Arab League (AL)

The legal status of the Bedouin people

Research Report

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"Out of this world"

Forum: **Arab League (AL)**

Issue: **The legal status of Bedouin people**

Position: **Chair**

Introduction

We hope this research report can be a good start for doing research on the topic of the legal status of Bedouin People.

The Bedouin people are pastorally nomadic Arab tribes, who usually live in the desert during the rainy and winter seasons and move back to the cultivated regions during summertime. The different tribes are traditionally categorised according to which animal they herd. Some examples of these names are the camel nomads, which are large tribes that live in the Sahara, Syrian and Arabian desert. The sheep and goat tribes have a smaller size, these groups live generally close to the cultivated regions of Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. Cattle nomads, or as they call them in Sudan Baggãrah (Baggara) are mostly found in Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

The tribes of the Bedouin people go back centuries and used to travel from place to place on camels, finding the best places to live. It started in the Syrian and Arabian desert but has now spread out all over northern Africa, middle east, and west Asia. However, a lot of countries in these regions, such as Israel, do not recognize Bedouins as Indigenous people, thus depriving them of Indigenous people's rights.

Definition of Key Terms

Cultivated area:

A cultivated area is an area typically used for agriculture, particularly livestock and growing crops.

Deprivation:

The absence, lack or denial of resources that are considered a necessity.

Displacement:

The act of removing someone or something from their usual place or habitat

Indigenous people:

A group of Indigenous people are groups that usually share ancestral ties to the land they live or have been displaced from.

Nomads:

Nomads are originally communities that have no one place they settle. They continue to move around from area to area. Most of these groups are hunters, pastoral nomads, or trader nomads. Reasons for moving around could be following the specific animal they hunt or making sure that the animals they herd have the best environment.

Polygamy:

Also known as plural marriage, meaning being married to more than one spouse at once. This way marriage is illegal in most areas. In some countries it is only illegal for women.

Tribalism:

The state of existing and/or advocating for tribes or other social groups

Tribe:

A group, usually made up of families, clans or groups of people who share the same beliefs, language, and religion.

General Overview

To understand the problem, we must understand the community that makes the Bedouins. The name Bedouin originally comes from the word desert nomads in Arabic. They usually live in tents and travel on camels as they originally moved around from place to place. Now most tribes have settled in one area where they stay most of the year. Lots of tribes in the present day move back to cultivated areas during the winter times. Here most Bedouins even have a “normal” job. Today there are around twenty-five million Bedouins.

The tribes are led by a Shykh, who is selected by the tribe’s elderly based on his ability to help other tribe members but also his wealth and inherited respect. The tribes have their own legal system called El ‘Orf. All the different laws have a different name, and important decisions are taken during tribal meetings called Majilis. Going to these meetings is another big responsibility for the Shykh, here they have to represent and speak for their people.

El ‘Orf is an important concept in these communities. Not only does it solve conflicts between tribes, but it also protects women. Misconduct to women holds around four times worse punishments than the same misconduct to men in the same situation.

Women are quite important and respected in the tribes, so it is not unusual for a man to have multiple wives. Polygamy is still extremely popular, with men having up to four wives. Now only twenty to thirty percent of Bedouins practise polygamy, but it varies between tribes. Within the tribes, the rates can get as high as sixty percent.

Bedouins in Israel

As mentioned earlier, Bedouins experience lots of problems, the most and well known have been happening for decades in Israel. These conflicts date back to the creation of the country in 1948. Before then, there were around 92.000 Bedouins living in Negev, Israel. Until in 1948 Israel got into a war with neighbouring countries and a lot of the Bedouins had to leave. Only around 11.000 remained but were gathered in the northern part of Negev and sent to Siyag. They were promised to get their ancestral land back when it was safe, which would be within six months. This did not happen. The Bedouins who fled and then returned were placed into communities created by the Israeli government and were thus recognized as citizens. The Bedouins who stayed and lived in thirty-five villages that existed before the creation of the state Israel, were not.

The government refuses to provide these villages with basic needs like running water, electricity, and schools. Even the people that live there, who are legal Israeli citizens, are seen as intruders. Because of this they have a constant anxiety about losing their homes. Israel is actively taking actions to show the tribes they do not have a place there, like in 2011 when the government destroyed one thousand homes with bulldozers. Israel is only an example of the treatment of the tribes.

Bedouins in other countries

Seeing as Bedouins do not only live in Israel, it cannot go unnoticed that Bedouins also have a challenging time in other countries, but to a relatively lesser extent.
Bedouins have been around for centuries all over the middle east and surrounding countries. Some of the most Bedouins right now live in Saudi Arabia. When Saudi Arabia pursued

sedentarization, the number of Bedouins living there decreased quickly, with around two million living there right now.

