

Report on the Situation of Bedouin Refugees in the West Bank

May 2006

Introduction

The exact size of the Bedouin population is hard to determine. Bedouin associations estimate that there are 50,000 Bedouins living in the West Bank of which many are refugees, though not all are registered with UNRWA. Many Bedouins still live a semi-nomadic lifestyle within the confines of ever increasing restrictions imposed by the IDF and the location of settlements. Others have succumbed to or opted for living in villages usually located on the periphery of established Palestinian areas. Many Bedouin communities feel isolated from and abandoned by mainstream Palestinian society and politicians who are not addressing their needs and concerns.

Highlighted below are the main immediate issues affecting the Bedouin refugees of today, including the drought and cost of obtaining water; the lack of and cost of fodder; restriction of grazing grounds; evacuation and demolition orders; the absence of accessible health care facilities and the difficulty in procedures relating to UNRWA refugee registration and services. Particular refugee communities with pressing issues are also detailed below and possible intervention strategies suggested.

Background and Location

The majority of the Bedouin refugees in the West Bank come from the Beer Sheva region who, after the 1948 upheaval, settled mainly in the Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem Governates as well as in the Jordan valley, particularly around Jericho. The Bedouin divide themselves into clans including Jahalin, Rashayida and Qa'abneh which are subdivided into smaller family clans. For instance the Jahalin clan is divided into Abu Darok, Salamat and Saraya families.

The Bedouin still maintain close-knit communities within their clans and sub-clans which tends to make collection of comprehensive data for mixed clan communities troublesome as family Mukhtars (the head of a clan) often do not share or cooperate with neighbouring Mukhtars. This lack of a united front within the Bedouin community is thus detrimental in its attempts to gain aid and recognition.

Interviews with Bedouin communities were focused in the areas of Ramadin (south of Hebron close to the Green Line); Rashayida (Bethlehem); the south of the Judean desert around Ar Rawa'in; the Al Eizariya village (Jerusalem); Arab al Jahalin (between Ma'ale Adumim and Kedar settlements); the Abu Darok area around Al Jib and Beit Hanina; the Mu'arajat area (between Jericho and At Tayba village); the Ras el Ain close to Al Auja; Fasayil village in the Jordan Valley; and the Zfin Bedouins in the seam zone around Qalqiliya.

Interviews with the various Bedouin communities, focusing in particular on refugee communities, has highlighted that the following areas urgently need to be addressed.

Water

Communities living in the south of the West Bank, particularly south of Hebron and south of Bethlehem in the Judean desert, are facing the worst drought for a generation. During the winter of 2005/6, little rain fell in these already arid areas and at present most village wells are either empty or hold less than 20% of their usual capacity.

For example, the village council of Um Ad Daraj-Az Zuweidin village, located in the Judean desert to the south-east of Hebron, stated in April 2006 that the village wells held 30mm of rainfall whereas during an average year this figure would be 150mm. Thus, at present, most Bedouin communities living in the southern West Bank are facing severe water problems.

Many of the communities are not connected to any water pipe system and water is being bought and brought by tanker; an expensive and unsustainable arrangement, given its cost of five NIS per cubic metre. To pay for the water, families are either selling livestock and thus reducing their assets or buying on credit. However, many communities are now so consumed by debt that suppliers are refusing to re-supply until payments have been made. Villagers spoken with in Ramadin village estimate each family to be (on average) 2000 JD in debt.

Communities have also lost many animals to the drought. For example, in February 2006, Bedouins from the Abu Mousa area south of Ar Rawa'in in the Judean desert were losing 5-6 lambs a day due to the harsh weather conditions. This was exacerbated by the fact that some Bedouins, mainly refugees in this region, were cleared from grazing grounds by the IDF during the lambing season.

The effects of the drought do not just affect Bedouins and/or refugees, but all those dependent on the land including the several thousand cave dwellers and fellahin (agricultural labourers) in the area. So serious are the problems, that many are considering selling their flocks altogether and abandoning their semi-nomadic lifestyle; a clear sign of their desperation within the communities. There is an urgent need for assistance. Communities cannot afford water at the market rate and need cash assistance in some form to boost their incomes.

