

Naqara, Hanna. Translated by the Palestinian Revolution, 2016.¹

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Brothers and Friends,

It is upsetting indeed that this conference, held 27 years after the establishment of the state of Israel, has been called in opposition to new confiscations, and government plans to seize large swathes of Arab lands.

Some thought the authorities were content with the Arab land they had already confiscated and seized, and that the day had come for Arab peasants, uprooted since the establishment of the state of Israel, to return to their lands and villages. However, it is now conclusively evident that the government is embarking on new schemes to strip Arab peasants of the rest of their land.

For several months, meetings have been held at the highest level to implement what was initially called the "The Galilee Judaisation scheme". To avoid hurting feelings, specialists graciously dubbed this "The Population Redistribution Scheme", before settling on the name "The Comprehensive Development Program for Misinformation". No matter whether it is called Judaisation, distribution or development, the scheme is the same. It involves the confiscation of more Arab land, and the elimination of what little land remains.

It is unfortunate that this government does not appreciate the feelings, aspirations and hopes of Arab citizens. It seems unaware that it uprooted, in the Nazareth area in particular, the people of Almjaydal, Saffūriyya, Ma'lūl and others; seized the lands of the village 'Aylūt Alsahliyya; and uprooted many of the people of Hittīn, Nimrīn, Alshajara, Alkhaṣaṣ and still more villages. It does not register that it seized the steppe lands in Shafa 'Amr, Bait Jin and Alrāma; uprooted the people of Albarwa, Aldāmūn, Arruways, Sha'b and Mi'ār; afflicted the people of Farādiyya, Kafr 'Anān; and uprooted the people of Kafr Bar'am, Iqrat, Alkuwaykāt, 'Amqā, Sheikh Dawūd and still more; and that the people of these villages are still living as refugees in their homeland, the homeland of their ancestors. These people's eyes look towards their land day and night, their hearts beat morning, noon and night for their homeland, for the homes of their youth. They are in love with the good land

¹ From an interview conducted by Tony Clifton, Newsweek (New York – International edition), April 3, 1978.

they watered, over generations, with their sweat, and if you wish, with their blood. They are waiting patiently for the day on which they can return to their beloved lands and dear villages.

It is unfortunate that the government does not realise all of this, and is not yet working to resolve this problem, after three decades, instead working on the displacement of the refugees who found shelter in Kābūl, Tamra, Jaffa and other places to displace them again and make them refugees all over again.

The government is turning a blind eye to the internal and external development, and it is unfortunate that they do not realise that what they were able to do in their early years of confiscation and seizure with various laws, methods and procedures will not be able to do now, and will not be able to achieve the stripping and uprooting they want. The Arab masses in Israel now have the legitimate means of opposition and struggle.

They have now dozens of local councils as well as local council heads, hundreds of intellectuals and tens of thousands of conscious workers and peasants. Now they have mass organisation of lawyers, academics, university students, high school students, craftsmen and tradesmen. The authorities should realise that they will not be able to continue the confiscation of our land and the uprooting of our people. We are concerned about the confiscation of our land and the uprooting of our people.

Brothers and Friends,

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, these authorities have been using all kinds of laws such as (the Fallow land law, Closed areas law, Abandoned fund law, security areas laws, land repossession law - work documentation and compensation - for 1953, the lands law - repossession for public use - for 1943, land settlement procedures, and Waste land law) to strip the Arab peasants, the citizens of the state, of a million acres (until 1960) of their most fertile and best land, as admitted by Don Burts in his book "The Arabs in Israel".

The authorities have been talking now about the establishment of cities, settlements and industrial centres in the Karmel region, which will threaten the lands of the villages of (Alba'na, nahf, Deir Alasad, majd Alkurūm, 'arab issawā'id, kasrā and Yānuh in Tufāniyya, Almakr and Jdayda, Tamra and kābūl, the lands of M'laya) and other areas of Galilee.

The current debate in government circles is about new confiscations which some are stating would not exceed thousands of acres, while others say it will reach tens of thousands.

They are planning to eliminate the Arab presence in the city of Acre and transfer the Arab population to the area of Almakr and Jdayda. Also in the plan, the uprooting of tens of thousands of the Arab citizens of this struggling town.

