

Why the EU Must Intervene to Stop the Praver Plan: A Conversation with Dr. Thabet Abu Rass



Dr. Thabet Abu Rass

In early April 2012, Dr. Thabet Abu Rass, the Director of Adalah's Naqab Office, conducted an advocacy mission to Brussels co-hosted by the [Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network \(EMHRN\)](#), of which Adalah is a long-standing, active member. The purpose of the mission was to call attention to the [government-approved Praver Plan](#), which threatens to forcibly dispossess and displace the Arab Bedouin community in the Naqab (Negev) from their homes and ancestral lands.

In this text, Dr. Abu Rass explains the importance of the mission and why intervention by the European Union (EU) on behalf of the Arab minority, and particularly the Arab Bedouin, could not come at a more critical time.

What was the aim of the advocacy mission?

TAR: The aim was to draw attention to the critical situation in the Naqab today, where up to 70,000 people are under threat of displacement because of the Praver Plan. We wanted to raise awareness of this issue at the highest level in the EU, and encourage policy-makers to increase diplomatic pressure on Israel to cease the human rights violations against its Arab Bedouin citizens and to stop the Praver Plan. I was in Brussels the day after Adalah and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) submitted an [official objection](#) to the proposed [Praver Plan Law](#). The advocacy mission reinforced the message we are raising here in Israel, which is "[Stop the Praver Plan](#)."

Who did you meet with and why?

TAR: We met with representatives of the Mashreq/Maghreb (MAMA) Working Group. These officials represent each of the 27 EU member states and deal specifically with issues relating to the EU's foreign and security relationship with the Middle East and North Africa. We also met with representatives of the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#), the foreign policy arm of the EU. We stressed in our meetings the critical importance of the EU and EU member states in taking a stand against the Israeli government's policy of dispossession, demolition and displacement of one of its most vulnerable groups, the Arab Bedouin living in the Naqab.

Do you believe that the EU can really have an impact on "internal" matters?

TAR: Of course it can. And it must. Implementation of the Praver Plan will not only inflame the Naqab and Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, but the forced displacement of an indigenous, minority community and the largest confiscation of Arab-land since the 1950s is a human rights issue that impacts the entire region.

What's next?

TAR: We expect that the Praver Plan Law will be introduced in the Knesset in the coming month or so. Given the political climate and the Knesset's willingness to pass blatantly discriminatory and racist legislation, we are deeply concerned that this [discriminatory bill](#) will also pass. However, we have seen, in many instances, that when the international community is informed and acts against discriminatory laws and policies, the Israeli government hesitates to support and/or implement them. The EU is a key player, and we are confident that if it takes a strong stance against the forced displacement of the indigenous Arab Bedouin community, we can stop the Praver Plan. We are therefore continuing to raise this issue both at the EU level and with individual Member States, urging them to take a position against the Praver Plan and to call on Israel to respect both the human rights of its citizens as well as its human rights agreements with the European Union.