



BUSTAN: Environmental Justice in Israel's Negev *Sustainable Community Action for Land and People*

BUSTAN BACKGROUNDER: The Bedouin as Worker-Nomad

We should transform the Bedouins into an urban proletariat— in industry, services, construction, and agriculture. 88% of the Israeli population are not farmers, let the Bedouins be like them. Indeed, this will be a radical move which means that the Bedouin would not live on his land with his herds, but would become an urban person who comes home in the afternoon and puts his slippers on. His children would be accustomed to a father who wears trousers, does not carry a Shabaria (traditional Bedouin knife) and does not search for vermin in public. The children would go to school with their hair properly combed. This would be a revolution, but it may be fixed within two generations.¹

-Moshe Dayan to Haaretz, 1963

From Pastoral Nomadism, to Migration in Search of Work

Although the Negev Bedouin continue to be perceived as nomads, today the Bedouin are fully sedentarized, and Dayan's vision of the transformation of the Bedouin into an urbanized, 'civilized,' workforce has come to full realization. Today, most 'Bedouin' prefer to call themselves 'Negev Arabs,' explaining the 'Bedouin' identity is intimately tied in with a pastoral nomadic way of life. Negev Arabs have become a new type of proletariat-nomad, a laborer in search of work.

Whether living in recognized or unrecognized villages, Negev Arabs lack regular job options. For this reason, says *Bustan* member Najib Abu Arabiyeh of the unrecognized village of Wadi Na'am (located on the grounds of Ramat Hovav toxic waste facility), "Most Bedouin men must travel immense distances, and pay a high proportion of their paychecks, to reach temp-jobs of 2 or 3 days in the far reaches of the country. I myself just traveled hours to Haifa simply to work a few hours, and in the past I had to commute

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¹*Ha'aretz*, July 31, 1963; cited in Shamir, Ronen, "Suspended in Space: Bedouins Under the Law of Israel," p.231; *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1996

....as the government has confiscated more than 60% of previously Bedouin grazing lands for military uses, it has concentrated the Bedouin in a small reservation-like area called the 'Siyag' (fence), and located the most toxic of Israel's industrial infrastructure and waste adjacent to Bedouin villages. In turn, the unrecognized villages – which lack consistent municipal trash-pick-up – are depicted as the dump-yards of the desert.

confiscated more than 60% of previously Bedouin grazing lands for military uses, it has concentrated the Bedouin in a small reservation-like area called the 'Siyag' (fence). At the same time, over the years Israel has located the most toxic of Israel's industrial infrastructure and waste adjacent to Bedouin villages. The Bedouin share some 2.5 % of the Negev with Israel's nuclear reactors, 22 agro and petrochemical factories, an oil terminal, closed military zones, quarries, a toxic waste incinerator, cell towers, a power plant, several airports, a prison, and 2 rivers of open sewage. Due to constant exposure to toxicity and radiation, the risk of cancer for residents in this entire area is significantly higher than the rest of the country, according to the a 2004 preliminary Israeli Ministry of Health study.² Ironically, the government manages to depict the unrecognized villages – which lack consistent municipal trash-pick-up – as environmental hazards, as

many kilometers to reach my jobs in the Dead Sea and in Dimona.”

Furthermore, the two chief stable sources of employment for Negev Arabs – the IDF and Ramat Hovav toxic waste facility – involve risking one's life for one's livelihood. Both types of employment directly challenge the basis of Bedouin culture. Employment in the IDF as Border Policemen or soldiers not only pits Negev Arab-Palestinians against West Bank and Gaza Palestinians – some of which are members of their own family – it entails guarding borders and reinforcing movement restrictions which are intrinsically constrictive of the nomadic way of life. And employment in the 22 agro- and petrochemical factories and toxic waste incinerator of Ramat Hovav involves processing some of the most destructive substances known to humankind, toxins proven to poison Bedouin agriculture and herds on repeated occasions since the creation of Ramat Hovav.

Meanwhile, as the government has

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²Sarov, Batia, and peers at Ben Gurion University: "Major congenital malformations and residential proximity to a regional industrial park including a national toxic waste site: An ecological study;" *Environmental Health: A Global Access Science Source* 2006, 5:8; Bentov *et al.*, licensee BioMed Central Ltd.

the dump-yards of the desert.³ Note that re-use and conservation was once at the basis of the Bedouin lifestyle, and when trash was left behind, it bio-degraded; non-biodegradable substances were only introduced in Negev Arab communities in the past few decades.

Further, as a result of extremely high rates of unemployment and crime in Bedouin communities, Negev Arabs have come to develop a two-tiered reputation for dependence on State welfare, and criminalism. The criminal image demeans the Bedouins' decades of service to the State – service which the majority now regret – in the IDF. These images also fail to take into account the State's severe repression of Bedouin efforts to engage in self-subsistence agriculture, via campaigns of crop destruction⁴ and heavy-handed restrictions of grazing.⁵ All of these images contribute to racist conceptions of Bedouin as primitives who have not yet adjusted to modern civilization.