They are planning to set up a cement factory on thousands of acres in the areas of Tamra and Kabul, and they are hiding the fact that this scheme will run until it reaches Kawkab Abulhayjā, and thus will sweep away thousands of other acres.

They are planning to cut off and confiscate parts of the Arab villages, as well the annexation of this land to the local councils and the neighbouring Jewish municipality. The central area surrounded by the villages of Alrayna, Kafr Kanna, 'ayn mahl and Almashhad are still under the threat of being joined to upper Nazareth and Alrayna by confiscation. As for the land of Yafat Alnaşira in the west, they are working on joining it to Almjaydal, the people of which were uprooted and their land confiscated.

Other areas under the threat of being cut are the western lands of Kafr Yasif, Almakr, the western M'alya. Also the western Baqa villages, Um alfaham, Alteeba and other villages of the triangle. This annexation is a first step to confiscation and seizure. Thus, a very big responsibility lies on the respective local councils to protect the lands of their villages, and to stand up in the face of these schemes which are aimed to choke the Arab villages and prevent it from growth and development, and thereby stripping them of their land.

We have started to study the general overall plan at Galilee. This plan which divides Galilee to residential, agricultural, and industrial areas, does not mention cities, villages, places or construction plots plan. The local councils were urged to present objections and appeals within the period specified for this plan, which include the whole of Galilee, and urged to demand details in order for them and us to get a clearer picture, and to be aware of the extent of the damages which will result from this plan if approved. We believe that the local councils have done their job in this regard.

Brothers and Friends,

In 1972 the government amended the property tax law, and this amendment is effective on wooded land with olive trees or other fruit trees, without paying attention to the fact that it was and still land intended for agriculture and farming. Also, without paying attention to the fact that it is not divided into construction plots, nor that there are no roads, water or electricity. These lands have been arbitrarily considered land intended for building and construction, and is valued on this basis for tens of thousands of liras per acre, and it is mandatory to pay property tax and purchase financing tax of 2.4% of this unreasonable value. Before 1972, these lands were considered farmlands, and agricultural tax was levied for the value of few liras per acre, but now they are subject to thousands of liras tax which is multiple times of what that had produced. What is worse than all of this is that this land itself is considered farmland if the owner himself practiced farming and the income of which is not less than 50%. However, if the owner is a worker, employee, teacher or a tradesman then the land would not be considered farmland, thus the nature of the land surprisingly changes according to the profession of the owner. In other words, what determines the nature of the land is not the use, rather the owner.

We all know that agricultural earners have vanished after the confiscation and seizure processes, and that the overwhelming majority of the villages do not depend for their livelihood on farming only, rather on other jobs. This amendment was intended but for the Arab citizens exclusively since the settlement lands, kibbutz, and colonies are owned and registered in the name of governmental and non governmental bodies, and are exempt from tax. Such tax would impoverish the Arab peasants and would force them at the end to give up their land to get rid of this tax which would come on their land if they insisted on keeping it.

This is the general issue of the peasants at the moments. The tragedy began with notifications and reservations in Shafā Amr and extended to include most of the Arab villages.

We hereby, call on the authorities and the Knesset to restore the law to what it was in 1971, and to lift the unreasonable taxes on our farmland. Our villages have been agricultural villages since ancient times, and they have the right to be treated and operated on this basis, and taxes on its farmland are levied as for agricultural lands.

Brothers and Friends,

The other mean to strip the Arab peasants of their land is bartering on the so-called government construction land. The Israel land administration has, in various methods, taken over vast areas located close to the villages Building level. These rugged and rocky land seized by the government from the Arab peasants often as outcome of land settlement, as lands not suitable for agriculture and worthless. These lands the government made ready for construction through the planning committees, entered them in the villages building level, and started bargaining with the peasants to own building plots in these lands in return for dozens of acres of cultivated, owned and confiscated land. The value of the acre in these rugged and rocky land reaches tens of thousands of liras, and the cultivated acre is valued at hundreds of liras, so the peasant have to set up a home for himself or for his married son and give up dozens of acres of farmland, so that he can get 500 meter square for building. This process is ongoing, and hundreds of acres of farmland will be cut off annually if it is not stopped.

