

NGOs and the Negev Bedouin Issue in the Context of Political Warfare





NGO Monitor's mission is to provide information and analysis, promote accountability, and support discussion on the reports and activities of NGOs claiming to advance human rights and humanitarian agendas.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The conflict over Bedouin citizens of Israel and land claims in the Negev has become a major point of focus for many Israeli and international NGOs. The involvement of political advocacy NGOs in this complex issue has increased significantly, particularly after 2010, including reports, calls for action, media visibility and lobbying in frameworks such as the European Union and the United Nations. This activity contributes significantly to the demonization and delegitimization of Israel.
- In their campaigns, these NGOs promote a highly biased portrayal of the Bedouin issue, and demand that the government accept the ownership claims made by several groups in the Bedouin sector – ignoring court proceedings that have examined and rejected these claims.
- NGO reports systematically take a simplistic approach, are based on unreliable sources, and use inflammatory rhetoric with unsupported claims, accusing Israel of implementing a policy of “racial discrimination,” “disinheritance,” and “human rights violations” against the “indigenous” citizens of the Negev.
- NGOs active in this campaign include **Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, Adalah, Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Bimkom, Rabbis for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch**, and others.
- These NGOs are largely **funded by the New Israel Fund (NIF), the European Union, and European governments**, providing substantial amounts to this partisan political agenda.
- Reports are submitted to various UN and EU committees, and become additional components in delegitimization campaigns – corresponding with the Durban Strategy (see below) that aims to completely isolate the state of Israel. Many NGOs conflate Bedouin issues with the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, without distinguishing between Bedouin and Palestinian issues.
- In response to NGO lobbying, the European Parliament [condemned](#) Israel’s Bedouin policy (July 5, 2012) and a Member of the European

Parliament (David Martin of the Socialists and Democrats group) accused Israel of “ethnic cleansing” (June 20, 2013).

- Many NGOs presented their positions to the Goldberg Commission for the Regulation the Bedouin Settlements in the Negev and to the “public consultation” process headed by former minister Ze’ev B. Begin. Yet, following their participation, some of the NGOs labeled it “a process of disinheritance” of “indigenous Arab citizens.”
- After the government approved the Prawer Report in September 2011 and the first reading of the Bill for Regulation of the Bedouin Settlements in the Negev passed in the Knesset in June 2013, NGOs claimed that Israel was committing “a grave violation of basic Bedouin rights,” “a blatant violation of human and property rights,” “[apartheid](#),” and “[ethnic discrimination](#).” Demonstrations were organized in several cities in Israel; in many instances, participants were not Bedouin, but activists brought in from elsewhere.
- After the first demolition of the illegally constructed village of Al-Arakib (July 27, 2010), NGOs issued a flood of press releases, calls for action, and articles on the “racist” and “disinheritance policy” of Israel. Amnesty International, for example, published 9 documents condemning Israel.
- In addition to attacking the State of Israel, NGOs target the Jewish National Fund (JNF) for its forestry projects in the Negev.¹

¹ For more on the campaign against the JNF, see Alon Tal, “[Why don't Rabbis for Human Rights care about Bedouin women?](#)” *Haaretz*, September 2, 2013.

INTRODUCTION

Lands claims, unrecognized Bedouin villages, and the complicated relationship between the state of Israel and the Bedouin population in the Negev have concerned Israeli governments for decades. During this time, the Israeli government has attempted to find a comprehensive response to this complex issue, satisfying the needs of both the state and its Bedouin citizens.

At the same time, many NGOs involved in the issue have taken a tendentious stance against the government's Bedouin policy. Their position includes an unequivocal demand to recognize the maximum Bedouin demands and their claims of ownership over the land, without taking into account other factors such as regional master plans and laws on construction and zoning. These groups accuse Israel of pursuing a racist policy, discriminating against "indigenous" Bedouins and favoring Jewish Israelis in the Negev.

It is notable this context that an academic article by Kark, Frantzman, and Yahel demonstrates that the description of Bedouins as "indigenous" is relatively recent and is essentially a political tool in the hands of Bedouins, academics, and NGOs in their allegations regarding Israeli "violations," while also providing an additional legal route for attacking Israel in international forums such as the UN.² They also enumerate generally accepted parameters of the term "indigenous," and explain why the Bedouins cannot be included in this category: the Bedouin are not the original inhabitants of the Negev; they have not resided there "from time immemorial," as they arrived during the Ottoman rule; the Bedouin "were never sovereign in the area"; and nomadic culture "by definition, precludes permanent attachment to specific territory." Finally, Bedouins are only

² Frantzman, S. J., Yahel, H., and Kark, R. "[Contested Indigeneity: The Development of an Indigenous Discourse on the Bedouin of the Negev, Israel.](#)" *Israel Studies*, Volume 17, Number 1, Spring 2012, 78-104.

considered “indigenous” in Israel, not in other neighboring countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.³

The organizations also deny the Israeli government’s right to apply Israeli law and sovereignty within Israel, using extreme rhetoric and language. The policies proposed by the NGOs, however, would create two different law enforcement systems in the Negev – one for Jewish citizens of Israel and one for Bedouin citizens of Israel.

