000



Haia Noach, NCF executive director, speaks at the Land Day central event in the Negev, at the unrecognized village of Wadi Al-Na'am, March 30th 2012



## What's new in the Negev (cont.)

people took part in the event. Haia Noach, director of the Negev Coexistence Forum, spoke about the Praver-Amidror Plan and the government's intent to change the situation in the Negev.

**April** April 17th – Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz reported that 200 policemen would be mobilized to form a special unit to enforce home demolitions in the Negev. The article reported that the Minister of Internal Security, Yitzhak Aharonovich, made the decision and that the new unit would begin operations in August. It is not clear whether the establishment of the new unit is related to the implementation of the Praver-Amidror Plan.

April 23rd – The Ministry of Interior formed a committee to examine the proper organization of the municipal area and the local planning areas in the Bedouin localities in the district of Be'er Sheva.

April 29th - A demonstration was held opposite the Jewish National Fund headquarters in Jerusalem following renewed cultivation of land by the JNF in the village of Al Arakib.



Sheikh Sayah Al-Turi during a demo in Jerusalem against the renewal of the JNF works at the plots of the village of Al-Arakib, April 29th 2012

Dozens of Bedouin and Jewish activists took part in the demonstration to protest the JNF activities.

April 30th – The Negev Coexistence Forum submitted a report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee. This was a preliminary report designed to aid the United Nations Committee for Human Rights in determining which issues would be dealt with in the next report to be presented to the Committee by the Israeli government regarding implementation of the International Charter for Political and Civil Rights in Israel. The report refers to relevant issues in the Charter, and presents a dismal picture regarding Israel's implementation of the Charter.

**May** During the month of May, Dr. Mansour al-Nasasra, a representative of the Negev Coexistence Forum, participated in the 11th session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York. During the conference, Dr.

Al-Nasasra presented the NCF's position regarding the Israeli government's policies towards Bedouin in the Negev and the infringement upon the rights of members of the community, particularly the Praver-Amidror Plan and its future repercussions. Dr. Al-Nasasra also met with the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Professor James Anaya, to inform him of current events in the Negev, and led a workshop for conference participants about the Praver-Amidror Plan.

May 7th – Bulldozers belonging to the Jewish National Fund arrived at the village of Al Arakib, accompanied by heavy police protection, and began to plow plot 24 of the village. This took place despite a promise made by the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the JNF, Efi Stenzler, that no work would be done in the four sections of the village that had not yet been plowed. Activists from NCF and other organizations held morning vigils in the village and the work was consequently halted.

May 16th – Matthew Gould, the British Ambassador to Israel, held an introductory meeting with members of the board of directors of NCF and visited the village of Al Arakib. The Ambassador wished to become acquainted with NCF and its activities. He met the NCF secretariat members, was updated on NCF various activities and was informed about the situation in the Negev.

The Ambassador also met with Al Arakib's local leaders, toured the village, and learned of the challenges residents faced in the village after repeated house demolitions over the past two years.

