

Arab Israeli Citizens, Land and Discrimination: the case of Dar ElHanoun

Report, September 2007

Summary

Dar ElHanoun is an Arab-Palestinian village within the borders of the State of Israel. It is an old village that dates back to the 1920s, and its residents are Israeli citizens who legally own their lands. However, the Israeli authorities refuse to recognize Dar ElHanoun. As a result the village has no paved road leading to it, no electricity, no sanitation facilities or telephone connection, no health, education or post services. Despite expressions of support for Dar ElHanoun by politicians from a wide range of parties in the Israeli Knesset, including Balad, Hadash, Meretz and the Labor party, recent developments indicate that the Israeli Ministry of the Interior is intending to demolish the village and evacuate its inhabitants. This is happening while senior Israeli officials express their concerns about the “demographic threat” of Arab citizens, and new plans of taking away their citizenship are announced daily.

Following these new threats we have launched the *International Committee for Dar ElHanoun* (ICDH). By supporting the struggle of Dar ElHanoun, the ICDH will aim to raise international awareness to the distress of the Arab citizens of Israel who live in unrecognized villages. We urge you to read this report, visit our website and help us by [joining](#) our mailing list and [donating](#) for the struggle of Dar ElHanoun.

For a recent news item, see Appendix II (*Haaretz*, 6 May 2007).

Introduction

While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is widely covered in the international press, the discrimination against the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel has received much less attention. The case of Dar ElHanoun is an example for this sort of discrimination. Dar ElHanoun is an old Arab village in Israel that dates back to the 1920s. The residents of Dar ElHanoun are all Israeli citizens who legally own their lands. However, the State of Israel does not recognize Dar ElHanoun as a legal dwelling place and denies all facilities from the residents. As a result, the village has no paved road leading to it, no electricity, no sanitation facilities or telephone connection, no health, education or post services. Against most of the houses of the village there are demolition orders pending, and some houses in it were already demolished by the Israeli authorities.

Dar ElHanoun's residents have shown remarkable persistence in their struggle for equality and recognition. The village of Dar ElHanoun is a heartwarming locus of Arab-Jewish solidarity in Israel. For more than six years, since the beginning of the second Intifada, the struggle of Dar ElHanoun has prompted many Arab and Jewish Israeli citizens to join forces and try to bring about an end to the discrimination. In a lasting effort that was initiated by a big voluntary work camp in August 2001, the residents of Dar ElHanoun together with Arab and Jewish activists of *Taayush* have collaborated in numerous demonstrations, protest vigils, political campaigns and legal appeals.

Despite all these efforts, this struggle has so far failed to lead to the recognition of Dar ElHanoun. The Israeli ministry of the Interior has declared time and again that it has no intention of recognizing Dar ElHanoun as a (so called) “new settlement”. The ministry is

ignoring the fact that Dar ElHanoun predates the State of Israel, and that new, exclusively Jewish settlements are being continuously established in the same area. Recent declarations of the minister of the interior indicate that the ministry aims to evict Dar ElHanoun. This 80 years old village and all that it symbolizes for peace seeking people in Israel is in imminent danger.

To confront this situation we now need your help. We believe that people from all over the world should call the Israeli government to stop all discriminatory policies against Arab Israeli citizens. In order to help Dar ElHanoun and to raise public awareness of the discrimination against the Arab citizens of Israel, we have launched the *International Committee for Dar ElHanoun* (ICDH). We urge you to read this report, visit our website, and help us by [joining](#) our mailing list and [donating](#) for the struggle of Dar ElHanoun.

The location of Dar ElHanoun

Dar ElHanoun is located in between the Arab villages of Kafr Qari and Arara in the Wadi Ara area (see maps in appendix I). Wadi Ara is a major cultural, political and economic center for the Arab citizens of Israel. The strategic importance of the area stems from its big population and its proximity to the occupied Palestinian territories in Samaria as well as to the main highways connecting Tel-Aviv with the north of Israel. The new Road 6, which connects Wadi Ara to the center of Israel, increased the value of lands in the area.

Because of its centrality and its big Arab population, Wadi Ara has been in the center of many controversial plans. In the early 1990s, when Ariel Sharon served as the Israeli Minister for Housing Construction, he initiated what was known as the “star settlements plan”. This plan aimed to strengthen Jewish settlements in Wadi Ara, including the towns Katzir and Harish next door to Dar ElHanoun, in an attempt to separate the Arab Israeli citizens of Wadi Ara from the Palestinian inhabitants of northern Samaria.