The Israeli government has attempted to address the Bedouin issue through establishment of the Goldberg Commission for the Regulation of the Bedouin Settlements in the Negev, which submitted its recommendations in 2009, and the Prawer Commission for the implementation of the Goldberg Commission Recommendations, which submitted its recommendations in 2011. The goal of these commissions is, among others, “the formalization of a comprehensive systematic policy which combines handling the land issue and the planning and settlement issue.”

In 2012 Minister Ze’ev (Benjamin) Begin was entrusted with formulating a final draft bill for the implementation of this plan. He conducted a public consultation process that spanned more than three months, and included meetings with individuals, groups, and NGOs. Begin then submitted to the government his policy recommendations for a final bill, in accordance with the citizens’ suggestions where feasible. The first reading of Begin’s bill passed in June 2013, prompting elements of the Bedouin population and some NGOs to strongly criticize the bill and hold demonstrations and protests, some violent.

The primary NGOs most active in opposing Israeli policy on the Bedouin are the international organizations Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International, as well as Israeli organizations such as Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Adalah, and Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF). Representatives from some of these NGOs testified before the Goldberg

³ Yahel , H., Kark, R. and Frantzman , S. J. “[Are the Negev Bedouin an Indigenous People? Fabricating Palestinian History](#).” *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2012, pp. 3-14

Commission and participated in the public consultation process, likely affecting the outcome. Yet, subsequently, the NGOs continue to harshly criticize Goldberg, Praver, and Begin because their compromise policy recommendations do not accept the maximalist Bedouin claims.

Additionally, these NGOs submit numerous reports on Israel's Bedouin to the UN, European government bodies, and the EU. The NGO-initiated reports, as well as press releases and public campaigns, present Israel as racist, discriminatory, and perpetuating a policy of disinheritance "indigenous" people from their land. These publications are part of strategy (see below) of falsely branding Israel as a racist and criminal state. NGO publications on the Bedouin question also present a highly complex issue in simplistic terms, rely on unreliable sources, distort data and ignore historical facts, use deceiving terminology, and display a systematic structural bias against Israeli government policy.

THE DURBAN STRATEGY

The UN's World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa (2001) was intended to unify states and activists from all over the world against "racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia." Despite [this declared goal](#), a preparatory meeting for the conference was held in Teheran, from which Jewish and Israeli organizations were excluded. Arab states and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) initiated a draft resolution in this assembly, which included accusations that Israel commits "holocausts" and "ethnic cleansing," and that Zionism is "based on racial superiority."

The Durban Conference itself included three forums: an official diplomatic framework, an international youth forum, and an NGO Forum. The NGO Forum included approximately 1,500 NGOs from across the globe, and became the focus of blatant anti-Israel and antisemitic activity. Among the NGOs participating in the forum and in various preparatory events were Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Adalah.

The Final Declaration of the NGO Forum concluded that the state of Israel is “a racist, apartheid state in which Israel’s brand of apartheid is a crime against humanity...” The NGOs called for the imposition of comprehensive sanctions on Israel and for “the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel.”

This Final Declaration has become a plan for further action against Israel, implemented through coordinated NGO campaigns in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and around the world. These campaigns are also taking place in Europe, and various UN bodies, especially in the Human Rights Council and its sub-committees.⁴



"...The PFLP in Gaza affirms that the Prawer plan is a new Nakba" – PFLP Twitter feed (15/07/2013).



One the posters used by the BDS and the delegitimization campaign against Israel.

⁴ Steinberg, Gerald M. “[The Centrality of NGOs in the Durban Strategy](#).” *Yale Israel Journal* 9 (Summer 2006).

Selected NGOs involved with the issue of Bedouin citizens of Israel and unrecognized villages

The NGOs discussed in this section are the leading organizations involved in opposing Israeli policy on Bedouin citizens of the Negev. Other NGOs – such as Coalition of Women for Peace, Hakara Forum (an umbrella organization), Mossawa, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, and Amnesty International – are also active on this issue.

Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF)

Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, which testified before the Goldberg Commission (p. 63), is an organization established [in order](#) “to provide a framework for Jewish-Arab collaborative efforts in the struggle for civil equality and the advancement of mutual tolerance and coexistence.” Within this framework, the NGO and its activists publish dozens of “[Newsletters](#),” “[House Demolition Diaries](#),” and [reports](#) to various UN bodies. NCF is supported by the [New Israel Fund](#) (NIF) (\$45,532 in [2012](#)), and received funding from the Swiss Foreign Affairs office in [2011](#) (109,279 - unspecified currency).