Above all, these images serve to distract Israeli citizens from the severe dearth of income-generating activities (with dignity) available to Negev Arabs. For instance, according to *Bustan* analysis, the much-touted introduction of 'clean' high-tech industry in the Negev has utterly failed to include the Bedouin. Intel, as listed on Ben Gurion University's Industries Index does not employ a single Bedouin. Ultimately, no more than 30% of Bedouin have permanent jobs. An estimated 25% of the population occupies a small niche as agricultural contractors with modern mechanical equipment; as owners of trucks, utility vehicles, buses and cabs, or as salaried employees of transportation companies; and as contractors for development work, involving the use of heavy mechanical equipment.⁶

The Means to the Success of Dayan's 'Dream'

A brief overview of Israeli sedentarization policy can help us to understand how the Bedouin came to lose their self-defined pastoral 'Bedouinness,' and to transform rapidly into the 'Bedouin laborer' who migrates in search of subsistence. An article written in the late 1970's reveals a widespread Jewish Israeli attitude towards the Bedouin, to this day:

Illegal building spreads with alacrity; scores of structures are erected regardless plan or order...In several instances the herdsmen violently refused to remove their herds claiming that the field had belonged to their forefathers....The disregard for the law was condoned in light of the important function that the Bedouin fulfill in the regional employment system....This gave rise to various charges and counter charges among factions because the price (of cheap Arab labor) had to be paid for by public assets....The sensitivity to international coverage of the destruction of an Arab house tends to encourage a policy of light-handedness. The Bedouin take advantage of these

³Re-use and conservation was once at the basis of the Bedouin lifestyle, and when trash was left behind, it bio-degraded. Non-biodegradable substances were only introduced in Negev Arab communities in the past few decades.

⁴See:
Brous, Devorah: "Not Greening, but Weeding, the Negev;" Haaretz, March 3, 2006
and:
Hasson, Nir: "Bedouin to Sue ILA for Crop Destruction;" Haaretz, March 22, 2004

⁵Falah, Ghazi: "How Israel Controls the Bedouin in Israel;" *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.14, No. 2; pp. 35-51

⁶Ben-David, Yosef: "The Bedouin in Israel;" Israeli Foreign Ministry, 2006

limitations....⁷

In the year prior to the creation of the State of Israel, roughly 80,000 Bedouin from 96 different tribes lived in the region. After the 1948 war, the new State of Israel declared most of the Naqab/Negev a closed military zone, designated 85% of the Naqab/Negev "State Land," and imposed a military administration over the region. All Bedouin habitation on the newly declared "State Land" was retroactively termed "illegal," and all Bedouin villages on "State Land" were thenceforth "unrecognized."

By the end of 1948, the Naqab/Negev Bedouin were restricted to approximately 10% of the area previously occupied, and following a campaign of transfers throughout 1951, fewer than 13,000 inhabitants remained. In order to justify the expulsion of the thousands of Bedouin who remained within the borders of the new state in 1948, the new government failed to issue the Bedouin identity cards until 1952.

The government forced the remaining Bedouin tribes into a triangular "Bedouin Reserve" near Beer Sheva (the Siyag - 'Fence' - reservation), between Dimona, Arad and Beer Sheva. The government then declared the reservations closed, and enabled the military governor to impose strict movement restrictions. Negev Arabs were allowed to leave these zones only with special permits, and as a result, the Bedouin were unable to conduct trade in Beer Sheva or to freely graze their animals. In 1949, the new state's establishment of the border with Jordan put an end to the Bedouins' traditional migration patterns. Each time their lands were carved up, the Bedouin, whose tradition relied on transience and whose identity was intrinsically bound up with nomadism, were presented with a quandary: how to defend their turf by establishing land claims, and at the same time preserve their culture as nomadic pastoralists and maintain their range.

After the last transfer campaigns of the early 1950's, the government established seven legal townships and encouraged migration from the "unrecognized" outlying settlements. Throughout the 1970's, the government promised all Bedouin who agreed to concentrate in these legal villages the same services promised to every other citizen. In contrast, the government made clear, those Bedouin who refused to move would receive no electricity, no water utilities, and scant education and health services. Furthermore, these 'trespassers' would live under the continual threat of the demolition of their communities.

