



The Arab Bedouin indigenous people of the Negev/Nagab – A Short Background

In 1948, on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel, about 65,000 to 100,000 Arab Bedouin lived in the Negev/Naqab region, currently the southern part of Israel. Following the 1948 war, the state began an ongoing process of eviction of the Arab Bedouin from their dwellings. At the end of the '48 war, only 11,000 Arab Bedouin people remained in the Negev/Naqab, most of the community fled or was expelled to Jordan and Egypt, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. During the early 1950s and until 1966, the State of Israel concentrated the Arab Bedouin people in a closed zone known by the name 'al-Siyāj' (سياج) under military administration. In this period, entire villages were displaced from their locations in the western and northern Negev/Naqab and were transferred to the Siyāj area.

Under the Planning and Construction Law, legislated in 1965, most of the lands in the Siyāj area were zoned as agricultural land whereby ensuring that any construction of housing would be deemed illegal, including all those houses already built which were subsequently labeled “illegal”. Thus, with a single sweeping political decision, the State of Israel transformed almost the entire Arab Bedouin collective into a population of “lawbreakers”, whereas the Arab Bedouins’ only crime was exercising their basic human right for adequate housing. In addition, the state of Israel denies any Arab Bedouin ownership over lands in the Negev/Naqab. It does not recognize the indigenous Arab Bedouin law or any other proof of Bedouin ownership over lands.

Today, about 250,000 Arab Bedouins reside in the Negev/Naqab area, in three types of settlements: about 35 unrecognized villages; 7 governmental planned townships; and 11 newly recognized villages. While the state’s urbanization process has been very much successful, with more than a half of the community residing today in planned townships, tens of thousands of Arab Bedouin citizens still live in unrecognized villages.

The Unrecognized Villages | The unrecognized Arab Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab include approximately 35 villages that the state of Israel does not recognize and refers to them as a “diaspora” or “illegal villages”. Amongst these villages are some which are historic villages since they exist in their location prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. Other villages were internally displaced during the 1950s into the Siyāj area. The state does not recognize the historical villages, nor does it recognize the internally displaced villages.

The residents of the unrecognized villages get very little governmental services and in most cases no services at all. In most of the villages there are no schools, kindergartens or health clinics. There is hardly any infrastructure, including electricity, running water, paved roads and sewage disposal systems. These villages have no representation in the different local government bodies and are mostly unable to participate in municipal elections. Consequently, the populations of these villages are reduced to severe hardship and poverty, compounded by the fact that they cannot access their basic civil, political and social rights.



منتدى التعايش السلمي في النقب من أجل المساواة المدنية
פורום 17 קיום בנגב לשוויון אזרחי
Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality



المجلس الإقليمي للقرى غير المعترف بها في النقب
המועצה האזורית לכפרים הבלתי מוכרים בנגב
The Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev-RCUV



Over the years, Israel has employed a variety of mechanisms to displace residents of the unrecognized villages into planned townships, including the establishment of special government authorities for this purpose. Planning policies have ensured that villages remain unrecognized and are subjected to house demolitions and legal penalties, and that basic infrastructure and services continue to be denied to these localities. While these policies have proved successful to some extent, in most cases, the unrecognized villages remain standing.

The Governmental Planned Towns | In the late 1950s, the state began planning the urbanization of the Arab Bedouin indigenous community. By concentrating the Arab Bedouin in delimited urban areas, Israel aimed to strengthen its control over the community, prevent the Arab Bedouin villages from growing, and cut infrastructure costs. In 1966, when the military administration came to an end, the urbanization process began. The State established seven Arab Bedouin townships, mostly within the Siyāj area, that promised residents modern services in return for their settlement in organized urban lots. The first Arab Bedouin township, Tal as-Saba⁶, was established in 1969, and until the 1990s, six more townships were established. All seven Arab Bedouin townships are characterized by deprivation, high unemployment, crime and social tension, as well as insufficient services. Until the mid-1990s, Israeli policy had endeavored to concentrate the entire Arab Bedouin indigenous community of the Negev/Naqab within these seven townships. This process was forced and completely disregarded the Arab Bedouin traditional way of life which is based on agriculture and rural communities.

