

7th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues

Agenda Item III: Understanding the root causes of violence and atrocity crimes

Honourable Chair,

I speak on behalf of Al-Haq, a Palestinian human rights organisation based in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

We would like to express our grave concern with regards to the ongoing violations against the Palestinian Bedouin community in the OPT. There are approximately 30,000 Palestinian Bedouins residing in the West Bank, making them a numerical minority living under occupation. Most Bedouins are located in Area C and as residents of the area, they are considered to be amongst the most vulnerable groups residing in the West Bank, lacking humanitarian assistance and access to basic services, as UN OCHA highlights¹.

In 1948, a large number of the Palestinian Bedouin community was forcibly displaced from the Naqab desert. Today, the same community continues to be at imminent risk of forcible displacement from the OPT due to discriminatory practices of the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) in an attempt to eradicate Palestinian presence in Area C.

As part of the Palestinian population in the OPT, the Bedouin community is subject to an institutionalised form of discrimination by Israel. On a regular basis, Bedouins endure settler violence exacerbated due to Israel's granting of impunity to the settlers; land expropriation; continuous and unjustified house demolitions by the ICA. Clearly, the Palestinian population, particularly the Bedouins in Area C, are unable to exercise sovereignty over their land and natural resources on which they heavily rely for survival.

On 27 April 2014, the head of the planning branch at the Israeli Ministry of Defence said that there is a military plan to remove Bedouins from large areas of the West Bank in order to "gather and regulate them in an orderly and proper manner"². The Bedouins would then be transferred to the Nuweima area, north of Jericho.

Forcible transfer is listed as a grave breach in Article 147 of the Geneva Conventions and it is constituted as a war crime by the ICC Statute. We urge the international community to halt the Nuweima plan and investigate the widespread and systematic nature of Israel's policies and practices that have led to the forcible transfer of the Palestinian Bedouin community.

¹ Ramesh Rajasingham, Head of the OCHA office in the oPt, PRESS RELEASE, New figures indicate an estimated 300,000 Palestinians reside in Area C of the West Bank, Jerusalem, 5 March 2014. See also B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Right in the Occupied Territory, 'Civil administration plans to expel tens of thousands from Area C', 10 Oct 2011 <http://www.btselem.org/>

² The Nineteenth Keneset, Second Session, Minutes No. of the meeting of the Judea and Samaria Region Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 27 April 2014. <http://jahalin.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/2014.04.27-Minutes-Judea-and-Samaria-Region-Subcommittee-of-the-Foreign-Affairs-and-Defense-Committee.pdf>

Palestinians in the OPT, including the Bedouin community, must be guaranteed the right to self-determination and must be able to exercise their sovereignty over natural resources therein. Basic rights in everyday life are necessary as a means to prevent the escalation of violence amongst civilians, particularly against the Bedouin minority in the region.

In light of the mentioned above, we strongly encourage the adoption of the Forum's recommendation number 32 which stresses on the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and emphasize the right of minorities and the indigenous population to access and control their natural resources. Additionally, we encourage the adoption of recommendation number 49 which ensures minorities' protection from forcible displacement. We would further urge that this recommendation secures minorities from forcible transfer.