Recently, Avigdor Libermann, now the Israeli minister for “strategic affairs”, announced his plan for taking away the citizenship of the Israeli-Arab inhabitants of Wadi Ara and subjecting them to the same treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. This idea appeals to many right wing supporters in Israel, who have often expressed their concern about the “demographic threat” posed by the Arab citizens of Israel.



Dar ElHanoun 1956 – aerial photograph of seven stone houses (note 2)

The Origins of Dar ElHanoun

The lands of Dar ElHanoun were purchased by the Abu Hillal family at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Dar ElHanoun's residents legally own their lands to this day. The first houses in Dar ElHanoun date from the 1920s.¹ In order to get an appreciation of the development that took place in Palestine since that time, it is worth noting that the city of Tel-Aviv was founded in 1909 as a small neighborhood.

During the 1948 war the majority of Palestinians in what came to be the State of Israel were driven out of their lands. The residents of Dar ElHanoun stayed in their village.² However, after the State of Israel had been founded and Wadi Ara had been annexed to it, the existence of Dar ElHanoun was ignored. The lands owned by Dar ElHanoun residents were defined “agricultural lands”, without much attention to the fact that stone houses had existed on these lands for thirty years. In effect, the State of Israel denied the legality of the houses and infrastructure in the village. This situation has persisted to this day. Similar statutory definitions of “agricultural lands” or “scenic areas” are systematically applied to deny recognition from many Arab villages and neighborhoods.



Dar ElHanoun 2007

Implications of the “unrecognized” status

The lack of state recognition affects every aspect of life in Dar ElHanoun. The construction of new houses and renovation of existing ones are prohibited by the State of Israel. Demolition orders and other legal procedures are pending against most houses in the village. Most sinisterly, possible demolition of their houses is a threat that prosecutes all the residents of Dar ElHanoun. Some houses in Dar ElHanoun have already been demolished. Fines and legal expenses pose heavy economical burdens on the residents.

The people of Dar ElHanoun are considered to be living there illegally, and as illegal dwellers they have no right of receiving state services at their village. In this way, the construction laws and the planning authorities turn innocent people, living on their land, into criminals.

¹ Israeli Knesset – center for research and information: background document prepared for the Internal Affairs and Environment Committee of the Knesset, June 3, 2002.

² An aerial photograph by the center for mapping Israel from September 1956 shows seven stone houses in Dar ElHanoun (photograph number MM/9 7065, approximate scale 1:2500, ×16.2).

This situation distorts public opinion and prevents any legal possibility to improve the physical situation in Dar ElHanoun. The village has no paved road leading to it, no electricity, no sanitation facilities or telephone connection, no health, education or post services. Water in the village comes from a private well. Dar ElHanoun does not appear on the official maps of the State of Israel and receives no services from the local municipality to which the village's lands are annexed – the Menashe municipality. This situation creates daily hardships to the residents. Elderly people, pregnant women and ill people need to get all treatments outside the village, traveling on private vehicles on the bumpy 1km dirt road that leads to it. Dar ElHanoun has no education or recreation facilities for the children and teenagers in the village. Many of the young people in the village have chosen to build their houses elsewhere – not an easy decision considering the great housing shortage in other Arab communities in Israel.

The struggle of Dar ElHanoun for recognition

It is remarkable that despite all these hardships, ten families of around eighty people have remained in their village and continue their struggle for recognition and equality. In the sixty years since the foundation of the State of Israel, the residents of Dar ElHanoun have tried many ways to reach a solution for the problem.

At the statutory level, the residents have appealed to the planning authorities in continuing requests to recognize Dar ElHanoun. Despite the fact that as citizens they are entitled to receive a statutory state plan, the residents prepared, on their own expense, a plan for developing the village. This plan was rejected by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior (see below).

Another proposal was made by the local municipality Menashe and the nearby Arab municipality of Arara. These municipalities agreed to a solution in which Dar ElHanoun would be annexed as a neighborhood to the village of Arara.³ This plan as well was flatly rejected by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior and its planning authorities.

At the legal level, in 2004 the residents together with the Legal Clinic at Tel-Aviv University appealed to the Israeli Supreme Court, in a request that the Israel Electric Corporation would be required to connect Dar ElHanoun to the electricity network. The court rejected this appeal on the grounds that the Ministry of the Interior had refused to approve any statutory plan for the village. Thus, the position of the Ministry of the Interior prevents any services from the village.

Various fines and demolition orders have been issued by the Ministry of the Interior against private houses in Dar ElHanoun and against the short asphalt area that was paved in the Arab-Jewish work camp in 2001. The residents duly reacted in court to these legal suits, and they continue their legal struggle against them.