The Recognized Villages | As of 1999 the state of Israel, in various government resolutions, decided to recognize 11 Arab Bedouin unrecognized villages in the Negev/Naqab. This was allegedly a fundamental change, after years in which the only settlement option for the Arab Bedouin community was forced urbanization. Yet, nearly 20 years later, there is no significant difference between these villages and the villages which remained unrecognized. In most of the recognized villages there is no approved urban planning scheme, so their residents cannot attain building permits; the policy of house demolition continues; and infrastructure of water, electricity, sewage disposal and roads are still, in most cases, are unavailable to the residents.

The House Demolition Policy and the Housing Crisis | The main Israeli policy toward the Arab Bedouin indigenous community in the Negev/Naqab is an ongoing policy of house demolition. In spite of the fact that the villages having been inhabited for years, in 1965, most of the houses located in the unrecognized villages were retroactively deemed illegal. Since then, it is impossible for the residents of these villages to acquire building permits as their villages are considered by the state to be illegal. Therefore, community members are unable to legally build or repair their houses, and those who choose to do so face demolition and homelessness. Far from enough to meet the needs of the broader Arab Bedouin population, the seven governmental planned townships are already unable to accommodate their own natural



growth. The recognition of 11 villages, have likewise failed to remedy the Arab Bedouin housing crisis.

House demolitions do not occur merely in unrecognized villages, as many of the demolitions take place in the townships and the newly recognized villages. In spite of the housing crisis, there is a drastic increase in house demolitions in the Negev/Naqab area each year. Instead of trying to solve this crisis, state authorities mainly focus on expanding it, demolishing thousands of Arab Bedouin houses, crops and other structures every year.

Land Ownership | Recent ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court (al-Uqbi verdict, May 2015) makes it almost impossible for Arab Bedouin citizens to prove ownership over lands in the Negev/Naqab. While in the 1970s the state allowed Bedouin to claim their ancestral lands yet later decided to freeze this process, during the 2000s the state attorney started filing counterclaims over the same lands, demanding to register them as state lands, with 100% rate of court winnings in such cases. Although living on and cultivating these lands for hundreds of years, the state of Israel does not recognize Arab Bedouin indigenous rights and ownership over lands in the Negev/Naqab.¹

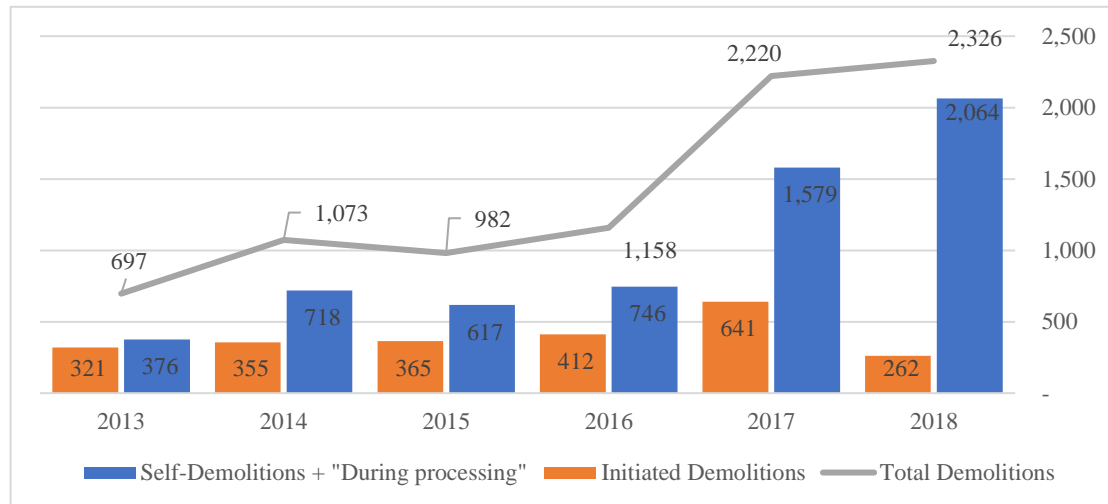
Demotion Report (abbreviated)