NCF arranges tours in the Negev for foreign diplomats and lobbies foreign governments in order to influence their policy toward Israel. In addition, NCF has been consistently and systematically distributing publications with serious allegations against Israel regarding “racism” toward Bedouin citizens. Reports by the NCF are based on reports from unreliable political organizations including [Mossawa](#), Adalah, [Bimkom](#), HRW, [Oxfam](#) (which also funds some of the reports), and NCF itself.

Adalah

Similar to Negev Coexistence Forum, Adalah is conducting a continuous systematic campaign in UN frameworks and in Israel against Israeli policy

regarding the Bedouins. Adalah [describes](#) itself as “an independent human rights organization and legal center.” The organization is [funded by](#) the NIF (\$356,911 in [2012](#)), the [European Union](#), [Switzerland](#), [Ford Foundation](#), [Welfare Association](#) (funded by Saudi Arabia and several Islamic foundations), and other foundations. The total amount of donations Adalah received from foreign governmental bodies in the first three quarters of 2012 was [1,948,459 NIS](#) (in accordance with the [Law on Disclosure Requirements For \[Groups\] Supported by a Foreign Governmental Body](#)).

In June of 2005, Adalah [alleged](#) that the “intruder defrayment law” (public lands law [intruders defrayment] [amendment] 2005), which allows for stricter enforcement of squatting and other regulations, targets “indigenous people,” and is similar to the “Group Areas Act, that established the apartheid in South Africa in 1950, and let ‘the white neighbors’ expel the blacks from the ‘forbidden areas’ by evacuations and home demolitions.”

Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)

ACRI’s [stated mission](#) is “to ensure Israel’s accountability and respect for human rights, by addressing violations committed by the Israeli authorities in Israel, the Occupied Territories, or elsewhere.” The NGO is [funded](#) by the NIF (\$1,007,846 in 2012), the [Netherlands](#), [Norway](#), [Spain](#), the EU, and [NDC](#) (NGO Development Center: joint funding from the governments of Switzerland, Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden). Its [budget in 2012](#) was over NIS 10 million. The total amount of donations from foreign governmental bodies in the first two quarters of 2013 was [1,526,757 Shekels](#) (in accordance with the [Law on Disclosure Requirements For \[Groups\] Supported by a Foreign Governmental Body](#)).

ACRI calls the Israeli government's policy towards the Bedouins “discriminative” and “racist,” and places the responsibility for the low status of women in Bedouin society on Israel. ACRI’s position papers are based, in part on HRW and Bimkom reports.

Bimkom- Planners for Planning Rights

Bimkom is an NGO established “[in order](#) to strengthen democracy and human rights in the field of spatial planning and housing policies... to assist the weakest sectors of society through research and reports, community planning assistance and through awareness raising among planning authorities.” In 2012 Bimkom [received](#) donations from the governments of [Ireland](#) and Norway, as well as [NDC](#) (NGO Development Center: joint funding from the governments of Switzerland, Denmark, Netherlands and Sweden). Bimkom is also [funded](#) by the NIF (\$194,800 in [2012](#)) and the [Ford Foundation](#). In the first two quarters of 2013, Bimkom received [NIS 831,992](#) from foreign governmental bodies (in accordance with the [Law on Disclosure Requirements For \[Groups\] Supported by a Foreign Governmental Body](#)). Bimkom is a co-partner in the NGO lobby against the Begin Plan (referred as the “Prawer Plan” by the NGOs), and also claims that not recognizing Bedouin villages is “a serious violation of Human Rights.”

Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR)

Rabbis for Human Rights [claims to](#) “defend[] human rights of marginalized communities within Israel and the Palestinian Territories.” RHR is funded by the NIF (\$140,114 in [2012](#)), the EU, and Spain (via [AECID](#)). Total amount of donations from foreign governmental bodies in the first two quarters of 2012 was [984,049 Shekels](#) (in accordance with the [Law on Disclosure Requirements For \[Groups\] Supported by a Foreign Governmental Body](#)).

In the Negev, RHR is mainly involved in actions relating to Al-Arakib (see below), but starting in April 2013 there has been an increasing involvement in activities relating to the wider protests of Bedouin citizens of Israel. RHR dedicates a section of its Hebrew website to “[Protest against Prawer](#),” listing of demonstrations, [emergency conferences](#), [propaganda videos](#), and other activities opposing the plan and bill.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Human Rights Watch is an international organization “[dedicated](#) to defending and protecting human rights. By focusing international attention where human rights are violated, we give voice to the oppressed and hold oppressors accountable for their crimes.” HRW has a massive budget of over \$50 million, and receives funding from the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Open Society Institute (George Soros), and other donors.