At the public and political arena, Dar ElHanoun residents have cooperated intensively with various civil organizations in Israel, including The Association of Forty, Taayush, Bimkom, Mossawa, Karame and others. The residents of Dar ElHanoun appeared numerous times before the committee of Internal Affairs of the Israeli Knesset. Consequently, the Knesset committee called the planning authorities to recognize Dar ElHanoun and create a statutory

³ Mr. Ilan Sadeh, head of local municipality Mensahe, summary of meeting on October 6, 2005 with Mr. Jamil Marzouk, head of municipality Arara. A letter sent to the Minister of the Interior on November 2, 2005. It should be noted that Dar ElHanoun had been part of the Arab municipality of Arara until it was annexed (without recognition) to the Menashe regional council, where the majority of inhabitants are Jewish.

plan for the village. The committee also called the government to supply Dar ElHanoun with all necessary facilities, including electricity.⁴ So far, the Israeli Ministry of the Interior has refused to act according to these calls.

In their public and political campaign, the residents have received support from members of Knesset of a wide range of political parties, including Balad, Hadash, Meretz and the Labor party. Many of those MKs visited Dar ElHanoun and expressed their support in its cause. The residents initiated numerous demonstrations and protest vigils calling the Israeli government to recognize the village. Press reports and articles appeared about the village in major Israeli newspapers. A large ad in the *Haaretz* newspaper was published in November 2005, calling the ministry to recognize Dar ElHanoun. Many of these activities were initiated by the Arab-Jewish work camp that was organized in Dar ElHanoun together with Taayush in 2001.⁵ The work camp was a heartwarming experience for the 1000 participants, and its physical results included a small playground for children and a short asphalt area at the entrance to the village, needed to overcome dust and mud problems. But now also this short asphalt area is being threatened by a demolition order.

The position of the Israeli Ministry of the Interior

As mentioned above, the planning authorities in Israel have constantly rejected all plans submitted by the residents of Dar ElHanoun. The official reason given for this rejection is quoted below:

“There is no justification for establishing a new settlement or a new neighborhood in this place. The mere existence of a few houses that were constructed illegally and not according to a general plan cannot form a justification for approving the construction of a whole neighborhood in this place”.⁶

Two facts should be mentioned in relation to this position:

1. Dar ElHanoun dates back to the 1920s, when the State of Israel did not exist. Thus, the references to “a new settlement” and “illegal constructions” are misleading in connection to this village. A detailed analysis of the planning situation in Dar ElHanoun, with alternative plans for recognition, appears in a report of *Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights* association.⁷
2. The Israeli planning authorities have time and again approved state plans for Jewish settlements in the same area. More than 5,000 people now live in these new settlements, which only date back to the late 1970s and the early 1980s.⁸ This suggests

⁴ Conclusions of the committee of the Interior of the 15th Israeli Knesset, June 4, 2002.

⁵ More on the grass-root organization of *Taayush* see at <http://www.taayush.org/new/2004-pn-txt.html>. On the 2001 work camp see www.taayush.org/new/work-camp.html. On the last big demo for Dar ElHanoun, on May 5, 2007, see www.geocities.com/dar_elhanoun/demo-5.5.07-eng.html.

⁶ Dr. Haim Koppelman, the head of the planning authority for the Haifa district, in a letter to the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Eli Yishai, “a plan for Dar ElHanoun (unrecognized village)”, November 20, 2001. Quote from a background document prepared for the Internal Affairs and Environment Committee of the Knesset, June 3, 2002. This position has recently been ratified by the Israeli minister of the Interior, Mr. Roni Bar-On (letter to MK Haim Oron, October 15, 2006).

⁷ Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights, “Dar ElHanoun – a statutory expression of opinion” (in Hebrew): <http://www.bimkom.org/publicationView.asp?publicationId=77>

See *Bimkom*'s website: <http://www.bimkom.org/aboutEng.asp>

⁸ These figures refer to the Jewish town Katzir-Harish in the Haifa district (Israel, 3800 people) and the Jewish settlements in the occupied northern Samaria – Reihan, Shaked, Hinanit, and Tal Menashe (1200 people). Data according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics – http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/?Mival=cw_usr_view_Folder&ID=141 – and the Jewish-Israeli local municipality of Samaria in the occupied West Bank – <http://www.shomron.org.il/Index.asp?ArticleID=186&CategoryID=289&Page=1>.

a policy of preferring new Jewish settlements to old Arab ones, a policy endorsed by most Israeli governments until now.⁹

Officials in the Israeli Ministry of the Interior declared that the “preferred solution” for Dar ElHanoun is “negotiation for eviction”.¹⁰ Obviously, the residents refuse to accept any proposal for so-called “negotiation” that is based on the premise that their village would be destroyed and they would be evicted from their land and the land of their elders.