Over the course of 2018, 2,326 structures in Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab were demolished, 604 of which were intended for residential purposes. Even more alarming than the mere extent of this destruction is the trend of "self-demolition", demolitions carried out by owners themselves, which continued to rise in 2018 and amounted to about 88% of all structures destroyed that year. The desire to avoid the trauma of a violent enforcement mechanism and without prior warning; the criminal and economic sanctions that may be imposed on the owners of the buildings; the possibility of saving personal equipment and building materials in controlled demolition; threats by the authorities and more, have a tremendous detrimental effect on the Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the Negev/Naqab and bring the owners of the structures to demolish themselves.

¹ For more information on the land ownership dispute: NCF, 2012. "Processes of dispossession in the Negev-Naqab: The Israeli policy of counter-claims against the Bedouin-Arabs", <https://tinyurl.com/yalmenpo>

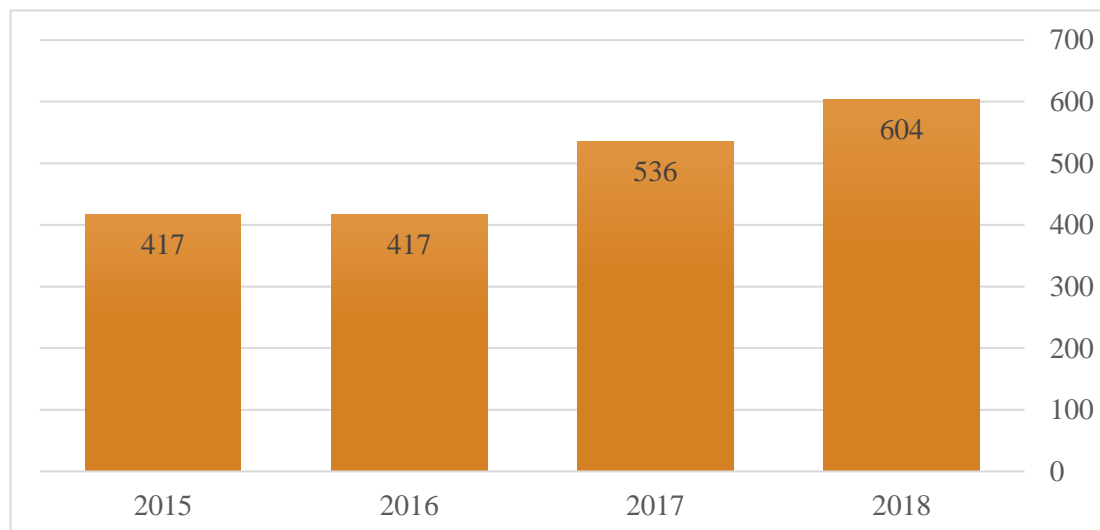


Demolition Statistics in Arab Bedouin Communities in the Negev/Naqab, 2013 – 2018



As per the data presented in this diagram, between 2013 - 2014 the rate of structure demolitions in Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab increased by 54%, from 697 to 1,073. In 2015, there was a slight decline of about 8.5% in the number of buildings demolished, but over the next two years there was a dramatic increase of more than 90% resulting in the demolition of 2,220 structures in 2017. In 2018 there was another 5% increase in demolitions in bringing the total number of structure demolitions to 2,326.