All refugees spoken with in the communities of Ramadinp; Arab Ar Rashayida; Ar Rawa'in in the south of the Judean desert; the Hathaleen and Hameeda An Najeda areas; Al Eizariya; Bir Nabala; Ras al Ein; Jericho and Fasayil; stated their urgent need for assistance with water.

Fodder

The drought has also led to a shortage of grazing land, again, particularly in the southern Hebron hills and the Judean desert, which has resulted in Bedouin now buying substantial amounts of fodder which they also cannot afford. As with the crisis regarding water purchase, communities are also either selling livestock or buying fodder on credit. Again, certain suppliers are now no longer willing to continue supplying them, understandably, without payment.

Some communities have abandoned their traditional 'khirbets' (small villages) and grazing ground altogether and have moved north in search of areas of natural grazing. An example of this are the Abu Mousa refugee Bedouin, located several kilometres south of Ar Rawa'in village. The community of 200-300 refugees normally live all year round in the Immartadah area and although regularly subjected to IDF harassment, animal confiscation and demolitions, had managed to stay in the area. However, during March 2006, the entire community moved north to Ar Rawa'in village in hope of finding grazing and easier access to water (there are pipes in this area). This put added strain on the existing community and caused antagonism over access to land and facilities. Grazing in this area was found to be no better than further south and in April 2006 several families from the Wadi Ghar area of Ar Rawa'in village packed their animals on trucks (paying 1000 NIS a truck) and transported their livelihoods to the Nablus region in search of land.

There is also evidence of families from other areas, such as Jahalin families in the Al Eizariya area close to the Ma'ale Adumim settlement, transporting animals to the Nablus region. Although this is a costly and drastic measure many families feel there is no alternative if they wish to maintain their semi-nomadic lifestyles.

All refugees spoken with in the communities of Ramadin, Arab Ar Rashayida, Ar Rawa'in and south in the Judean desert, Hathaleen and Hameeda An Najeda areas, Al Eizariya, Ras al Ein, Jericho and Fasayil stated their urgent need for assistance with water.

Access to Land, Restrictions and Demolitions

Besides the issue of access to unproductive land, grazing land is being restricted by the IDF and the expansion of settlements and illegal outposts. This is putting further pressure on the Bedouin way of life as well as increasing the effects of the drought. The IDF have declared many areas in the southern Judean desert and Jordan valley as closed military zones, although in most places there are no signboards depicting this change in status.

Large parts of the south and eastern Judean desert are officially off limits for the Bedouin though in many areas the Bedouin still graze cautiously, as they do not have any

alternative locations. If caught they can be subject to arrest, livestock confiscation and shelter demolition.

Other traditional Bedouin areas are being cleared for settlement expansion. Inextricably connected with this is the Israeli authorities demolition policy of the Israeli authorities for all structures built without permits in Area C.

Arab ar Rashayida and south Judean desert

In the past, the Rashayida Bedouins who live in Arab ar Rashayida and the desert areas to the south, had free and easy access to the southern Judean desert area south of Ar Rawa'in towards Rujm en Naqa and Ein Gedi. However, over the last couple of years harassment from the IDF has increased and in 2005 several demolitions of Bedouin refugee areas south of the old Jordanian base at Immartadah took place. Since that date the refugees in the southern Judean desert have lived in constant fear of further demolitions and have moved around regularly to avoid passing IDF patrols.

Many families from Ar Rawa'in village used to spend the winter months in Wadi Ghar but in November 2005 the IDF delivered evacuation orders to several families. In January 2006 four Bedouin family dwellings were demolished along with the killing of several animals and the confiscation of equipment. Other families cautiously remained in the valley until April 06 when they left due to the barrenness of the area. Several of these families moved to the Nablus areas, others to ar Rawa'in.

At Giga

The isolated village of At Giga located 4km south east of Hameeda An Najada and close to the Green Line has also suffered recent demolitions. The village consists of 30 families of which 12 are registered refugees. The village used to be in Israel but in 1948 the whole village was uprooted and moved 400m inside the West Bank. Three years ago the entire village was demolished by the IDF but the villagers have since returned and rebuilt the area.