HRW addresses the Bedouin simplistically, uncritically accepting all claims against Israeli policy despite the complexity in registering lands of semi-nomadic populations and despite continues rulings [against](#) Bedouin claims in Israeli courts. HRW also uses emotive terminology, based on unreliable sources such as reports from the (see above), Adalah, ACRI, [Alternative Information Center](#), and [Badil](#) (which aims to implement the Palestinian “Right of Return”).

Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)

[EMHRN](#) is an umbrella organization for more than 80 NGOs. It was founded in 1997, and is funded by the EU and other European countries. Governmental [funding](#) for 2011 (last available report): European Commission (539,768 Euros), Sweden (949,819 Euros), Denmark (504,818 Euros), Spain (174,502 Euros), Norway (76,596 Euros). Other donors include FIDH, the Ford Foundation and George Soros’ Open Society Institute.

EMHRN “promote[s] the rule of law, human rights and human rights education, and []strengthen[s] civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean region,” lobbies for the network’s partners, and promotes the agendas of [members](#). These include Adalah, B’Tselem and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI), as well as Palestinian NGOs central to lawfare campaigns against Israel such as Al-Mezan, Al-Haq, and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR).

With to the network's support, local organizations lobby European governments. EMHRN has been active in promoting the NGO narrative and Bedouin claims [among EU institutions](#).

Below, we present the most egregious and salient examples of NGO activity in the UN, Europe, and Israel. Additionally, in Israeli and foreign media outlets, there are dozens of press statements, quotes, and interviews by officials from these NGOs. These NGOs also lobby outside official frameworks, such as a joint [U.S. advocacy tour](#) opposing the Praver plan by representatives from Adalah, Negev Coexistence Forum, and ACRI.



Poster with the statement: "Stop Praver-Begin Plan, no ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Bedouin" in an event held by the EU parliament Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. (October 17, 2013). Photo: Mission of Israel to the EU



Protest against Praver plan in northern Israel. The protest included stone throwing and blocking roads. (July 15, 2013). Photo: Israel Police, North District Spokesperson



NCF Member appearing in the European Parliament (June 20, 2013). Screenshot, Source: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/committees/video?event=20130620-0900-COMMITTEE-DROI>

NGO participation in UN forums on the issue of the Bedouins and the unrecognized villages in the Negev

1. In the beginning of July 2013, two members of NCF [attended](#) the Sixth Session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN EMRIP), where they [called for](#) “urgent intervention by the international community” against the “displacement program which the weakened Bedouins community is being coerced into, [which] will harm the delicate social fabric of the Negev and lead to a deterioration in relations between Jews and Arabs.” They also showed a film documenting home demolitions in the Negev.
2. On June 11, 2012, Adalah [submitted a report](#) to the UN Human Right Council in order to assist with preparing the “list of questions” to be presented to Israel in July 2012. The report refers to urgent problems related to “discrimination” against Arab citizens, and alleges Israeli non-compliance with internationally recognized human rights commitments, including “the demolition of unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev” and “the lack of access to water” in these villages.
3. NCF representative Dr. Mansour Nasasra spoke at the [11th Session](#) of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues in New York. In his remarks, Nasasra claimed that the Praver 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.’”
4. In February 2012, during the [visit](#) of the UN special rapporteur on adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, attorney Suhad Bishara of Adalah accused Israel of “attempt to destroy and evict Arab Bedouin residents from the unrecognized villages of Atir and Umm el-Hieran.” Adalah’s Negev office also arranged her visit to the unrecognized and illegally built villages, including Al-Arakib (see below).

5. In February 2012, attorney Orna Cohen of NCF [represented the NGO](#) at the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in Geneva.
6. On November 23, 2011, a member of NCF testified before the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) demanding that the international community “get involved and assist the Bedouin population.”
7. A report submitted by ACRI to CESCR (October 2011) touches broadly on the issue of the Bedouins. The [report](#) discusses various Bedouin rights and the JNF’s alleged “discriminatory policy,” and holds Israel responsible for the low status of women in Bedouin society.
8. NCF representative Sana Ibn Bari spoke at the Tenth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In her [remarks](#), Ibn Bari declared that the Bedouins face the “harshest consequences of discrimination through laws as well as policy and practice.”
9. A [joint report](#) submitted to CESCR by NCF, PHR-I, and other NGOs (October 2010) demanded that Israel recognize “the Bedouin’s claims for ownership of their lands,” and claimed that Israel has created a “discriminatory policy” that violates many Bedouin rights, including the right to an “adequate standard of living,” through “forced proletarianization” as part of a “policy of dispossession.”
10. Adalah also presented [a report](#) to CESCR, where it claimed that most Bedouin homes are “demolished on the pretext of Arab Bedouin violation of land and planning laws,” and that Israel’s objective is to concentrate the Arab Bedouin of the Naqab into...overcrowded and impoverished townships and to allocate the remaining land to Jewish citizens.”
11. ACRI also presented [a report](#) at this session of CESCR, where it claimed that Israel’s policy “is a violation of the Bedouins’ rights as an indigenous people, and specifically their right to own and manage their lands according to traditional customs and laws.” The report also claims that Israel “does not explain or offer any justification for the policy that refuses to recognize [villages].”