Demolitions of Structures Intended for Residential Purposes in Arab Bedouin Communities in the Negev/Naqab, 2015 – 2018

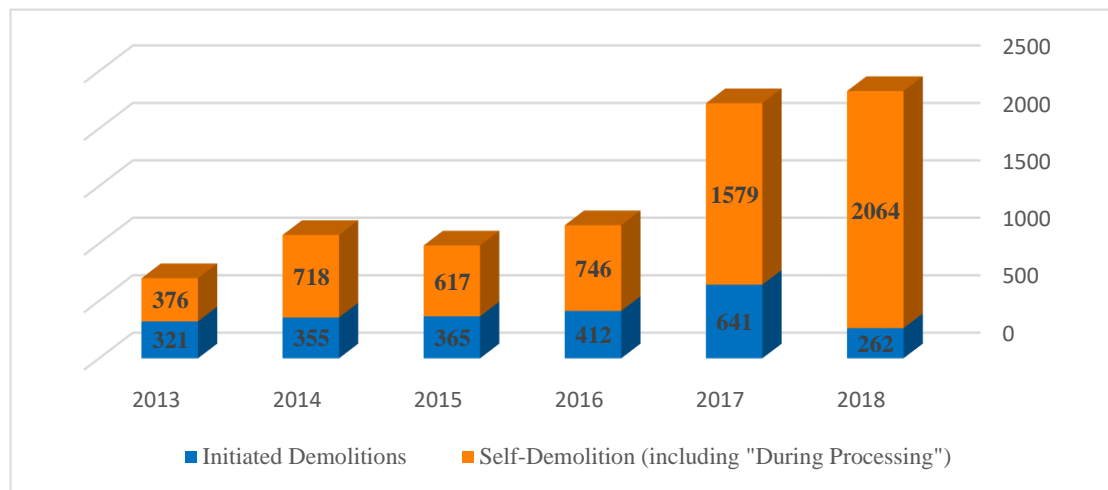


Following a petition, filed under the "Freedom of Information" Act, by the NCF and the Freedom of Information Movement, the Southern Administration for Coordinating the Enforcement of Land Laws (hereinafter: Southern Administration) released



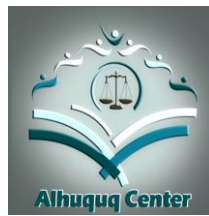
statistics with the exact number of structures used by the Arab Bedouin indigenous population for residential purposes that were demolished between 2015 and 2018. As can be seen in the diagram above, there has been a steady increase in the number of homes demolished. In 2015 and 2016, some 417 houses were demolished. Between 2016 and 2017, there was an increase of more than 28% in the number of homes demolished in Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab, from 417 to 536 in 2017, and then another increase of approximately 13% in the number of houses demolished in 2018, resulting in 604 residential demolitions by the end of that year.

"Initiated" Demolitions as Opposed to "Self-Demolitions" in Arab Bedouin Communities in the Negev/Naqab, 2018



Since 2013 there has been a sharp increase in the total number of demolitions. In six years alone, the destruction increased from 697 demolitions in 2013 to 2,326 demolitions in 2018, an increase of approximately 233 percent. The number of "self-demolitions" increased from 1,579 demolitions in 2017 to 2,064 in 2018, an increase of 31 percent. At the same time, the number of "initiated" demolitions, those carried out by the enforcement authorities, increased between 2013 and 2017 (from 321 to 641 demolitions), and a dramatic decline between 2017 and 2018, from 641 to 262 demolitions. In other words, in a period of only one year (2017-2018), the number of demolitions carried out by the authorities decreased by 59%, although the total number of demolitions in those years increased from 2,200 to 2,326 at the end of 2018.

These statistics reflect a worsening of official policy accompanied by increased pressure on the residents by means of a constant presence of law enforcement officials in patrols, demolition teams, distribution of orders, threats of fines, aerial photography carried out using drones and repeated visits by representatives of the Authority for Development and Settlement of the Bedouin in the Negev (hereinafter: Development and Settlement Authority), all intended to force them to move from unrecognized villages to the townships and villages recognized by the state.



Displacement and Forced Transfer: The State of Israel's policy towards the Negev/Naqab Arab Bedouin indigenous people since the Praver-Begin Plan and the various mechanisms of action

The "[Praver-Begin Plan](#)" was passed by a narrow majority in a first reading in the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) in June 2013. The bill was based on a team headed by Ehud Praver and later amended by a team headed by former Minister Benny Begin. Even though [the Goldberg Report](#) was defined as a blueprint for the implementation of the bill, the Praver-Begin plan is completely contrary to the recommendations of the Goldberg Committee, and "contradicts the main principle recommended by the Goldberg Committee - recognition of the [Bedouin] villages as much as possible."² The Plan is based on Israeli Government Resolution No. 3707, 2011, which purported to facilitate "regularization" of the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab so as to provide settlement solutions appropriate for the population and civilized living conditions as is deemed acceptable in the State of Israel, and enable economic and social development of the region for the benefit of all residents - Arabs and Jews alike.