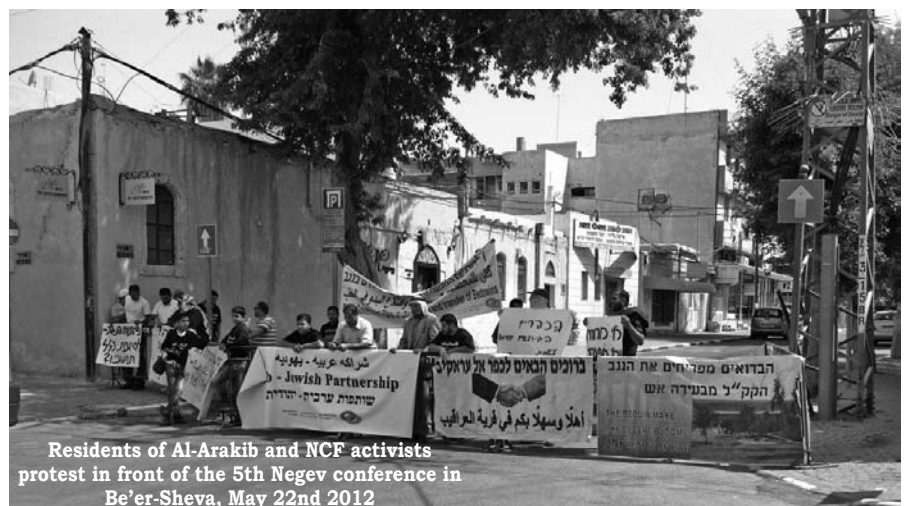


British Ambassador to Israel, Matthew Gould, during a visit in the village of Al-Arakib, May 16th 2012

May 22nd – The Fifth Negev Conference was held in the Old City of Be'er Sheva. Dozens of Bedouin residents of the Negev stood at the entrance to the building at the beginning of the conference. They were joined by activists from the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality and other organizations. The protestors, who were not permitted to enter the building, demonstrated against the conference since, despite its theme of "Development of the Negev", it ignored 30% of the residents of the area. The demonstrators shouted slogans calling for coexistence in the Negev and making clear their opposition to the conference in its present format.

May 27th – A solidarity visit was held in the village of Al-Arakib after it was demolished by the Israeli government for the 35th time on May 23rd. Many activists came to the village to express their solidarity with the residents and to join the weekly demonstration held by the residents each Sunday at Lehavim Junction.

Throughout the month of May, residents of the Abu Basma Regional Council encountered difficulties in registering to vote in the regional council elections. The Abu Basma Regional Council was established by the State of Israel in 2003, and since then it has been headed by an appointed official by the Ministry of Interior. An appeal over this issue was made to the High Court of Justice by the Association for Human Rights in Israel and Adalah, of which NCF was one of the petitioners. The court



Residents of Al-Arakib and NCF activists protest in front of the 5th Negev conference in Be'er-Sheva, May 22nd 2012

## What's new in the Negev (cont.)

ruled that the first democratic elections in the regional council would take place in December 2012. However, only 30% of the residents are registered in the population registry, and the Ministry of Interior is making it difficult for people to register to vote.

**June** June 20th – A festive event was held to mark the end of the youth photography workshop in the villages of Al Arakib and Alsira at the Multaka-Mifgash, the NCF's Arab-Jewish Cultural Center. Children attended with their parents to view their work. The village committees, representatives of the children, and members of the forum spoke and expressed a desire for similar cooperation in the future.

June 24th – Residents of the village of Bir

Hadaj appealed to the High Court of Justice through the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) against Eli Yishai, the Minister of Interior. They appealed because residents living outside the "blue line" (a line that indicates the planned area within a municipality) of the village, who were designated to be included within the village in the future plan, have been prevented from registering to vote. Consequently, they will not be able to vote in the upcoming elections for the Abu Basma Regional Council, of which the village is a part. The residents demanded that they be allowed to register to vote, or, alternately, be allowed to vote in the elections of the Ramat



NCF's representative, Dr. Mansur Al-Nasasra, at the 11th session of the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues in New York, May 2012.

Negev Regional Council, which had jurisdiction over the area in which they lived.

## International Lobby

Negev Coexistence Forum invests extensive effort in activities in the international sector. These activities are aimed at implementing change and increasing awareness of the situation regarding the Bedouin in the Negev - particularly those living in the unrecognized villages.

NCF's international lobbying efforts focus on work with the United Nations, including writing reports to various UN committees, sending representatives to UN conferences and to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and meeting with United Nations representatives when they visit Israel. NCF conducts

field trips for groups from abroad and informs the international press of current events related to the situation in the Negev. The NCF staff also participates in various delegations and seminars abroad and works in cooperation with various international organizations.

