

Israel's contention in such blatant ethnic cleansing is the incredible assumption that these lands are *mawat, terra nullius*, owned by no one and that Palestinians do not exist in Beer Sheba district. The government's official experts at Beer Sheba court solemnly declared that this land is uninhabited. There had been some shepherds who came with their sheep for pasture and now they returned to Saudi Arabia. Hence the government confiscated the land and decreed that the district of Beer Sheba is State Land. All Palestinians who live there now (200, 000 out of a total of 675,000, the district population, mostly refugees) are trespassers who should be removed from the state property.

This incredible contention flies in the face of every conceivable historical and legal record.

British Mandate

The Palestinians who remained in Israel and became citizens of Israel are part of the Palestinian people who lived in the district for centuries and cultivated their land. The evidence of their rights is overwhelming. The aerial survey of RAF in 1945 showed that all the inhabited areas in Beer Sheba district have been cultivated. Palestinians owned their land, sold, purchased and inherited it according to Custom Law which had been explicitly recognized by the British government through the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill, when he visited Jerusalem in 1921. The Jerusalem High Court had affirmed this decision and resolved disputes accordingly during the Mandate period. The government of Palestine in its report to the Anglo American Committee on Palestine in 1947 stated that Beer Sheba land is not State Land. Its State Land maps of 1931 and 1947 showed Beer Sheba privately owned Arab land where the Jews cannot acquire land according to the Land Transfer Regulation of 1940.

The Ottoman Period

Furthermore, Ottoman tax record, as far as back as 1596, clearly lists various localities in Beer Sheba, their land areas, their cultivation and tax due to be paid. In 1891 the Turkish government sent a military commission to demarcate the properties in the district. The Jerusalem Court records before WWI have many cases of powers of attorney given to various people to buy, sell land in Beer Sheba. **Neither the British nor Ottoman authorities over several centuries had ever questioned the private land ownership in Beer Sheba.**

Israeli Occupation

Israel occupied the whole Beer Sheba district between 21st of October 1948 and 25th of December 1948. At this time there were 110,000 Palestinians living in this district (and there were less than 200 Jewish soldiers in hastily erected sheds at the end of the Mandate.) Ninety percent of Palestinians were expelled and became refugees in Gaza and Jordan. In 1998, the refugee population from Beer Sheba district was 550,000. Those who remained in Israel (10%) are now 200,000, half of them lives in 45 villages unrecognized by Israel. In 1948, Israel relocated those remaining into a reserve, known as *Siyag*, ie Confined Fence (*see map*), north and east of Beer Sheba city. Within *Siyag* lives the original Palestinian inhabitants of the area and those who were relocated to it. On 2nd May 1971 the Israeli government started to register land in Beer Sheba as Absentee Property in order to confiscate lands of the expelled refugees. The remaining Palestinian citizens submitted applications for the registration of their property in one million donums. (Donum = 1000 m² = ¼ acre approx.) Israel approved none.

In order to deny Palestinian ownership registration, Israel did not recognize many Palestinian villages in *Naqab* including those which had been in existence before Israel was created on Palestine soil. Subsequently, Israel recognized seven urban centers. The aim was to evacuate and relocate all Palestinians to these centers, to confiscate their land and to transform them into cheap labour for Jewish factories. The Palestinians refused to do so and insisted on staying on their land which they owned and cultivated for many centuries. In response to continued protests and refusal to relocate, Israel introduced a plan by which it, implicitly not officially, recognized this ownership. That is, by offering the owner to give up 50% of this land to the government, to receive the value of 30% of his land at very low cost and to be given an alternate land elsewhere equal to 20% of his land. Obviously, the intention of course was to confiscate Palestinians land without recognizing their ownership and to remove them from their land.

Present Plans

As Israel government failed to convince Palestinians in Beer Sheba to give up their lands, it created Goldberg Committee on 28 October 2007 which submitted its recommendation on 11 November 2008. The Goldberg Committee did not accept the minimum demands of the Beer Sheba Palestinians.

Conversely, the government found Goldberg recommendations very generous. Israel therefore set up a new committee, ostensibly to carry out the recommendations of Goldberg Committee. In fact, this committee was headed by Ehud Praver, who is a member of the National Security Council of Israel and the head of the Strategic Planning Division in the office of the Prime Minister. In Praver committee, there are no representatives of the people whose fate was being decided. This committee did not meet or listen to any of the Arab citizens. Praver committee submitted its recommendations to the government on May 3, 2011, to the head of the National Security Council (NSC), who is known as a right wing extremist. It is not surprising that the matter of citizens' land ownership is referred to the highest Security Council in the country. This highlights the inherent racist policies of Israel. General Ya'kov Amidror, the head of NSC, introduced additional "security" amendments to the report, which was then issued on September 11, 2011. This report, tagged to No. 3707, can be properly described as *the final solution* of the Palestinians in Beer Sheba. Praver report number 3707 is the harbinger of a new Nakba in Beer Sheba.