In practice, the "regularization of settlement" under the law was an attempt to transfer all the Arab Bedouin indigenous people who were living in the dozens of unrecognized villages (whether by force or by consent) to Arab Bedouin townships recognized by the state. Not surprisingly, this outline, just as previous plans of the government concerning the Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the Negev/Naqab, did not take into account the social structure of the society and/or the rural/agricultural character of their sources of income. The plan was written without any participation of the Bedouins or their representatives, and they were not allowed to object or intervene effectively and substantively in the content of the bill before it was brought to a vote in the Knesset. Following demonstrations and strong opposition that the bill aroused among the Arab Bedouin indigenous population, right-wing parties and the international community, the government decided to withdraw the proposal before it was approved in the third and final vote necessary for its' implementation.

Despite the repeal of the law, the intention and the ideas included in the Praver-Begin plan were and are continuing to be implemented in other ways. For example, the Southern Administration and the Yoav Police Unit³, enforcement agencies that were established following Government Resolution No. 3707 with the aim of "streamlining" the demolition of houses in Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab, continue to operate to this day in full force. Since 2013, attempts to forcibly transfer the Arab Bedouin indigenous population from the unrecognized villages to the recognized communities continue to multiply and with them the dispossession of the community of its land. The five-year plans (see below), whose declared purpose is socio-economic development, are based on the selfsame Resolution No. 3707, which formed the social-

² Article 110 of the Goldberg Report.

³ For more information on the Yoav Police Unit, please see: NCF, 2018. *House Demolitions as a Central Tool for the Dispossession and Concentration of the Bedouin Population in the Negev/Naqab Updated Data for 2017*, P.21 <https://tinyurl.com/y75spl9s>



economic basis of the Praver-Begin Plan. More importantly, the actions of the government and the enforcement agencies on the ground point to their determination to forcibly transfer the Bedouin population to recognized settlements in new and more sophisticated ways and onto less land than was purposed in the Praver-Begin Plan.

The Five-Year Plan as a mechanism for dispossession

The Government of Israel approved the first "Five-Year Plan for the Social and Economic Development of the Bedouin Population in the Negev" (Government Resolution No. 3708) in September 2011. The total budget of the plan was NIS 1.26 billion at the time, however, many of the projects (especially those related to agricultural development, infrastructure, housing and sewage treatment) were only partially implemented. The present Five-Year Plan (Government Resolution No. 2397), meant to be implemented between the years 2017-2021, was accepted by the Israeli Government on February 12, 2017. The overall budget of this Five-Year Plan is NIS 3.12 billion (in addition to this plan, the Arab Bedouin communities are also included in another general Governmental plan for economic development of minority populations, Government Resolution No. 922). Government Resolution No. 3708 includes, inter alia, the establishment of educational projects, investment in women's employment, the strengthening of local authorities and the development of infrastructures in the Arab Bedouin communities. That being told, it almost completely excludes the residents of the unrecognized villages (whose population constitutes more than 33% of the Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the Negev/Naqab) from participation in the development plans and reduces their ability to participate in other programs by conditioning that participation on physical attendance at the centers of activity, which are usually located outside their place of residence.

The five-year plan is an inter-ministerial program involving many government ministries (education, agriculture, welfare, public security, construction and housing, etc.). These offices are required to report on the extent of implementation and compliance with the goals set by the Five-Year Plan. According to the Planning and Implementation Report of the current plan, some of the budgets allocated to the various programs have not been utilized at all or have been partially exploited. The Ministry of Agriculture's Department of Socio-Economic Development (the body that is responsible for overseeing the current Five-Year Plan) explains the gap between the plans and their implementation as the result of "real barriers" but does not specify exactly what those barriers are.