Since rebuilding every structure, including the school and the mosque, they have received demolition orders. The last orders were received in April 2006 and the villagers now live in constant fear of demolition at any time. Presently, many of the Bedouin do graze their animals in Israel, as they have limited access in the West Bank, but they are aware that if the flocks are caught they will be confiscated.

Karmel settlement fence refugees

Approximately 100 UNRWA registered Bedouin refugees live directly next to Karmel settlement fence, just off Road 317. They are all members of the Il Hadeel family and in June 2005 received demolition orders for several of the family shelters. If the demolitions go ahead, seven refugee families totaling 35-40 persons will be homeless. The case is currently being pursued through the court system. The family has been living at this location since 1948 and originally came from Arad.

There are approximately twenty demolition orders, received in early 2005, in the nearby area of Hameeda-An Najada, Khashem Ad Daraj-Hathaleen. The area houses up to 4000 Bedouins. The people there are a mixture of refugees and non-refugees and have both the demolition issue to contend with as well as the already mentioned issues of water and fodder.

Al Eizariya area

The Bedouin community of Al Eizariya has suffered displacement and demolitions due to the expansion of the Ma'ale Adumim settlement and the building of the barrier. 250 Bedouin families, all refugees – most of whom are registered – now live on 'al Jabal' on the outskirts of Al Eizariya.

Previously in 1997, without warning, the IDF demolished houses and structures of 35 Bedouin Salamat-Jahalin families living on land, which is now Ma'ale Adumin. The IDF arrived one morning, sealed off the area and transported all the Bedouin possessions to 'al Jabal'. The Bedouin refused to move so spent the next nine days sleeping on the ground while an Israeli lawyer took their case to court. The court ruled that the IDF could not remove them without finding alternative land. The IDF were forced to negotiate with the Bedouin which resulted in a compensation package being agreed.

The families received between half and one and a half dunums of land each and between NIS 15,000 to 38,000 each depending on the family's size to relocate to 'al Jabal' which is a small hill located between Al Eizariya village and a nearby rubbish dump. The 35 families, all refugees and mostly UNRWA registered, moved to this location in 1999-2000 after the compensation packages were finalized. Since this date more Bedouin families living nearby received evacuation and demolition orders to make way for the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim, and now 250 families are crammed onto land in the 'al Jabal' area with the latest ones having moved in in 2003. The hill is crowded and there is no space to keep animals thus many families have had to sell their livestock and now take menial jobs in settlements or nearby villages.

Land ownership is a major issue. According to the Israeli authorities, the land the Bedouin were given, with a 98 year lease, was state land. However, villagers in Abu Dis claim it is their land. However, they have no documents to prove this in court. The Jahalin are concerned that when the barrier is completed around Ma'ale Adumim they will be on the West Bank side and then the Abu Dis families will reclaim their land and they will be further displaced, but this time without compensation.

In addition to this displacement, in September and October 2005, another 140 families (55 of the Salamot clan and 85 of the Sayara clan) received evacuation orders from land between 'al Jaba' and Ma'ale Adumim, and between Ma'ale Adumim and Kedar settlements in Wadi Abu Hindi. All the families are refugees though they are not all registered with UNRWA. An Israeli lawyer has taken up the case on behalf of the community and negotiations are in progress.

The IDF wish to move the families to another hill located between the rubbish dump and the village of As Sawahira ash Sharqiya, but the Bedouin do not wish to move as the land belongs to the village of Sawahira and there will not be enough space to house and graze the animals. The Bedouin do not want to become like those living on the hill who have had to give up their traditional way of life and move into a semi-urban lifestyle.

Another option that has been put forward by the IDF is to relocate the families to land between Mishor Adumim and Jericho. This area would be far from amenities and villages and grazing would also be restricted by Road 1 and the military area to the south. The Bedouin do not wish to take a compensation package from the Israeli authorities and wish to remain at their present location which is where they have lived since 1948.

In total there are up to 2000 Jahalin Bedouins, mostly registered refugees, in the area around Ma'ale Adumim, all of whom will at some point be displaced by the IDF to areas outside the Ma'ale Adumim bubble. They are presently paying for legal representation but this is costly and they are looking for outside support. They also would like to know what UNRWA plans to do for them if they are displaced and what new services will be established in any future location especially if that location is remote with limited existing services. There are also Jahalin Bedouins living along Route 1 whose situation needs to be further assessed.