Ethnic Cleansing Plan

The main recommendations of Praver report are:

1. **Confiscation** of half a million donums owned by Palestinians, including 200,000 donums in the southern district and 300,000 donums in western district where Palestinians were forced to locate in 1948.
2. **Confiscation** of property without compensation of an equivalent land of pasture land and hilly land in Siyag area. Siyag area is only 3% of the district area of 12 million donums. The Palestinian population of the district (200,000) makes up 32% of the district total population.
3. **Confirmation** of all previous judgments issued *in absentia* against Palestinians, amounting to 80 cases and consequently confiscation of 70,000 donums, and confirmation of confiscation decisions taken against Palestinians since 1948.
4. **Prohibition** of any Palestinian urban settlement west of road 40. This is a patently a racist decision which aims to make Israel *Arabrein*.
5. **Review** by the Ministry of Justice for comments within 60 days before forwarding the report to the Knesset to be issued as a law.
6. **Transfer** of the "Authority for Re-settlement" of Beer Sheba Palestinians from the Ministry of Housing to the office of the Prime Minister directly.
7. **Establishing** a special police force in order to carry out the eviction, relocation and re settlement orders.

8. **Preparation** by the Ministry of Interior (not Planning Ministry) of a plan for the ‘enclosure and confinement’ of all Palestinian citizens in Beer Sheba. This is another racist decision to confine Palestinians to an enclosed camp.
9. **Allocation** by the Ministry of Finance of a relevant budget.
10. **Implementation** of Praver plan to be within a maximum period of 5 years. During this period all lands shall be registered as State Lands, unless the court issues a contrary judgment. Meanwhile any Palestinian who lives on the so called “State Land” will be punished.
11. **Setting up** special courts to examine all complaints. The majority of the members of this court are to be appointed by the government. No discussion will be allowed during the court sessions.

The unrecognized Villages

Beer Sheba Palestinians are, like any other Palestinians, citizens of this land for centuries. In 1996 Rabin government recognized 7 Arab villages. After constant protestations nine other villages were recognized and two others after that. An unrecognized village means that it does not appear on Israeli maps, does not have roads or government buildings. It is not provided with education, health and municipal services. It is considered illegal, subject to demolition of homes and expulsion of inhabitants. The new Praver plan aims at the ethnic cleansing of 14 villages and eviction of 30,000 Palestinian citizens from their homes and lands. (*See map*).

Jewish Settlements

Since 1948, Israel established tens of small Jewish development towns, agricultural villages, Kibbutz and individual ranches spread over the whole district. Of these Jewish settlements, 113 have a population of only 34,000. Some Jewish settlements have as little as 50 persons per settlement. This is against 100,000 Palestinians living in 45 unrecognized villages. Israel concentrated the Palestinians in the smallest possible area of land. For example, Rahat town’s population of 52,000 people live on a land of 21,000 donums. By contrast, the Jewish Regional Council of Beni Sham’oun has a population of only 6,000 and the land allocated to them is 440,000 donums.

Our Stand :

1. **Rejection** of Goldberg, Praver and Amidror plans and the government decisions taken on September 11, 2011 which calls for confiscation of property, expulsion, ethnic cleansing and transfer.

2. **Affirmation** of the Palestinian absolute and complete right of ownership on their land on which their forefathers lived and the illegality of any order for confiscation, resettlement or eviction. These decisions are patently racist and should not be tolerated.
3. **Call** for recognition of all Palestinian villages, according to approved urban planning and building laws, meeting the needs and the size of population, without discrimination. Such laws shall not be formulated without our participation and consent.
4. **Support** of decisions of the local Arab authorities of not accepting any of the evicted people to settle within their jurisdiction, thus adding to concentration of Palestinian population and converting their towns into labour dormitories for Jewish factories as in the well known South Africa Apartheid style.

A Call for Help:

All NGOs and Human Rights Organizations around the world are called upon to express their protest at this 21st century ethnic cleansing, by all possible means, through demonstrations, writing to the media, MPs and to the Israeli embassies as well.

As a sign of solidarity, please hold demonstrations in your country to coincide with **our demonstrations in Beer Sheba and Jerusalem on October 6, 2011**. We appeal to all those who support human rights and reject racism and ethnic cleansing to join us and support us.

You may contact local Beer Sheba committee:

High Guidance Committee for Naqab Arabs in Beer Sheba District

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References:

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3. Israel approves plan to relocate 30,000 Bedouin from unrecognized villages. (Date: 11.09.2011) <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/israel-approves-plan-to-relocate-30-000-bedouin-from-unrecognized-villages-1.383772>
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