It is the duty of the local authorities to stand alongside the peasants and to call for the allocation of hundreds of acres in each village for distribution to those who need to build homes, in order to solve the housing problem in the Arab villages.

The government is launching an intensive attack on the Negev region to strip the Negev Bedouins of one million nine hundred thousand acres of their farmland and their pastures. The authorities have displaced thousands of the Bedouins and strip them of more than 1.5 million acres of these lands, and is now restoring to new ways to strip them of the rest. One minute they chase them for not having title deeds, and the next they claim that their lands are wasteland. They also claim sometimes that they are in need for more land to build settlements, airports or camps on, although we know that the Negev region exceeds ten million acres and the authorities can implement their projects in other parts of this vast area. However, the hand of confiscation and displacement is refusing but to extend to the Arab citizens in the Negev, their homes and the rest of the lands.

And We, hereby, raise our voice "Hands off the lands of the Negev Arabs. Stop the confiscation and seizures. Leave the Bedouins in their lands. Give them their lands back. Return them back to their land so they can live safely in their homeland.

The Bedouins will never give up their land which they inherited from their parents and grandparents, and will never overdo with a grain of sand of the soil of their ancestors"

Brothers and Friends,

The picture will never be complete unless it includes the plans that have been plotted to strip the Arab villages of the communal lands. The act of land settlement that the government invented has stripped all the Arab villages of their land, such an act has not been done during the British mandate. They have not left one single acre of the communal lands for the village of Alshāghūr, neither for the northern villages, Um Alfaham villages and others, of these communal land. The authorities have registered these lands as belonging to the government, and denied these villages of their communal land, and now the government resorted to stripping the Arab villages in the mandate period as a result of land settlement of these villages.

These lands had been registered in the name of the British High representative on behalf of these villages and their people, as he served as a secretary for these villages, and that is due to the absence of the a statutory body at the time in these villages to register these villages in its name. Thus the registration took place on behalf of these villages in Yafat Alnaşira, 'ayn mahl, iksal, dabburiyya, tar'ān, almaghar, almazra'a and others. However, Israel land administration claims falsely that these communal land belong to the state, and challenging these villages over the ownership in order to choke and harass these villages, and to sell these lands.

We hereby condemn these false allegations, and salute the local councils in these villages for their honourable stand in the defence for their land, and recall with pride the mighty demonstration that was called for and led by the local council of Tar'an in their struggle to keep the village communal land.

Our villages are exploding with the number of people, and they are in great need for their communal land for housing and the creation of public facilities on these lands. They are strongly determined not to give up these lands and to keep it for the people of these villages. We are not against development. The head of the government Yitzhak Rabin has declared that the government will allocate 1.5 billion for the development projects, and our villages are in dire need or development. What we are witnessing is that the scissor of the governor and the interior minister is extending to cut off any allocations in the local councils budgets when they dare to mention development on their budget even if that was for paving a street, introducing drinking water, connecting electricity, or even building a school.

The governor and the interior minister will go to extreme measures to obstruct any vital constructional development in our villages, while in a town like Karmel the government is now allocating 450 million liras for development, and this amount exceeds the total amount allocated for the development of Arab villages in Israel since the establishment of the state until now. Our villages are suffering a great deal for the lack of development. Where are the structural maps of our villages? Why are these maps sleeping at the organisation committees offices and governor's departments? Why should the citizens pay thousands of liras for fines and fees for alleged unlicensed buildings? Why would the sword of demolition stay pointed towards the heads of thousands of Arab citizens?

We are not against development, rather we are demanding development and allocating millions for development, but not at the expense of our land and villages. The policy of land seizure, confiscation, choking and impoverishing exercised against the Arab villages and denying them development is an integral part of the policy of persecution, discrimination, and denying the rights of the Arab people in various aspects.

We are an oppressed minority, however we hereby declare that the Arab masses will not be silent in the face of this injustice, and will continue with the struggle, with all their strength to foil this brute policy. We will go with a delegation from this conference to the Knesset to explain our just cause, and if the authorities do not listen to us we will demonstrate with our people in Jerusalem, and will stand strongly against this threat to our existence.

Our struggle is just, and we look forward to all the noble circles in Israel to raise their voices with us to serve the cause of peace and genuine coexistence based on justice and equality between the two peoples.