Fasayil village

Fasayil Village in the Jordan valley was subjected to actual demolitions on 8th February 2006. The Bedouins, many of whom are refugees, have lived at the site since the 1980s but over the last couple of years have been repeatedly harassed by the IDF to vacate the area. Some of the shelters received demolition orders in 2003 and 2004 and in September 2005 eight families had their shelters demolished by the IDF on the same spot. They rebuilt their shelters and in December 2005 the IDF returned and gave the families 45 days to vacate the area.

The IDF appeared on 8th February 2006 and demolished houses and animal shelters. Some of the Bedouins dismantled their own shelters to prevent breakages by the IDF. Nineteen families were affected of which eight dismantled their own shelters to prevent IDF damage to belongings. Of the other eleven families eight are Bedouin refugee families. As some of the refugee families were registered in Bethlehem and not Jericho they did not receive UNRWA assistance thus causing some antagonism between the families. The refugees have since rebuilt some of the shelters on the same area and others are living in tents and have no intention of leaving the area, which is adjacent to approximately 200 other Bedouins who have also been living there since the 1980s.

Access to Health Care

All Bedouin refugee communities with whom UNRWA spoke emphasized the lack of accessible health care facilities and highlighted the increasing need for healthcare given their deteriorating living conditions, especially given the lack of clean water supply in

many areas. Health workers with whom UNRWA had communication have already noted the increase in water-borne diseases and complaints in outlying areas. During the summer months the general health of many communities is expected to degenerate further.

Large Bedouin refugee areas in the southern Judean desert have no permanent healthcare facilities in their vicinity and are usually only served by a weekly or biweekly UNRWA or PA clinic. This is the case with the Hameeda An Najada area as well as Ar Rawain and the desert area to the south.

Bedouin refugees in the Al Eizariya area are registered with UNRWA, but in Jerusalem Old City and now that the barrier is in place, they have severe difficulty in accessing the facilities, while Bedouin refugees in the Mu'arrajat and Ras el Ein have no easy access in any direction.

All communities requested UNRWA to rethink its health policy towards them and to establish more health points and mobile clinics for the outlying areas.

At Giga and Hameeda An Najada area

Giga is located 4km south east of Hameeda An Najada - very close to the Green Line. The village houses 30 families of which 12 are registered refugees. There is no health care facility. The nearest point is a weekly PA health service that runs for a mere 2 hours in Hameeda An Najada. There is one refugee man living in the village who is paralyzed from the neck down and needs regular medical attention. He relies on the good will of other villagers to take him to Yatta for attention. He is also much in need of a wheelchair. UNRWA mobile health team visits would be much appreciated in this region.

An incident which highlights the need for healthcare facilities in the area is that which occurred on 2nd March 2006 when an elderly Bedouin refugee woman was physically assaulted by Karmel settlers near her home near the settlement fence. The woman sustained a broken leg in the incident and although the IDF was on hand she received no medical treatment. She was dragged home by children and then a neighbour drove her to Yatta for treatment.

In addition to this there are a lack of health care facilities in the neighbouring villages of Najada, Hathaleen, Um Malhere and Zuweidin, all of which have partial refugee populations and are suffering heavily from the effects of the drought. PA clinics in these villages are only open once a week for a couple of hours. At all other times the population of more than 4000 persons has to travel to Yatta for healthcare which involves passing the settlement as well as crossing the settler Road 317, which can be problematic and will continue to be so as the 317 road barrier is put in place.

Al Eizariya area – Jerusalem

The Al Eizariya Bedouins, most of whom are UNRWA refugees and number several thousand in total, are mainly registered for healthcare in the Old City Jerusalem. However with the construction of the barrier around Jerusalem access is now difficult. Several women recently have been stopped by the IDF and sent back while trying to

cross the barrier to go to the health centre. Now the families are paying for health care which they cannot afford. This is an added burden to the already difficult conditions in which they are living especially given the drought this year and the associated costs of paying for fodder and water.

