

Israel to forcibly evict Bedouins from West Bank

State accelerates relocation of thousands of Bedouins from Area C, which is under complete Israeli control.

By Amira Hass

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The Civil Administration is expected to begin forcefully moving Bedouin in the West Bank to a permanent location as part of a plan to remove all the Bedouin in Area C (under both Israel's civilian and military aegis) from lands they have been living on for decades.

The plan will eventually relocate Bedouin living in other areas of the West Bank. According to various calculations, some 27,000 Bedouin live in the West Bank, mostly in Area C.

The first to be relocated will be the approximately 2,400 Bedouin living in an area east of Jerusalem, which will make it easier for Israel to implement its plan to expand the settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim and other settlements to create contiguity of construction for Jews up to Jerusalem.

The plan to move the Bedouin to permanent locations about which Haaretz learned from Bedouin sources in the area and from diplomats and international aid groups, was made without consulting them.

About two weeks ago, Civil Administration officials appeared at the permanent location of the Jahalin Bedouin east of Al-Azariya, which went up at the end of the 1990s near a regional garbage dump east of Jerusalem. When the inhabitants asked the officials what they were doing there, the officials responded, according to the locals: "We're checking the area where we will be relocating the Bedouin beginning in January 2012."

Over the past few months, the inhabitants of the encampments heard about it repeatedly from representatives of the Civil Administration. They were told that if they refuse to move, they will be evacuated by force.

Over the past few months, the Civil Administration and the Israel Defense Forces have increased demolitions of lean-tos and tin huts in the encampments and have further limited the inhabitants' access to grazing lands.

Bedouin and international NGOs assisting them say there has been a rise in settler harassment.

At the end of July, the community of Al Baqa'a, east of Ramallah, dismantled their four encampments and sought shelter on neighboring village lands after settlers attacked one of the encampments and the police arrested four Al Baqa'a residents.

From conversations with Israeli officials, international representatives concluded that the plan to forcefully relocate the Bedouin is based on the Civil Administration's assumption that the Oslo Accords intended Area C for Israeli settlements and military areas, and therefore the Bedouin should not be there.

Area C, which today constitutes about 60 percent of West Bank land, is a geographic area created in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority in 1995. It was to cease existence as an administrative category by 1998.

According to the United Nations and the International Red Cross, in any case, the area is occupied territory, where the occupier has no right to settle its citizens and must also see to the welfare of the local population, and consult them on all changes.

The first 2,400 Bedouin to be relocated are living in some 20 encampments east of Jerusalem. The majority are refugees expelled from the Negev in 1948. Some are living on lands that Israel declared state lands in the 1980s. Others are living on private land leased from Palestinian villages. The entire area has been appended to the jurisdiction of Ma'aleh Adumim. In the 1980s, when Israel expanded Ma'aleh Adumim, the Jahalin Bedouin had to leave the area where they had lived since the 1950s. Dozens were forcefully relocated to the site near Al-Azariya, where they were given old shipping containers in which to live.

Following a legal battle, two more groups of the Jahalin tribe reached an agreement with the authorities that a master plan would be prepared for them, allocating them lots for lease, and that families to be relocated would be paid compensation.

The relocation of the rest of the Bedouin in the area will be carried out in three stages, according to information from the Bedouin and international organizations. The Civil Administration will first move an unknown number of families to lots in the village of Jahalin, where people who leased them under an arrangement in 1998 are not currently living.

The master plan for the permanent village of Jahalin will then be completed, by the end of 2011 with the preparation of another 50 lots.

At the third stage, a master plan will be prepared for another 150 to 250 measuring about 600 square meters each.

The number of lots to be allocated to each family will depend on the size of the family and each family will receive between NIS 22,000 and NIS 60,000, depending on its size.

The Civil Administration is apparently looking into the possibility of establishing two other permanent locations in the area.

As far as can be understood from conversations with Civil Administration officials, the forced relocation of the Bedouin is expected to take three to six years.

Bedouin with whom Haaretz spoke over the past few weeks are divided over the relocation, but all protest that the Civil Administration has not involved them in the planning.

They have also been told by residents of Jahalin about health problems from living so close to a garbage dump. Expansion of the village

will bring it even closer to the dump.

The Civil Administration did not respond to a Haaretz request to directly discuss the details of the plan, saying it was "too soon." Haaretz sent the Civil Administration the details of the plan for its response, which was not forthcoming by press time.

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