NGO participation in EU frameworks and European countries on the issue of the Bedouins and the unrecognized villages in the Negev

1. On October 17, 2013, representatives of Negev Coexistence Forum participated in a seminar hosted by the Socialists and Democrats group (S&D) of the European Parliament, "[Bedouins in the Naqab/Negev: Dreams and Nightmare](#)." A [banner featured at the event](#) accused Israel of "ethnic cleansing."
2. On July 3, 2013, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) [asked](#) the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton to "issue a public statement condemning the Praver-Begin bill as discriminatory and contrary to the human rights provision of the EU-Israel Association Agreement." Additionally, EMHRN requested that the European Parliament's president express his concern on the matter and promoted the "'alternative plan', an initiative of the Bedouin community." (EMHRN's statement provided links to publications of Adalah and HRA.)
3. On June 20, 2013 representatives of Adalah, NCF, and EMHRN [testified](#) before the EU Parliament subcommittee on human rights, claiming that the "Begin Plan" "represents two principles: Apartheid and Military Rule." During the session, MEP David Martin of the Socialists and Democrats group responded, "I would go further than our guests describe it as apartheid. I don't use this word lightly but I think what we are seeing taking place is ethnic cleansing...under any definition."
4. On May 30, 2013 Adalah and the NCF published [a position paper](#) (funded by the EU), reviewing the "[Praver-Begin Bill and the Forced Displacement of the Bedouin](#)" and accusing Israel of "forcible displacement," "dispossession," and attempting to implement "the complete and final severance of the Bedouin's historical ties to their land." The position paper is one-sided and makes unfounded historical and factual claims.
5. In December 2012, NCF [wrote](#) to the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), opposing the SPD's fundraising for forestry projects in the Negev and

[informing party members](#) that the “forest erases the memory of the Bedouins and the memory of their dispossession.”

6. In October 2012, four members of the European Parliament’s Working Group on the Middle East [toured](#) the Negev guided by representatives from Adalah, Bimkom, and NCF; they did not meet with any official representatives of the Israeli government. The MEPs heard about “the rights of the unrecognized villages in the Naqab, including the policy of the displacement of population and house demolitions” and the way in which “Arab Bedouins deliberately prevented from all basic services and infrastructure.”
7. In June 2012, NCF Executive Director Haia Noach and Aziz Abu Mdeighem, an Al-Arakib activist, [participated in a seminar in Sweden](#).
8. In April 2012, Dr. Thabet Abu Ras, Adalah’s Negev office director, traveled to Brussels for an “[advocacy mission](#)” – a trip funded in part by EMHRN. The mission’s objective was to “draw attention to the critical situation in the Naqab today, where up to 70,000 people are under threat of displacement because of the Prawer Plan.” Abu Ras also aimed to “encourage policy-makers to increase diplomatic pressure on Israel,” and claimed that “when the international community is informed and acts against discriminatory laws and policies, the Israeli government hesitates to support and/or implement them.”
9. On December 11, 2012, NCF [accompanied the Swiss ambassador to Israel](#), Andreas Baum, in a visit to three unrecognized villages in the Negev, in order to “raise international awareness to Bedouin home demolitions.” The Ambassador was present at Al-Arakib when Israeli police carried out a court-ordered demolition.

NGO activities in Israel on the issue of the Bedouins and the unrecognized villages in the Negev

1. On July 23, 2013, ACRI submitted [a position paper](#) on the Praver plan to the Knesset Internal Affairs and Environment Committee. In the paper, ACRI alleges that the Praver plan will cause the “displacement and eviction of dozens of villages...in a way which will condemn thousands of family to poverty, unemployment and the destruction of communal life and social fabric.”
2. On May 31, 2013, Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR) posted [a video](#) titled “Fiddler without a Roof” on its YouTube page, in which the actor Theodore Bikel (known for portraying Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof”) condemns the Praver plan. In addition, RHR published “five actions against the Praver plan” including: “change your banner to the number [40,000](#) in order to highlight the danger of expulsion for 40,000 Bedouin citizens; send a letter to the coalition whip through [Avaaz petitions](#); Send [a letter](#) to a member of Knesset; post and share on MK’s Facebook pages; A film against Praver, share this post!”
3. On May 8, 2013, the [Center for Justice and Equality for the Bedouins](#) organized an “[Emergency Conference – No to the Praver/Begin Law.](#)” Organizers of the conference included Itach-Maaki, Maan-the Forum of Arab-Women’s Organizations in the Negev, Sidra, PHR-I, and others.
4. On May 6, 2013, NCF released [a press statement](#) claiming that “the approval of the Praver-Begin plan this morning in the minister’s legislative committee is a grave step on the path to institutionalizing the state’s discriminatory and racist policy in the Negev. The meaning of this law is turning the Negev ‘as Bedouin free as possible’, the dispossession of the Bedouins from their land and their traditional means of production, eroding their social structure and concentrating them in urban settlements with low resources and a lack of potential for development.”
5. On May 5, 2013, ACRI and Bimkom [jointly addressed](#) the Minister of Justice and the minister’s legislative committee with a similar letter, calling on them