Even though Bedouins do not originally come from Jordan, it has a big population. And while the Jordanian authorities have clashed with the nomads living there a couple times, the government provides the tribes with all different kinds of services such as health clinics, education, and housing. Providing them with a safer place to live, where society is not against them.

Meanwhile, the Israeli government supports the idea of destroying Bedouin villages to expand the Israeli settlements. By this they would be misplacing tens of thousands of Bedouins.

Remembering that there are lots of countries Bedouins currently reside in, these are just some examples.

Deprivation

Due to the legal status of the Bedouins and the political view of the government, the tribes lack basic human needs such as water, electricity, medical care, and education. The authorities have also made their original way of living harder, by limiting the space they have and trying to keep them in one place. Because of this and the fear of their home being demolished, the Bedouins are under a lot of stress which causes their health to decline.

Major Parties Involved

Bedouins Without Borders (BWB)

BWB is an independent non-profit organisation based in Palestine. It was founded in 2015 by a group of Bedouin activists and supporters. The organisation's main goal is to work with Bedouins in regions such as Palestine, the Middle East, and Northern Africa. They aim to provide support, research, documentation, and studies. They also help the tribes with their citizenship and active participation in society by enhancing local and international advocacy. The group also provides tours for people who want to learn about and be around Bedouins, as Bedouins are known to be very friendly and accepting of everyone. In summary, this organisation helps provide the Bedouins with support and hope, which they have been doing successfully since 2015.

Israel

Israel, officially the state of Israel, is located in the southern levant region of west Asia. It borders the countries Lebanon and Jordan. Over the years they have had multiple conflicts with other countries and regions. The country is led by their president Isaac Herzog and their prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Even though the president is the head of the state, his duties are limited and mostly for ceremonial purposes. The country is in reality led by their government, which consists of 120 members.

In the last couple of decades, the Israeli government has made it harder for the Bedouins to live in their country. Even if they are the country with the most of the said desert nomads.

Minority Rights Group (MRG)

Minatory Rights Group is a non-governmental organisation that helps all sorts of groups, ranging from Indigenous groups to religious minorities. They help them recognize and realise their rights. The organisation has all sorts of programs, helping people in more than sixty countries. On their website you can also find information on all the groups they help, including multiple pages on the Bedouin tribes and the violence against them.

Keshet association

Keshet Ngo, is a group that, by recognizing the importance of the traditional nomadic way of living for the Bedouins, they help the groups with maintaining their culture and to aid the communities, so that they do not disappear. This Organisation has multiple projects to now only help the Bedouin tribes, but also educate people and tourists on the way of living that the tribes practise and their culture. For example, their project “The Land of Tents – Bedouin Experience Tourism Project” offers to meet Bedouins and experience their way of living. Or with their project “The legalisation and recognition of Bedouin villages” where they, as the name states, help Bedouin villages in Israel get recognized as legal.

Timeline of Events

6000 BCE Start of Bedouins in the Syrian steppe.

850 BCE A complex network of Bedouin settlements was established.

1326 The Egyptian authorities used Bedouins at a custom post to guard the border.

1757 The plunder and massacre of the Hajj caravan by Qa'dan Al as a revenge to the Ottomans

1858 Under the Tanzimat land reforms, a new law was issued: the new ottoman law, meaning now legal grounds for the displacement of Bedouins were offered.

1948 Creation of the state of Israel and displacement of a lot of Bedouins

1950's-1960's Lots of Bedouin tribes were forced to leave their nomadic lives due to the drought

1958 The Syrian law formally annulled the Bedouin tribes' legal status in the country.

1958 The political party called Ba'ath tried to wipe out tribalism.

2011 Destruction of a thousand Bedouin houses

2011-present time Due to the civil war that is ongoing in Syria, lots of Bedouins seek refugees in countries such as Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan

March 26, 2024 The 55th session of the UNHRC, where a member of the MRG makes a statement about the escalation of violence by Israeli settlers on the occupied west bank of Palestine.

Possible Solutions

The problem at hand is quite tricky to fix and not one that will be solved right away, although there are some things that can help. First to help some of the problems that the Bedouins face, is fixing the deprivation of their basic human rights as mentioned in the general overview a start. These could be fixed by, for example, making water more accessible, building solar panels by villages to give them their own electric network.
This does not fix the political issue at hand, but for the Bedouins it could be a start.
Secondly education in the tribes about their rights. If the Bedouins know what their rights are that they are supposed to have, it makes it clearer for them to know how to get them. Lastly, education internationally on the problem and creating alliances worldwide. The more help the

tribes can get, the better for them. All of this can help the Bedouin get a set legal status in all areas.

Conclusion

In this research report we discussed who the Bedouins are, the current biggest issues that the Bedouin people experience in our modern-day world and more. We hope this report can help you with your research for the upcoming conference. Good luck.

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