



bedouin Palestine refugees the Jahalin tribe in the eastern Jerusalem periphery

The Palestinian Bedouin in the Jerusalem periphery are at high risk of forced displacement. In July 2011, the Israeli authorities confirmed to UN officials their intention to transfer the 20 Bedouin communities living in the eastern Jerusalem periphery out of their homes. This initiative is part of a wider plan to transfer the Bedouin and other pastoral communities from their communities throughout Area C, where Israel has full military and administrative control. These include the Bedouin of the Jahalin tribe, the largest Bedouin tribe among the Palestine refugees in the West Bank today.

The Bedouin of the Jahalin tribes originate from the Tel Arad district of the Negev desert. The majority of the Negev Bedouin were forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands in the Negev by the Israeli authorities in the years immediately following the 1948 conflict. Clans from five of the Negev tribes¹ subsequently moved to the West Bank and registered as refugees with UNRWA. As with all refugees across the world, each community has its own historical account of the steps which led to its forced exile and subsequent plight.

On arrival in the West Bank, the Jahalin tribe splintered into smaller social units to maintain harmony with the hosting herding population and to optimise use of local natural resources for their livestock. Initially, the three clans of the Jahalin tribe² remained in the southern parts of Hebron for several months, anticipating a return to their tribal territories in the Negev. From mid-1951, however, many of the Jahalin registered as Palestine refugees with UNRWA and headed for the year-round surface waters of Wadi Qelt in the central West Bank. There, they established seasonal migration patterns along the valley between Jericho and Jerusalem and traded at the Jerusalem livestock market³. Others remained in the south of the West Bank.

Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, a range of Israeli policies and practices adopted over time have forced the pastoral groups to reduce their seasonal movements and settle into permanent communities. The Jahalin pastoralists of the central West Bank selected locations along their established migration routes in the northern and eastern Jerusalem periphery and the Jericho governorate. The areas where they settled in the eastern Jerusalem periphery would soon become some of the most strategically significant locations in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) due to Israel's plans to further expand its settlements there. This includes the E1 Plan, which envisages major expansion of Ma'ale Adummim settlement and its linkage to Jerusalem. According to OCHA, "if implemented, these plans, along with Barrier construction in the area, risk preventing Palestinian growth and development and disrupting the territorial contiguity of the West Bank"⁴.

By 1995, the land where the majority of the livestock dependent Bedouin population lived was classified as Area C, which as a consequence of the Oslo Agreements, makes up approximately 60% of the West Bank and is under the full military and administrative control of Israel. Greater restrictions on movement, settler violence and settlement expansion, and the ongoing construction of the Barrier, have rendered the day-to-day lives and livelihoods of Palestinians resident in Area C, including the Jahalin Bedouin in the Jerusalem periphery, increasingly unsustainable.

Expropriation of land for the establishment of the Ma'ale Adummim settlement in the Jerusalem periphery began in 1975⁵. Since then, efforts to expel Bedouin communities from their homes in the settlement's municipal area have been ongoing⁶. The largest scale evictions to date began in 1997 and saw the transfer of over 150 families of the Jahalin tribe from three rural communities to allow for the construction of a new neighbourhood in the Ma'ale Adummim settlement⁷. Private lawyers, instructed by the Bedouin and paid for by the Palestinian Authority, secured compensation packages from the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) for the majority of the displaced families after the transfer took place.

In 2006, the ICA resumed discussions with the remaining Bedouin communities in the Ma'ale Adummim municipal area with the intention of moving them from their homes, but negotiations were interrupted by the outbreak of the Lebanon War and have not resumed since. Diplomatic pressure simultaneously froze Israel's plans to expand the Ma'ale Adummim settlement. In 2011, however, the ICA resumed its study of potential transfer sites and confirmed to UN officials its intention to target a number of the remaining communities living in the Ma'ale Adummim municipal area for transfer.

In July 2011, in response to the re-emerging threat of forcible transfer, the leaders of the targeted communities formed the Protection Committee for Bedouin Communities in the Jerusalem Periphery in order to represent themselves and call for international protection.

The Committee has three main requests:

1. That the Bedouin be allowed to return to their tribal territories in the Negev.



2. Pending return to their tribal territories, the Bedouin seek to remain in their current locations in the Jerusalem periphery.
3. Should transfer prove inevitable, the Committee requires a guarantee that the Occupying Power will obtain the full, prior and informed consent of all the affected Bedouin and pastoralist communities, including through participatory consultation.

UNRWA remains concerned that any proposed transfer by Israel of Bedouins and other pastoralist communities currently residing in the Jerusalem periphery may amount to individual and mass forcible transfers and forced evictions contrary to international humanitarian and international human rights law.

¹ The other tribes of Negev Bedouin living in the West Bank are the Kaabneh, the Rashayda, the Ramadin and the Azazme (there are also five families from the Sawarka tribe living in the Rashayda area).

² The Salamaat, Abu Dahuk and Sara'ya make up the three clans of the Jahalin tribe under the Huwaytaat umbrella.

³ Initially, none of the Bedouin accepted settlement in UNRWA refugee camps, requiring isolated, rural locations to sustain their traditional pastoralist livelihoods and semi-nomadic lifestyles.

⁴ "Bedouin Relocation: Threat of Displacement in the Jerusalem Periphery", OCHA, September 2011.

⁵ The Hidden Agenda B'tselem/Bimkom 2009.

⁶ According to personal testimony collected during UNRWA field visits, demolitions (without court orders) of Bedouin homes in the area began as early as 1975. Significant numbers of the Abu Dahuk clan were expelled from the area by 1981 and moved to the northwest Jerusalem periphery, including Beit Iksa, Nabi Samwel, Al Jib and Beit Hanina.

⁷ In its Concluding Observations on Israel report of 1998, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed its "deep concern [at] the situation of the Jahalin Bedouin families who were forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands to make way for the expansion of the Ma'aleh Adummim and Kedar settlements". The committee further "deplore[d] the manner in which the Government of Israel has housed these families - in steel container vans in a garbage dump in Abu Dis in subhuman living conditions" (E/C.12/1/Add.27, 4 December 1998).



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