The NCF sent a representative to New York, to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues during the month of May, which gathered representatives of indigenous peoples from around the world. NCF's representative, Dr. Mansour Al-Nasasra, presented our position at the plenum, and conducted

a workshop about the Praver Plan and its future repercussions on the Bedouin population in the Negev. Dr. Al-Nasasra also met privately with the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, to discuss Israeli violations of Arab-Bedouin rights in the Negev and to warn him of the consequences of the Praver Plan. Several representatives of the Negev Coexistence Forum have previously met with Professor Anaya, and NCF continues to keep him informed of current events in the Negev through letters and reports. Dr. Anaya's request to visit Israel has not yet been granted.

## Please recognize - Village of A-Sir

The village of A-Sir is located five kilometers south of Be'er Sheva, near Emek Sara industrial area. The village is named after a common shrub that is native to the area. The village has approximately 3,000 residents, most of whom are members of the Al-Azazme Tribe.

The village is divided into three sections. The first section is a narrow strip of land, less than 500 meters wide, that is located between Route 406 and the train tracks that run parallel to the road on its eastern side, and extends from the Eshel Prison to the Nokdim Junction two kilometers away. The Eshel Prison is located immediately east of the train tracks and divides the village in half, making access between the two halves of the village difficult. The other section of the village lies east of the prison; it is a long narrow strip of land on which most of the village residents lives. The third strip is located east of Route 40 and reaches the outskirts of Segev Shalom.

Access to services in the village is similar to that of other unrecognized villages in the Negev. Water is dispensed from one house to another through plastic pipes that the residents have set up themselves. Electric poles surround the village, providing electricity to the nearby prison, but residents of A-Sir are forced to get electricity through generators run by diesel fuel or solar energy. There are no schools in A-Sir, and children must attend school in Segev Shalom.

Residents of the village are internally displaced persons. Their historical place of residence was an area on the other side of the road 40 known as Givat Hablanim, which is now a military fire zone, where entry is forbidden. After they were moved from their original location to the area of Emek Sara,

Ratb Abo Krenat and Yoav Galai

Pleased to  
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they were moved again in 1994 to their present location.

As in all of the unrecognized villages, house demolitions are common in A-Sir.



Village of A-Sir, June 2012



Various cultural events were held in the Multaka-Mifgash – the Arab Jewish Cultural Center that is operated by the Negev Coexistence Forum.

A study group was held to commemorate Land Day, led by MK Dov Hanin, Dr. Thabet Abu Rass, and Nura Al-Nasasra. A panel was held in commemoration of the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination on the topic of racial discrimination in Israel in 2012. The panel consisted of Yael Ben Yafet, head of the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow; Danny Admaso, former head of the Israeli Association for Ethiopian Jews; Attorney Nidal Othman, director of the Coalition against Racism in Israel; and Haia Noach, Director of the Negev Coexistence Forum. Noach presented the NCF report on the accessibility of government and public services in Bedouin villages in the Negev. May Day was commemorated by a panel discussion led by representatives of workers' associations, a discussion with Dr. Ephraim Davidi, and films screenings. A discussion was held about the one-state solution, led by former MK Mossi Raz, Attorney Yifat Solel, Dr. Thabet Abu Rass, and Dr. Avner Dinur. The 6th Marx Convention hosted a discussion about social protests in Israel and Germany. The film "Habundaim" was screened

## Multaka-Mifgash Activities - an Arab-Jewish Culture House in the Negev



and a discussion was held with the director, Eran Torbiner, and the script writer, Yaad Biran.



Screening of the Movie "Hula and Natan" at the Multaka-Mifgash and a discussion with the director, Robby Elmaliah, February 28th 2012