- “not to approve this bill, which is unnecessary for the regulation of the Bedouin settlements.”
6. In an op-ed in *Haaretz* (April 28, 2013), attorney Rawia Abu Rabia of ACRI [claimed](#) in the context of the Bedouins in the Negev that “for years the seeds of racism have been growing unhindered in Israeli society...[including] instances of racism and incitement in the Israeli legislature.”
 7. Center for Justice and Equality for the Bedouins, Shatil (NIF), RHR, ACRI, Bimkom, Adalah, Mossawa, and NCF [sent a letter](#) to the Prime Minister, Justice Minister, and the Attorney General requesting that they do not “promote the memorandum of the law, and remove it from the government’s and Knesset’s agenda,” and that “the government must recognize the villages and plan them according to equal standards. It must also recognize the full ownership of the Bedouins over their lands” (April 18, 2013).
 8. In March 2013, ACRI [appealed to the court](#) in Beersheva against a home demolition order in the Bedouin village of Sawa. In July 2013, the court [rejected](#) the appeal, noting that accepting it would create chaos and render legally issued demolition orders meaningless.
 9. ACRI’s annual report from December 2012 gives prominence to the issue of the unrecognized villages in the chapter titled “[Arab Minority Rights](#).” The report describes the Praver Plan as “discriminatory,” designed to “supplant the residents” and “deny their historical connection to the land.” The report also claims without evidence that the villages existed prior to Israel’s independence.
 10. In April 2012, ACRI and Bimkom submitted a request for [amicus curiae](#) status in order join an appeal to the Israeli High Court of Justice opposing the rejection of a proposed master plan for the village of Arara.
 11. On March 14, 2012, “Hakara Forum,” of which NCF is a member, [demanded](#) that El Al cease cooperation with the JNF. On February 16, 2013, El Al [responded](#), saying that cooperation with the JNF ended as of May 1, 2012.
 12. On January 2, 2012, Adalah [submitted](#) to the Southern District Planning Board an objection to the Yatir Forest plan, according to which the unrecognized village of Atir would be demolished and a forest planted in its

place. The board rejected Adalah's submission, but granted the NGO a right of appeal in January 2013.

13. Dr. Thabet Abu Ras, director of Adalah's Negev office, claimed that the state is implementing "a massive [disinheritance](#) program of the Arab population in the country, that hasn't happened since the 1950s" (June 3, 2011). Abu-Ras also claimed that the discussions about this issue "fit in very well with [anti-democratic and racist](#) discourse against the Arab population" (June 22, 2011). He also [alleged](#) that the "purpose of the Israeli government, according to the Prawer report, was and still is disinheriting the Bedouins from their lands" (April 2011). It is noteworthy that, in his articles, Abu-Ras claims that the Bedouin population constitutes 30% of the Negev's residents, whereas Adalah, in a report to the UN Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2010 (discussed above), claims that the Bedouin population constitutes only 14% of the Negev's residents.
14. In a [document of principles](#) for the recognition of the Bedouin villages (May 2011), Bimkom claimed that "any attempt at a solution [for the issue of the unrecognized villages] must recognize the rights of Bedouins as an indigenous minority to own land and hold it, use in and control the territory and resources that they occupy according to traditional ownership, and include the restitution of lands and resources stolen from them..." The document goes on to claim that the alleged violation of Bedouin rights "harms their rights and is contrary to international norms of human rights which anchor in conventions the rights of minorities in general and the rights of indigenous minorities in particular."
15. On April 18, 2011, Adalah [petitioned](#) the magistrate's court in Kiryat Gat requesting the cancellation of the eviction order against 1,000 Bedouin citizens of Israel living in the unrecognized villages of Atir and Umm Al-Hiran, and demanding recognition of the villages.
16. On March 31, 2011, Adalah [submitted](#) a motion for permission to appeal to the HCJ regarding eviction orders in two unrecognized villages. The next hearing was scheduled for September 2013.

