
Excerpts from the oral response of the planning authorities to Adalah's objection to "Partial Regional Master Plan"

Delivered at a hearing held on 2 July 2008

Mr. Tal Pudim [Manager of planning and programs, Southern District Planning Committee]: This is no doubt a detailed and reasoned objection, which contains many specifics. We do not intend to challenge the information presented in your objection. Much of what you said is true, though some of it is imprecise.

However, the objection overlooks the work that the planning authorities have carried out in recent years, including the approval of more than ten new [Arab Bedouin] villages. This work may not be sufficient, and not all of the unrecognized villages have been recognized. Nonetheless, work has certainly been done and over ten new villages have been advanced [through the planning process]; and in our view these constitute various types of villages. They are permanent settlements, indicated on the plan's map by a specific symbol or as suburban or rural villages, and are open to a wide range of land designations and uses. The local plans, derived from the regional plans that were developed for the establishment of these villages, were drafted with the participation of the residents. True, it was not always easy to find genuine representatives of the Bedouin who have been assigned to reside in these villages, but work has been undertaken, and Alicia [Alicia Sieber, a district planner] can elaborate on that. Alicia was the chairperson of the steering committees. It was difficult to convene some of the steering committees, such as those held in Mulada and Umm Batin, and the whole process took several years to complete.

The new villages were included in partial regional plans and then incorporated into this plan. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, technical

difficulties were experienced in advancing the plan. If this had occurred a decade ago, around ten villages would have already been indicated in the plan's map as new villages, instead of two.

It was the intention to establish new villages and to recognize existing Bedouin villages. However, for various reasons these villages could not be included in the plan. The mechanism of the search area, which you harshly criticize, was proposed for that reason. True, some of the search area cannot be used for the establishment of villages because of infrastructure, but this infrastructure affects the entire southern region, and not only the possibility of establishing or recognizing villages.

We have made great progress with this plan, which includes a proposal for new villages, some of which have been included within the framework of other plans. The character and other aspects of the two villages marked with a symbol [Abu Tulul and Al-Fur'a], [...]. will be determined in the local planning.

Another village, Makhlo or Greater Mar'it, which is considered a single community, but which encompasses a number of communities or independent neighborhoods, as well as the separate village of Darijat, are all included within the approved plan. Further expansion of Mar'it is planned to the southwest, where additional clusters of villages or independent neighborhoods of settlements or villages will be located. In practice, this action constitutes recognition of these settlements or villages, rather than their transfer elsewhere.

Alicia Sieber: My feeling is that a shift in approach has occurred in recent years towards the Bedouin villages, at least within the planning system. I myself have promoted [the planning of] around ten villages over the past three years. Plans for groups of Bedouin who were more united and aware of their demands and groups with very strong and clear representation progressed more quickly than groups that were unsure of their demands. The plans of villages represented by groups that did not know what they wanted were very late in moving forward relative to other villages. I see that there has been some progress, a type of new approach, a need and will to

advance solutions for the problem of the Bedouin population, part of which is located in recognized [towns and villages] and part in unrecognized villages.

It is very important to me personally that this matter is resolved, because it is impossible to continue as things currently stand. There has to be a clear solution. We have tried to provide a solution via the plan we submitted, to the best of our understanding. Accordingly, we delineated the search area where we did not know the exact location of the villages to be built or where their borders would lie. This area is suitable for the establishment of communities and was selected in the knowledge that population groups are located within it.

You argue that the plan is not feasible due to various constraints. According to your argument, there are already groups situated in the designated search area, but due to these constraints it will not be possible to put forward a local plan. I have not examined this issue in depth, but we assume that it will be possible to move local plans forward within the designated search areas and, in certain circumstances, to establish villages. Perhaps there is a need and place for reviewing the constraints you have raised, but there are certain constraints, for example, the noise emitted from airports, that cannot be altered because the airport exists. The constraints are actual constraints, so what can we do? We also want the whole population of the area to have quality of life in terms of noise pollution. So in the search area, we have to know how to deal with these constraints. I am raising a question mark. Some constraints result from the national highway and from Route 6, which we can deal with. Route 6 is marked at a scale of 1:100,000, and when we get to the detailed planning, we will know exactly whether or not these constraints can be resolved.

But it is undoubtedly important for the plan to be practicable.

[...]

You speak of agriculture as if it were the only option, or at least the most important one, for creating employment for the Bedouin population. It may

be that the character of this population is traditionally agricultural. However, I am not sure that this is the most significant part of this population today, and I see what is happening in other communities, such as *moshavim* and *kibbutzim*, which are trying to move away from agriculture and engage in as many other fields of employment as possible. We know today that agriculture has experienced a decline. We do not want to harm agriculture, and I do not think the plan need harm Bedouin agriculture. However, I do not think it is correct to push the population back towards agriculture and lay emphasis on agricultural land. The plan should not constrain; it should provide a range of opportunities and possibilities to avoid dependence on agriculture alone and to raise the level of employment among the Bedouin population. The state of agriculture today is not what it was twenty or thirty years ago, and farmers are looking for other sources of employment. We addressed this issue at the regional level and it was investigated prior to the plan's submission. Thus, we integrated the Bedouin population in the metropolitan employment zones, as we have already seen in the local plans for the Shoqet Junction and Lehavim Junction. I hope that this plan, in any case, will prove feasible.