### Home and building demolition - January – June 2012

Village	Location	Buildings demolished	Date
Alsira	Route 31, near Kseife	One house was demolished	January 9
Hura	Route 31	One house was demolished	January 9
Al-Arakib	East of route 40, between Lehavim and Goral junctions	Tents were demolished for the 31st time	January 18
Squeb A-Salam (Segev-Shalom)	Route 25	One structure was demolished	January 18
Al-Arakib	East of route 40, between Lehavim and Goral junctions	Tents were demolished for the 32nd time	February 13
East of Hura	Route 31, near Hura	One house was demolished	February 15
Hashem Zane	Route 25	One shack was demolished	February 15
Al-Arakib	East of route 40, between Lehavim and Goral junctions	Tents were demolished for the 33rd time	March 6
Lakia		Three homes were demolished	March 6
Umm Batin		One house was demolished	April 23
Al-Arakib	East of route 40, between Lehavim and Goral junctions	Tents were demolished for the 34th time	April 23
Hirbat Al-Batal		One house was demolished	May 2
Hirbat Al-Batal		Part of a newly-renovated house was demolished	May 8
Squeb A-Salam (Segev-Shalom)		One house was demolished	May 8

## Home and building demolition - January – June 2012 (cont.)

Village	Location	Buildings demolished	Date
Al-Arakib	East of route 40, between Lehavim and Goral junctions	Tents were demolished for the 35th time	May 23
Umm Ratam		Two homes were demolished	June 6
Sawa		One house was demolished	June 6
Tel Sheva		Three houses were demolished	June 6
Hirbat Al-Batal	South of Rahat	Three huts and a chicken pen were demolished	June 11
Bir Hadaj		One fence was demolished	June 11
Squeb A-Salam (Segev-Shalom)		One house was demolished	June 11
Al-Arakib	East of route 40, between Lehavim and Goral junctions	Tents were demolished for the 36th time	June 24

**Note:** As a result of Israeli Land Authority supervisors threatening home owners with enormous demolitions costs, the people sometimes prefer to dismantle the houses and in order to save the building material. It should be noted that the legality of putting the burden of the payment for the demolition on home owners is unclear.



## Membership and Participation in the Forum

The Forum was first established and still exists as an organization dependent on volunteers and voluntarism: citizens who understand that without community action and intervention, government policies in the Negev lead to injustice, discrimination and a depressing future for the Negev and the country as a whole. The Forum's goals are to push equal rights further and forward and to promote tolerance and coexistence in the Negev.

We invite you to join us to help advance the goals of the Forum as they are outlined in this newsletter. If you are interested in doing so you can participate in any of these above-mentioned activities, even those already underway. The Forum is open and pleased to receive ideas and new initiatives for additional activities.

In addition, the Forum needs volunteers to carry out specific roles such as:

- 1) To develop and maintain the Forum's website.
- 2) To translate texts from Hebrew to Arabic and English and in the opposite directions.
- 3) Editor for the Forum Newsletter.
- 4) Members for the Multaka-Mifgash stirring committee.
- 5) Investigating ethnic based discrimination in working places, services etc.
- 6) For spokespersons and public relations persons to face the media and general public.
- 7) To co-ordinate volunteers activities.
- 8) To co-ordinate Knesset lobbying activities.

We would appreciate your support of NCF activities. Please send checks to POB. 130, Omer, 84965.

Those who wish to join the Negev Coexistence Forum are encouraged to pay a membership fee as follows: Individuals - 40 NIS, families - 60 NIS, students and others who wish to pay a reduced fee - 20 NIS.

\* Further information regarding the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality can be obtained by contacting one of the contacts at the bottom of the page, or through the Internet at [www.dukium.org](http://www.dukium.org).

\* We shall be pleased to receive the addresses of potential readers of the newsletter, or ideas for other subjects considered suitable to be included in the newsletter.

\* If you no longer desire to receive this newsletter please inform us.

The Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality is an independent non-party organization that was established in 1997 by Arabs and Jews - Israeli citizens who live in the Negev-Naqab. The Forum's aim is to provide a framework for Jewish-Arab co-operation as a basis for a common struggle for equal civil rights and to promote tolerance and coexistence in the Negev. The Forum's activities are carried out on a voluntary basis, or funded exclusively by private foundations, in particular The New Israel Fund, and donations. These include meetings and social events between the communities, information drives, environment justice campaigns, recognition of the unrecognized Bedouin villages of the Negev, the struggle for employment equality in the Negev and other similar activities.

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