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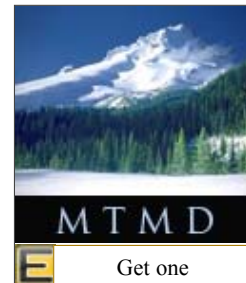
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Sunday, July 13

Israeli High Court: Nu'man villagers reside illegally in ancestral homes



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Nu'man children walk to school through Israeli settlement

Bethlehem – The Israeli High Court decided on Wednesday that the "facts on the ground" in Nu'man village, between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, are "non-negotiable."

The practical reality of the "facts on the ground," is that the 220 inhabitants of Nu'man have become illegal residents in their homes, and must apply to the Israeli Ministry of Interior to legitimize their presence. As it stands, residents can be arrested for "illegal residency" at any moment.

Such arrests, in fact, were what precipitated the villagers' initial 1993 petition to the Israeli judicial system, according to the human rights organisation Al-Haq.

Arrests began shortly after the villagers learned that their homes had been included within the boundaries of the Municipality of Jerusalem, even though Nu'man is in the West Bank, on the east side of the Green Line.

From the complaint residents learned that there had been a "bureaucratic oversight" on the part of the

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[24] State of Israel. Census takers had failed to include the people of Nu'man after redrawing the borders of Jerusalem, annexed in 1967.

[24] The petition, brought by Al-Haq, Defence for Children International – Palestine Section and the residents of Nu'man village against the Prime Minister of Israel, the Minister of Defense, the Israeli military commander in the West Bank, the Minister of Interior and the Municipality of Jerusalem, sought to study the possibility of dismantling the separation wall that cuts the village off from the West Bank.

Since the petition was rejected on Wednesday, the "facts on the ground" for the people of Nu'man remain unchanged:

-Access to the village is granted only to residents of Nu'man, while others, including foreigners, aid workers, and both West Bank and Jerusalem ID holders, are excluded.

-No building permits are being issued; young married couples must either live at home, or leave the village to find housing.

- All public transportation to the village has stopped. To

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reach their schools, or workplaces residents (including primary school children) must walk between half an hour and forty five minutes to reach public transportation.

-In order to purchase food or supplies, residents of Nu'man must cross the checkpoint, and justify any large purchases to the soldiers on guard. For those without transportation, goods must be carried from the checkpoint to their homes.

The majority of residents, as West Bank ID holders, submit a request to the Israeli Ministry of Interior for a temporary permit to access their own village, thereby undergoing the Ministry's arbitrary scrutiny, hoping that no security issues are raised to deny such a permit. Should the permit application be refused, the applicants will have no option but to leave their homes and be indirectly forcibly transferred from their birthplace.

The court denied the petitioners' request to postpone the final decision in order to give them the opportunity to think through the consequences of applying individually for such permits.

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According to Al-Haq, the decision Thursday proves that Israeli authorities are pursuing a political agenda of indirectly forcibly removing the residents of Nu'man from their land and homes for the benefit of the expansion of the nearby illegal Israeli settlement of Har Homa. Indirect forcible transfer is a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and Al-Haq called for Israeli decision-makers to be held criminally responsible.

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