The community requested that UNRWA mobile health team visits the Bedouin areas located around Al Eizariya village and Ma'ale Adumim and Kedar settlements, until a more permanent solution, such as a health point, can be realized.

Mu'arrajat and Ras el Ein areas

The Mu'arrajat area located along Road 449 between At Tayba village and Jericho consists of several scattered Bedouin refugee areas. The families are mainly from the Qa'abneh clan and are registered either in Jericho, Ramallah or Old City Jerusalem. There are no nearby healthcare facilities and those registered in Jerusalem face the same problems as the Al Eizariya Bedouins with the added burden of distance and more check-points, the latter being issues also for those going to Ramallah and Jericho.

The Ras el Ein Bedouin areas contain a majority of refugees mostly registered in Jericho or Ramallah. However they cannot leave the area without passing Yitav check-point and regularly face problems at An Nuwei'ma CP while trying to enter Jericho. The alternative is private health care in Al Auja. Access to healthcare is a major issue for the communities in these areas and mobile health team visits could form part of the solution.

Education

Most of the Bedouin areas visited are served by schools and most of the refugee children do attend the available facilities. However, often the distances traveled to school, especially for the younger children, are exhausting and in general there is no transport or the transport is paid for privately.

Children in *At Giga* village (south Judean desert) walk 4 km each way each day over harsh terrain as there is no means of transport. Those in first grade now stay in the village but the newly constructed school building has a demolition order on it and if demolished these children will also have to walk the long distances.

The Bedouin children of the Ras al Ein areas attend the UNRWA Basic School in Al Auja and pay privately for a taxi each day. However each day the mini-bus is delayed at Yitav CP and often the children are late. The transport is expensive and the bus severely overcrowded. Assistance with transporting Bedouin refugee children to school, especially to UNRWA schools, could be considered.

Bedouin refugee children attending schools in areas in which they are a minority often face difficulty in fitting in and being accepted by the other school children. This leads to a high drop out rate in such areas. An example of this is the Salfit Bedouin children, ten of whom used to attend a PA school in Salfit but who now have a small privately run

school in a tent within their community. Although they are being privately funded at present this is not sustainable and an alternative solution for the children needs to be found. Many Bedouin refugee children do need assistance in fitting in to the established schooling system.

Refugee Registration

Zfim

Just inside the seam zone north of Qalqiliya live 100 Bedouin refugees located between the barrier and Zfim settlement. They are the Jihadmi family originally from Ramadin area. The area is officially known as Arab ar Ramadin ash Shamali and the Bedouins are related to those living in the other seam zone area just south of Jaljoulia Green Line CP at Arab ar Ramadin al Janu and at Arab Abu Farda.

It costs the refugees 50 shekels for each trip to the Nablus UNRWA office and can take up to four hours due to the check-points. Thus as an estimated 25% of the refugee population in Zfim is not registered it would be efficient and feasible if arrangements could be made for the refugees to meet with a representative in Qalqiliya to try and solve this issue.

Fasayil - Jordan Valley

As stated in the demolition section above, on 8th February 2006 IDF demolished several Bedouin refugee shelters in Fasayil for being illegally constructed on Area C land, even though the community has been there since the 1980s.

Settler Harassment

There are a number of problems for the Bedouins in relation to settlers: many Bedouin refugee areas are located close to settlements or the refugees have had their lands reduced or have become dangerous to access due to the presence of the settlements and illegal outposts. One such example is the Om il Hair area close to Karmel settlement fence.

Karmel settlement fence refugees

The Bedouin refugees at this location used to live on land which is now the settlement but were evicted in the 1980s. They have since been subjected to regular and unrelenting harassment, threats and physical abuse. The most recent incident occurred on 2nd March 2006 when an elderly woman, an UNRWA registered refugee, was physically assaulted by settlers who broke her leg while she was walking close to her home. The settlers only stopped when the IDF arrived and intervened. A complaint was lodged with the Israeli police but, as is the norm, there has been no response and no doubt no action taken against the settlers involved. In 2005 twenty sheep were stolen by Karmel settlers and general abuse has increased recently. The aim of the settlers is to incorporate the Bedouin land into the expansion of the settlement.