Despite its positive name, the Five-Year Plan constitutes an important tool for the State to dispossess Arab Bedouin indigenous people of the Negev/Naqab from their lands and forcibly transfer them to population centers on the sole basis of considerations of the Israeli government and without any influence of the affected population. The plan includes a "statutory enforcement" clause that was added following the demands of a number of government ministers who refused to sign the plan unless additional measures were included to ensure the transfer of Arab Bedouin indigenous people from



the unrecognized villages to the recognized townships and villages. **With the help of this section, the plan conditions the receipt of government budgets for development upon the forced transfer of the population and house demolitions in the 35 unrecognized villages.** The plan also allocates some of its budget for this purpose: NIS 30,000,000 per year for planting trees on "lands that were evacuated" so as to prevent the return of the expelled residents, another NIS 32,000,000 for the reinforcement of the various enforcement forces, and an additional NIS 10,500,000 for additional staffing for the National Unit for Enforcing Planning and Building Laws (hereinafter: the National Unit) and for local planning committees in order to enable them to cope with the "illegal construction" among the Bedouin communities.

Legislative Mechanisms: the Kaminitz Law and regulations concerning the violation of the Planning and Building Law

More concerning the [Kaminitz Law](#) can be found in the report attached herewith.⁴

In 2018, as part of the government's efforts to implement Amendment No. 116 to the Planning and Building Law, new and very efficient technological tools from [Simplex Company for mapping and 3D modeling](#) have been used routinely. Two years ago, Simplex won a Ministry of Finance bid, under whose auspices the National Unit operates, for five years and at the beginning of 2018 the company began working in the Negev/Naqab. As part of its work, Simplex uses innovative technology for discovering construction irregularities. With the help of a unique photographic device (the weight of which makes it possible to install on any aircraft), the company collects information on any visible change in construction in the Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab, which it transfers to the various enforcement authorities.

The use of predatory legislative mechanisms and advanced technological means against a weakened and impoverished population increases the sense of despair and alienation among the Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the Negev/Naqab, which is often defined as "criminal" because of what the state categorizes as "illegal" construction. In an aggressive struggle between citizens without effective means of defense vis-à-vis the government and the various enforcement agencies, it would seem essential to consider whether it is appropriate to use means that are liable to cause psychological, economic, and social damage that could potentially endanger the very existence of the Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the Negev/Naqab.

Planning Mechanism

The Bedouin citizens in the unrecognized villages see themselves as landowners, even though those lands have become, according to the definition of the Israeli government, State lands used for various programs, such as essential infrastructure, security, Jewish settlement, and more. As part of the State's attempt to forcibly transfer the Arab Bedouin indigenous population from the unrecognized villages to the recognized townships and villages, several programs are being promoted:

⁴ Page 7 of the report.