Conclusion

The refusal of the State of Israel to recognize Dar ElHanoun is a blatant case of discrimination. It is one expression of a general policy that discriminates between Jews and Arabs in Israel/Palestine. We believe that the case of Dar ElHanoun and of the other unrecognized villages in Israel should receive more attention by the international community. For the future of Israel and the Middle East, the international community should not allow the current Israeli government to continue the policies of its formers against its Arab citizens. Dar ElHanoun is a small but significant example for the present state of affairs in Israel, but it also symbolizes the prospects of Jewish-Arab efforts to create a better life in this region.

The International Committee for Dar ElHanoun

To foster this hope and to help Dar ElHanoun in its struggle, we have launched the *International Committee for Dar ElHanoun* (ICDH). The ICDH will allow people in Israel and abroad to help Dar ElHanoun and take part in its campaign. You can contribute to these efforts by subscribing to our mailing list at the webpage:

<http://www.taayush.org/topics/dar-el-hanoun/ICDH-form.html>

Subscribers to this mailing list will receive messages about further activities and updates about the situation in Dar ElHanoun.

For donations please send a check for “Taayush-North” to: POB 45896, Haifa, Israel.

Please mention “Dar ElHanoun” in a cover note.

Please notify [our moderator](#) about your donation, or contact him for further questions about tax-free donations etc.

For further information on Dar ElHanoun and other ways to support our campaign, see our webpage:

www.geocities.com/dar_elhanoun/icdh.html

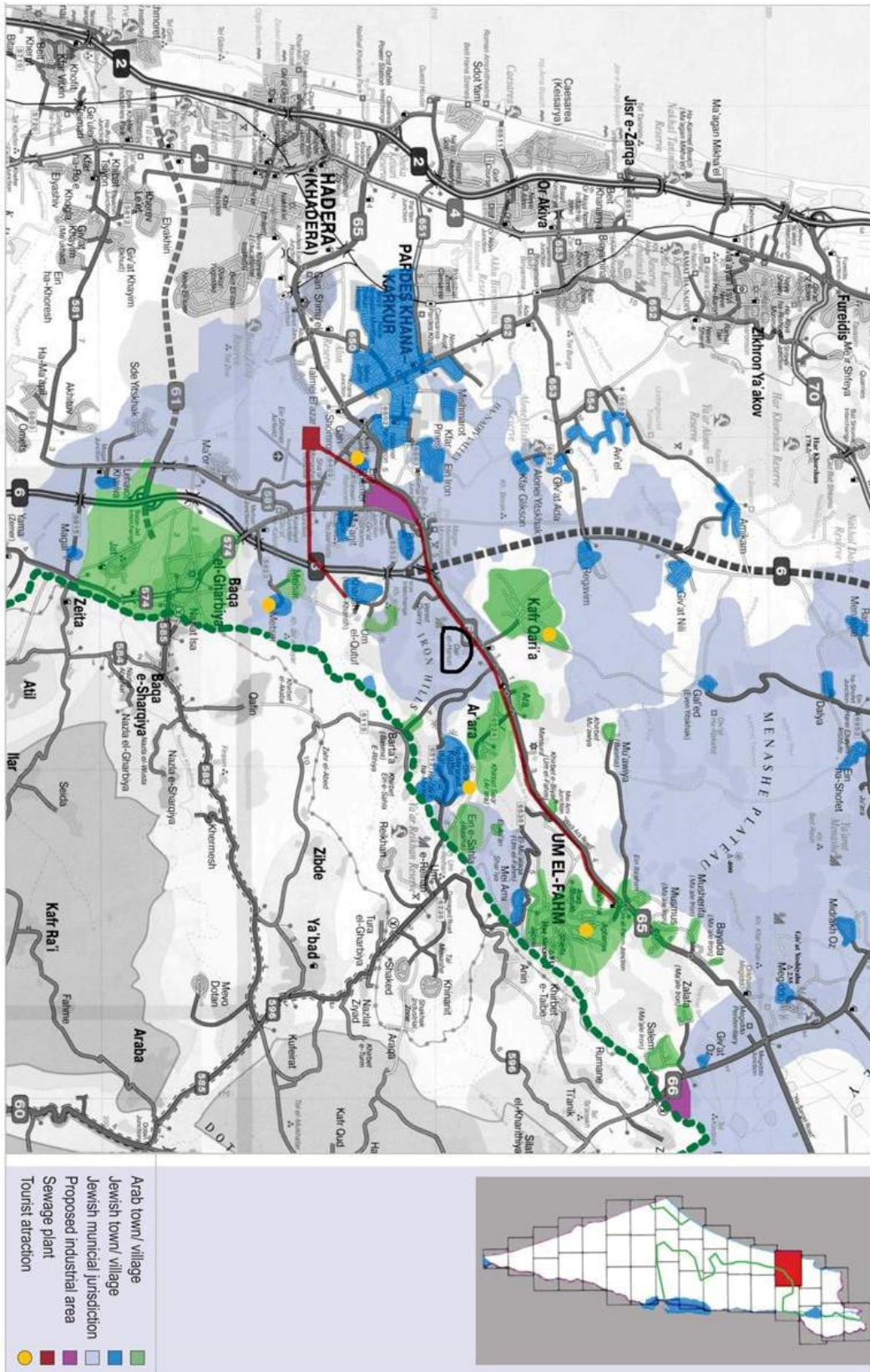
or contact our moderator:

abuaviv@actcom.net.il

⁹ On the planning situation in Arab communities in Israel, see Shmuel Groag and Shuli Hartman, “Planning rights in Arab communities in Israel: an overview”, <http://www.sikkuy.org.il/2003/english03/plan03.html>

¹⁰ A letter to Minister of the Interior by David Yona, head inspection of construction unit, Haifa District, March 17, 2005.

Map 2 – Wadi Ara



Map 3 – Wadi Ara in Israel



Appendix II

Haaretz, 6 May 2007:

Dar al-Hanun has been there 80 years, but state still refuses to recognize it

By Yoav Stern

When the weather's fine, members of the Abu Hilal family like to sit under the 80-year-old charob tree near their home in Dar al-Hanun, near Arara. They have been living there since before Israel was born. However, according to the state, they don't even exist. Not only does the state refuse to recognize the village as such, it is even acting to make it disappear.

The residents are bearing a grudge over a recent court order obtained by the Interior Ministry, forcing them to bulldoze the road they built in their "pirate village." The contested road is a 100-yard stretch that the people of Dar al-Hanun paved six years ago with activists from Ta'ayush, an organization promoting Arab-Jewish partnership. In its ruling to have it removed, the Haifa District Court cited the fact that paving asphalt roads over public grounds was against the law.

"If the state tears up this 100-yard road, I guarantee they'll wind up getting a 500-yard one instead," Mustafa abu Hilal warns. In addition, the state intends to implement another court order and demolish two of the 10 homes of Dar al-Hanun. This, despite the fact the Abu Hilals can prove they own the land on which all 10 of the homes were constructed.

Yesterday, 200 people converged on this sleepy town to protest the state's plans. The demonstrators were carrying signs reading "Let us live in Dar al-Hanun," and "Stop destroying our mutual coexistence." The demonstration attracted local residents as well as Jewish left-wing protesters. "We have no intention of escalating the struggle, but we won't go anywhere," Abu Hilal told *Haaretz*.

The story of Dar al-Hanun is the story of many Arab-Israeli towns in Wadi Ara. The town's name means "house of flowers" in Arabic. Its first home was built in 1925 by Hussein abu Hilal, who as a young man came here from Egypt. He was Mustafa's grandfather. He bought a couple of dunam (approximately 0.25 acres) from the Ottoman authorities, who ruled Palestine at the time.

Hussein abu Hilal at first built a hut on the grounds. Then he built another house from stone, this time for his son. Despite the Dar al-Hanun's long history before the State of Israel, the state never saw fit to recognize it as a village.

Head of the Menashe Local council, Ilan Sade, is willing to transfer the village to his neighboring council of Arara, to be recognized as one of its neighborhoods. The motion was seconded by former interior minister Ophir Paz-Pines, but his successor, Roni Bar On, opposes it. And so, as far as the state is concerned, the village of Dar al-Hanun is "open scenery," not a residential area.

Meanwhile, the state is trying to lure the inhabitants of Dar al-Hanun to leave and move into other Arab towns, so that the surrounding area can be used for future expansion plans. So far, two of Dar al-Hanun's families chose to leave, as well as 15 of its young inhabitants, who set up homes elsewhere.

The Interior Ministry responded by saying that Dar al-Hanun was an "unrecognized" place of residence, comprising illegal structures, which were constructed in the middle of wild scenic lands. "Illegal structures cannot constitute justification for forming new settlements," the ministry said.

Professor Kobi Peter, an activist in Ta'ayush, doubts the state will be able to adhere to this stance for much longer. "Obviously, they will have to reach some sort of settlement which will allow the residents to live on their land," he said.