

## **Planned and current demolition status of structures in the Jahalin community of the northern Judean desert**

### **Executive Summary**

The Jahalin tribe, following their expulsion by Israel in the early 1950s, embarked on a migration of several years, traversing various areas before eventually arriving to the northern region of the Judean Desert. After 1967, their migration slowed, and they settled in the vicinity of Al-Azariyeh, Abu Dis, and the outskirts of Jericho. Among these communities, Al-Khan Al-Ahmar stands out as the most renowned, having maintained its presence since 1974.

However, the Jahalin communities now face mounting pressure from nearby Israeli settlements and the Yesha Council (Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip), along with affiliated organizations. These groups have initiated a campaign denouncing what they perceive as "The takeover of Area C by the Palestinian Authority." Regrettably, this campaign distorts the reality on the ground by falsely asserting that the Palestinian Authority is promoting illegal construction, surpassing the reasonable needs for community growth in an attempt to acquire territory and impede Israeli settlement.

The primary objective of this campaign seems twofold. First, it seeks to intensify enforcement measures and demolitions of Bedouin structures, thereby restricting their ability to establish stable homes. Second, it aims to justify the construction of additional Israeli sites in the area, whether authorized or unauthorized.

Yet, not only do the dry statistics fail to support the claims underlying the campaign, they actually present a contrasting narrative. Since 1967, when the areas designated as Area C were predominantly inhabited by Palestinians, the Israeli population has experienced a growth ten times greater than that of the Palestinian population.

In the northern Judean Desert, for instance, the number of Bedouins belonging to the Jahalin tribe has only marginally increased from approximately 2,000 individuals in 1967 to approximately 3,500 today. In contrast, the Israeli settlement population has surged, increasing from zero in 1967 to approximately 60,000 residents today.

The number of Israeli settlers in Area C has been increasing dramatically since 1967, while Palestinians in the area have become a vast minority (which was not the case approximately two decades ago). The approval rate of requests submitted by Palestinians to the Israeli planning institutions for the issuance of building permits has dropped over the years and currently stands at less than 1%, while the number of permits issued in Area C for Israeli settlements is 350 times greater. A total of 12 comprehensive plans have been submitted by the Jahalin communities to regulate and address the planning needs of their settlements. However, to their

disappointment, none have been given the attention they deserve through meaningful discussion or approval.

On the other hand, the Jahalin communities face a disproportionately high number of pending demolition orders targeting nearly all of their approximately 750 houses in the northern Judean Desert. This is in contrast to the mere one percent of buildings in the Israeli settlements of the area. Correspondingly, the number of house demolitions is also 10 times greater among the Bedouins, despite their population being less than 1/20th compared to that of the Israeli settlement in the same area. Adding to their challenges, a number of illegal outposts and agricultural farms have been established in close proximity to the Jahalin communities, encroaching on their living space. Although the Civil Administration has issued demolition orders against these structures, not a single building has been dismantled, and an increasing number are being authorized retroactively.

Simultaneously, as part of a systematic policy, Israeli rangers are confining Bedouin shepherds and their herds to a narrow strip of land surrounding the communities, at times resorting to violent measures.

Out of all the areas in the northern Judean desert, a striking disparity emerges. While a staggering 75,000 dunams have been allocated to the Israeli settlement in the Adumim region (including Ma'ale Adumim, Kfar Adumim, Alon, Nofei Prat, Almon, Keidar and Mitzpe Jericho), a mere 320 dunams have been allocated to Jahalin, intended for limited construction plans to accommodate families who were uprooted from their place of residence during the expansion of Ma'ale Adumim. Some of the areas set aside for Israeli settlements include approximately 300,000 dunams of expropriated land, seized back in 1975 for the establishment of Mishor Adumim and Ma'ale Adumim.

As a result of this expropriation, some of the Jahalin communities that had been living on land owned by Palestinians, including Al-khan Al-Ahmar, suddenly found themselves sitting on state land with the state refusing to give them a permit.

The denial of building permits to the Jahalin community, along with the deliberate obstruction of law enforcement, the discriminatory practice of selective demolitions solely targeting the Jahalin structures, and the staunch opposition to any proposed plans for regularization (including those pertaining to the Al-Khan Al-Ahmar community), all allude to a carefully orchestrated planning policy. This policy seeks to obstruct any form of Bedouin development in the northern region of the Judean desert, despite the historical presence of the Bedouin people as an integral part of the desert ecosystem and culture since time immemorial.