

April 18, 2013

To:

Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister
By fax: 02-5664838

Ms. Tzipi Livni
Minister of Justice
Chairperson, Ministerial
Committee for Legislative Affairs
By fax: 02-6285438

Atty. Yehuda Weinstein
Attorney General
By fax: 02-6467001

To:

Members of the Ministerial Committee on Legislative Affairs

Re.: Memorandum of Law to Regulate the Bedouin Settlement in the Negev, 5773-2013

We, the Alliance of Organizations for Equality and Justice for the Bedouin, are writing to you regarding the Memorandum of Law to Regulate the Bedouin Settlement in the Negev, 5773-2013, which is due to be discussed by the Ministerial Committee for Legislative Affairs on Sunday, April 21, 2012. The Alliance comprises the following organizations: The Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev; Shatil – Support and Consultation Services for Organizations; Rabbis for Human Rights; the Association for Civil Rights in Israel; Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights; Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; Mossawa Center – The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel; Community Advocacy – Israel; and the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality. We urge you not to advance the Memorandum of Law and to remove it from the agenda of the Government and the Knesset, for the following reasons:

1. The Begin Plan, approved by the Government on January 27, 2013, effectively constitutes a modified version of the **Prawer Plan** for Bedouin settlement in the Negev, approved by the Government on September 11, 2011. Despite a three-month “listening process,” the Begin Plan did not introduce any substantive changes to the memorandum despite the overwhelming opposition from the Bedouin community and human rights organizations. With the exception of a change to the compensation percentages on account of the waiver by the Bedouin population of their ownership claims, the current plan is based on the same guiding principles as the Prawer Plan.
2. As in the case of the Prawer Plan, the Begin Plan is also based on an erroneous assumption that views the Bedouin as “squatters,” ignoring the fact that most of the villages have been in existence in their current location since before the establishment of Israel. Other villages were established by coercive transfer during the period of martial law. Like its precursor, the new plan also seeks to “confine” the Bedouin to a specific area and to forcibly apply this policy.

3. The three-month “listening process” did not lead to any substantive changes to the memorandum, despite the overwhelming opposition heard from the Bedouin community and human rights organizations.
4. On the basis of this plan, the Government is expected to approve the Memorandum of Law and to advance planning proceedings. If these are executed in accordance with the existing format, they can be expected to lead to the uprooting and forcible eviction of dozens of villages and tens of thousands of Bedouin residents, who will be stripped of their property and their historical land rights. This will condemn thousands of families to poverty, unemployment and lead to the destruction of communal life and the social fabric of these villages. In addition to the initiatives for the uprooting and dispossession of the Bedouin, the Government is simultaneously promoting the establishment of new Jewish communities, some of which are due to be built on the ruins of Bedouin villages.
5. Repeated efforts by the representatives of the residents of the unrecognized villages to engage in further dialogue with the Government regarding these plans have been rejected.
6. A just and feasible solution means, first and foremost, recognizing the fact that the Bedouin in the unrecognized villages are citizens with equal rights. The Government should recognize the unrecognized villages and plan them in accordance with egalitarian planning standards. It should also recognize the full ownership rights of the Bedouin population to its land.
7. In light of the above, we hereby ask you to act to prevent the promotion of the above-mentioned Memorandum of Law and to remove it from the agenda of the Government and the Knesset.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Organizations for Equality and Justice for the Bedouin