17. In January 2011, following the decision to demolish Umm El-Hiran, an Adalah representative [claimed](#) that the government practices a “separation policy on a national and/or religious basis that reminds us of dark regimes that have passed from the world.”
18. Haia Noah, one of NFC’s founders (who was [indicted](#) for interfering with police activities in Al-Arakib), published an [article](#) (December 2010) claiming that “the state of Israel is persecuting its Bedouin citizens and covets the rest of their lands.” In addition, Noah falsely claimed that the reason for demolishing the illegal Bedouin buildings in the Negev is “to forcefully concentrate all the Bedouins of the Negev in poor and discriminated against small towns, in order to clear lands for Jewish settlement. This policy is based on racism, has no chance of being a long term solution and hurts the Negev fabric of life.”

NGOS AND AL-ARAKIB

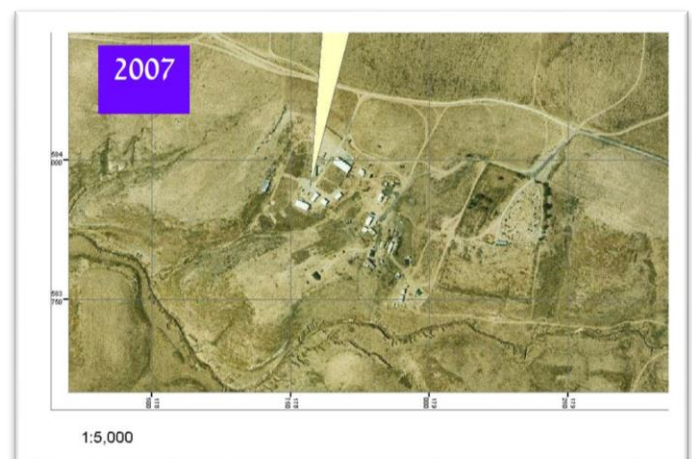
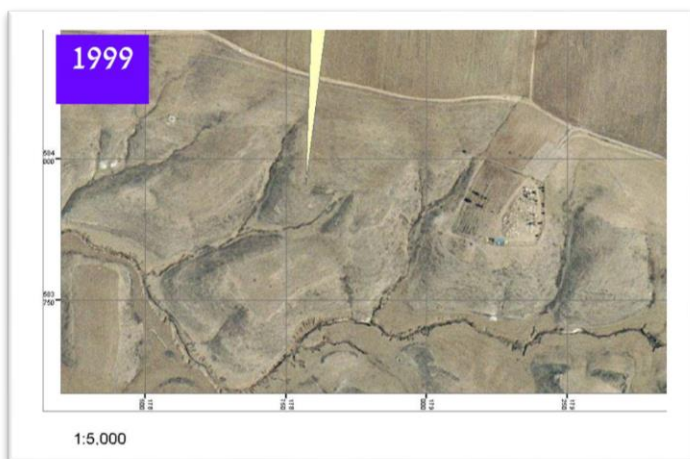
The illegally built village of Al-Arakib, which has been rebuilt and demolished several times during 2010-2013, received massive attention from the NGO network in Israel and internationally. The demolitions were condemned by HRW, Amnesty International, New Israel Fund, ACRI, Gush Shalom, [Rabbis for Human Rights](#), [Coalition of Women for Peace](#), [Taayush](#), [New Profile](#), and other organizations.

After the first demolition of Al-Arakib (July 2010), NGOs launched a campaign condemning it. Gush Shalom described the demolition as an “[act of war](#),” and ACRI [called](#) it “an action that undermines the foundations of democracy and human rights.” A Physicians for Human Rights-Israel activist alleged that the demolition is “a [racist policy](#) violating basic human rights.” Amnesty International published [nine press releases or calls for action](#) on the subject of Al-Arakib between September 2010 and July 2011, and HRW published two press releases on the matter of Al-Arakib in a three-week period in August 2010.

The demolition of the village has served as a visible rallying point for NGOs on the issue of unrecognized villages:

1. In a press release from July 29, 2011, Amnesty [condemned](#) the village demolition and the intention to sue the residents for the cost of the demolition. The organization also claimed that “Israel must end its policy of demolishing ‘unrecognized’ villages in the Negev and take steps to officially recognize al-‘Araqib and similar villages.”
2. An Israeli NGO coalition, including Gush Shalom, Rabbis for Human Rights, Coalition of Women for Peace, Taayush, New Profile and other organizations, published “[A Call for a Letter-Writing Campaign](#)” (May 3, 2011). In this call, the organizations claimed that the state of Israel “has made the lives of the Negev Bedouins a veritable hell.” The organizations declared that they will not “keep silent in view of the terror acts perpetrated by the government against the Bedouin villages,” and alleged that “the state of Israel is persecuting its Bedouin citizens, and is coveting the rest of their lands.”