- 1. Extension of the Trans-Israel Highway to the south (Route 6)** - This plan was approved in 2010 and in the coming year (2019) will be implemented south of the Shoket Junction. The topography of the area in which the extension is planned and the open spaces in the Negev/Naqab around Be'er Sheva and from Be'er Sheva to the south enable optimal planning of the extension route in order to avoid, as much as possible, the forcible transfer of a large population. Despite this, the state saw fit to plan the road so that it would pass through an area populated by more than 1,000 Arab Bedouin indigenous people who have claims to ownership on part of the land in question. From the information that is available to the NCF, it appears that **this plan places some 350 houses at risk of demolition**. Moreover, while the Development and Settlement Authority is exploiting the situation in order to evacuate as many Arab Bedouin families as possible from the area, Road 6 representatives claim that it is possible to reduce the number of evacuees by reducing the right-of-way of the road.
- 2. The expansion of a special industrial zone in Ramat Beka** - the current plan includes 114,000 dunams of land (114 sq. km.) for the relocation of the military equipment developer and manufacturer [IMI Systems](#) (recently acquired by [Elbit](#)) from Ramat Hasharon to the Negev/Naqab and the establishment of an area for testing weapons and establishment of military industry. Today, there are limited weapons trials in this area, but in December 2018 (despite objections from residents and human rights organizations), the full plan was approved and is being implemented on a very large area. The transfer of IMI Systems will affect at least six Arab Bedouin villages in the area, since 44 percent of the area designated for the experiments will be **subject to severe construction restrictions** that may lead to the forcible transfer of part of the Arab Bedouin indigenous population and result in health risks to the Arab Bedouin residents. An examination carried out by Bimkom, an Israeli NGO dedicated to aiding weakened social groups in issues relating to physical and social planning, found that approval of the plan and its implementation **would result in approximately 1,200 structures being under threat of demolition and the evacuation of 5,000 people**. On March 21, 2019, the Be'er Sheva District Court ordered the district planning committee that approved the plan to review and reconsider its approval in order to find an agreed solution with some of the Bedouin residents living and claiming land ownership in the area.
- 3. Establishment of a Phosphate Mine in Sdeh-Barir** - In March 2018, the Israeli Government approved the "National Mining and Quarrying Plan" which enables the open mining of phosphates in the Barir and South Zohar regions, covering more than 26,000 dunams (26 sq. km.). In the planned mining area and in the health risk range that exists around it, there are four Arab Bedouin villages. According to Adalah, the legal center for Arab minority rights in Israel, and Bimkom, **implementation of the plan is expected to result in the demolition of more than 1,995 buildings and endanger the health of the approximately 11,000 Arab Bedouin residents living in the area**. The phosphate mine in its present form is planned to be built at the



entrance to the Bedouin village of [al-Fur'ah](#). Although this village has been recognized by the state for more than a decade, it suffers from lack of development and planning due to the plans to open the mine.

4. **The Be'er Sheva - Arad railway** - This plan was approved for implementation in 2019. The planned route is **endangering approximately 600 structures and may affect the lives of 50,000 Arab Bedouin citizens** or more living along it. The living conditions of residents who will not be evacuated from their homes will also be severely affected. For example, the tracks are intended to cut an access road to the school in the Bedouin village of [al-Fur'ah](#), even though the road has already been approved for paving. It is notable that although objections were submitted, and alternative plans proposed for construction of the tracks in open areas, all of the objections and plans were rejected outright.
5. **The establishment of Jewish settlements at the expense of the Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the area** - While the state refuses to recognize the unrecognized Arab Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab, it promotes the establishment of a large number of Jewish settlements in the same area. The decision to establish new settlements for the Jewish population affects the Arab Bedouin population in the Negev/Naqab, especially since it "treats the Negev region as an empty space, ignoring the existence of unrecognized villages in which thousands of Arab Bedouin citizens, who are desperate for an orderly and just development planning solution, live."⁵

There is no need for an in-depth analysis of the numbers or for guessing the intentions of the government and its branches to understand that these projects are intended to forcibly transfer the Arab Bedouin indigenous population of the Negev/Naqab from the unrecognized villages to population centers according to the wishes of the state. The Israeli Minister of Agriculture, Uri Ariel, recently announced in an interview with the "Israel Today" newspaper that "in the coming year we will begin a strategic operation to regulate the settlement in the Negev. A series of national projects created a golden opportunity to advance the Negev, to resolve once and for all a large part of the unrecognized Bedouin communities, and to return to the State huge areas that were taken from it illegally."⁶

To view NCF's ["On the Map: the Arab Bedouin villages in the Negev/Naqab" website](#)

To view more of [NCF's reports and position papers](#)

For more information regarding the [Arab Bedouin indigenous population in the Negev/Naqab](#)

⁵ Position paper: "The Coalition for the Strengthening of the Negev Cities position on the intention to promote the planning of five new settlements in the Negev", submitted to the Internal Affairs and Environment Committee of the Knesset, 03.06.2018 [Hebrew].

⁶ Ariel Kahana, "A huge plan: How 36 thousand Bedouin will be relocated", Israel Today. 27.01.2019 [Hebrew].