3. In a call for action titled "[Stop creating forests that are destroying Bedouin lives](#)," Amnesty claimed that Bedouins "face permanent forced eviction from their homes and land to which they have a long-established claim."
4. Amnesty [condemned](#) the demolition and claimed that it "aim[s] to forcibly evict the residents of al-'Araqib from the land they have on lived for generations," (press release, November 25, 2010).
5. Amnesty UK and the Negev Coexistence Forum held a joint conference in London, "[Unrecognized: A conversation about disinherited Bedouins in the Negev](#)" (November 4, 2010).
6. A press release from HRW claimed that "Israel is [displaying a](#) shocking disregard for the basic rights of citizens who happen to be Bedouin Arabs" (August 18, 2010).
7. A previous HRW press release (August 1, 2010) claimed that the demolition is proof that "Israel's [discriminatory policies](#) toward Palestinian Arab Bedouin have not changed."



Aerial photos of Al Arakib from 1999 and from 2007, as shown in the court. Source: Israel Land Administration

CONCLUSIONS

The growing involvement of political NGOs in the issue of Bedouin citizens of Israel and the unrecognized villages in the Negev, as well as the NGO exploitation of the Bedouin population to advance a narrow political agenda, cannot be ignored. Since the first demolition of Al-Arakib village in July 2010 and the approval of Praver plan in September 2011, the NGOs discussed in this report have been giving greater weight to this issue, increasing sharply after former minister Begin's legislation was approved by the Israeli Government (June 2013).

In opposing Israeli policy, locally and internationally influential NGOs distort the complexities and difficulties facing the Bedouin population, ignore the rule of law and the democratic process, and neglect basic rights of other populations in the Negev. NGOs promote this political agenda by condemning Israeli policy in the media and in press releases, position papers, and calls for action, as well as lobbying the Knesset, petitioning the courts, and appearing before international and European Union frameworks. Additionally, NGOs organizing conferences and advocacy tours call on the public to decisively oppose the Praver plan by claiming it is "racial discrimination" meant to "expel the indigenous inhabitants" of the Negev.

The Bedouin issue is full of complexities, requiring a detailed examination of all its aspects and deep consideration of all possible consequences. The simplistic NGO activities on this issue demonstrate a one-sided, biased agenda, drawing it into context of the Arab-Israeli conflict as part of their wider delegitimization campaigns against Israel.

While their impact within Israel has been marginal, NGO campaigns against the Praver plan have resulted in condemnations of Israel, as detailed below:

- In August 31, 2012, the UN Human Rights Committee [published](#) 26 questions for the state of Israel regarding its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Two of the questions dealt with

Bedouin issues in the Negev. One dealt with the status of Bedouin villages, requesting information about the unrecognized villages and the steps taken by Israel to stop the home demolition policy, with a recommendation to withdraw the law implementing the Praver plan. The second question dealt with the access of the Bedouins to healthcare, education, water, housing, and sanitation services.

- In July 2012, a short time after Suhad Bishara from Adalah [testified](#) before the EU Parliament's Israel/Palestine working group, the EU Parliament [condemned](#) Israeli policy towards the Bedouin in the Negev and called on it to cancel the Praver Plan.
- In March 2012, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [published its concluding comments](#) on Israel: "The Committee is concerned about the current situation of Bedouin communities, particularly with regard to the policy of demolitions, notably of homes and other structures, and the increasing difficulties faced by members of these communities in gaining access on a basis of equality with Jewish inhabitants to land, housing, education, employment and public health... The Committee recommends that the State party address satisfactorily the problems faced by Bedouin communities, in particular with regard to the loss of their land and access to new land. The Committee also recommends that the State party step up its efforts to ensure equal access to education, work, housing and public health in all territories under the State party's effective control. In this regard, the State party should withdraw the 2012 discriminatory proposed Law for the Regulation of the Bedouin Settlement in the Negev, which would legalize the ongoing policy of home demolitions and forced displacement of the indigenous Bedouin communities."
- In a [press conference](#) held in February 12, 2012, the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, stated that "throughout my visit, I was able to witness a land development model that excludes, discriminates against and displaces minorities in Israel which is being replicated in the occupied territory, affecting Palestinian communities. The Bedouins in the Negev – inside Israel – as well as the new Jewish settlements in area C of the

West Bank and inside Palestinian Neighborhoods in East Jerusalem - are the new frontiers of dispossession of the traditional inhabitants, and the implementation of a strategy of Judaisation and control of the territory.”

- In August 2011, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Prof. James Anaya, [published a report](#), where he addressed the Bedouin issues in the Negev. Prof. Anaya rejected Israel’s position that Bedouin in the Negev should not be recognized as an indigenous people and claimed, “the Bedouin people share in the characteristics of indigenous peoples worldwide, including a connection to lands and the maintenance of cultural traditions that are distinct from those of majority populations.”