In many cases the government towns failed to offer promised services. Even worse, plans for the towns failed to include business districts. As Harvey Lithwick, of the Naqab/Negev Center for Regional Development, reasons, "the major failure was a lack of an economic rationale for the towns....unable to find

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⁷ Kressel, Gideon M., "Changes in Employment and Social Accommodations of Bedouin Settling in an Israeli Town," *The Changing Bedouin*, pp. 149-51; Transaction Books, date unknown

jobs, a community of angry young men grew up, blaming the State...."⁸

Tensions between these villages and the lush Jewish suburbs around them have grown. To illustrate, according to government statistics, at the start of the new millennium, the Negev Arab government town Tel Sheva ranked 3rd lowest in the government's official ranking of the socioeconomic status of towns in Israel. In contrast, Tel Sheva's neighbor, the Jewish town of Omer, ranked 201st out of 204 towns.⁹ Despite the fact that Omer should be the most livable town in Israel, it has the highest rate of car theft in the country.

As illustrated by the 70's text cited above, the government uses the criminal image of the Bedouin to its advantage when it refers to the "unplanned and illicit scatter" of Bedouin homes. In mainstream Israeli society, many see Bedouin villages as the settlements of lawless encroachers pitching their tents on random hilltops, without regard for planning law or Israeli development needs. On the one hand, the Bedouin continue to be perceived as intrinsically identity-bound to the desert, and historically rooted in the land; on the other, the Bedouin are seen as rootless nomads with no loyalty to any state, and whose land claims will never be recognized. Even as many Jewish Israelis harbor romantic oriental images of Bedouin as inseparable from their land, they simultaneously perceive the Bedouin as intruders on the land on which they were born.

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Living and Working in the Midst of Ramat Hovav

The example of the village of Wadi el-Na'am – Bustan's center of activity for several years – is an extreme one, and yet one that highlights the intersection between workers' rights, industrial pollution, and land expropriation, as faced by all Bedouin citizens of Israel.

Wadi el-Na'am is the only unrecognized village that has agreed to move from their current location, with proper compensation in the form of suitable land rights. In addition to the Ramat Hovav industrial zone, the unrecognized Bedouin village of Wadi el Na'am is surrounded by an I.D.F. munitions factory and military fire zone, the Efrat Oil Terminal (an oil-storage site), the Israel Electric Company

and Makorot (the national water carrier site). The example of the village of Wadi el-Na'am -- Bustan's center of activity for several years -- is an extreme one, and yet one that highlights the intersection between workers' rights, industrial pollution, and land expropriation, as faced by all Bedouin citizens of Israel.

⁸ Lithwick, Harvey, "An Urban Development Strategy for the Naqab/Negev's Bedouin Community," p.3; Naqab/Negev Center for Regional Development and The Center for Bedouin Studies and Development, August 2000

⁹ Ibid, Lithwick, p.46

A Wadi el-Na'am Timeline

In 1951, like all other Negev Bedouin tribes, the El Azzazme are forcibly displaced from their land holdings to the "Siyag" (fence) area between Arad, Dimona and Beer Sheva, in several stages. Members of the Negev's `Azazmeh tribe, including women and children, suffer a massacre at the hands of "Unit 101."¹⁰ About half of the tribe is forcibly settled in the area now known as Wadi el Na'am.

In 1979 Ramat Hovav, Israel's hazardous waste disposal facility – the largest toxic waste incinerator in the Middle East and the only facility of its kind in a Desert location -- is built on the grounds of the unrecognized village of Wadi el Na'am. The site is selected for its 'isolation' (from Jewish settlements) and favorable wind conditions in the area. The area is also perceived to be nearly invulnerable to leakage into the water table. Most of the men of Wadi el-Na'am seek employment at the new facility. Over the years, a great number of Wadi el'Na'am residents work within the Ramat Hovav Industrial Area.

Since the Ramat Hovav toxic waste facility is privately run, without regulation by the government, profit is placed above the needs of citizens. Waste does not undergo any pre-treatment before transport to the site. Storage facilities are weak, and barrels often rust. Toxic residues go unlabelled. The chemical composition of the substances disposed therein is hardly monitored. Reactive materials are stored near containers of cyanide. Located in the Desert, the facility lacks proper water access to sufficiently treat its waste (in all other regions of the world, such plants are located near rivers or coasts). Despite the area's perceived invulnerability, cracks are found in the rock beneath Ramat Hovav.

In 1980, an outburst of fire at Ramat Hovav forces the evacuation of workers from the industrial plants and from a nearby military compound. An explosion at the Spectrum plant, which produces chemical materials, results in the death of one worker and wounding of another. As a result, the Ministry of Health orders the closure of the site.

Only a year later, Ramat Hovav catches fire again, wafting a toxic cloud over Wadi el Na'am, Beer Sheva, and surrounding villages. The Ministry of Health seeks an order to close the facility. Instead, an inter-ministerial committee determines that the site has lost control of its charge because of low profits. The committee deems that the company should charge more for disposing of the waste and decides to put the site under the management of a government corporation.

On February 14th, 1985, 3 donkeys die after drinking from a wadi (river valley) near Ramat-Hovav. One month later, on the 12th, a military convoy passing the site comes across a stinking fog of poisonous gas. The soldiers become dizzy and suffer nausea and heartburn. Some of them require medical treatment.

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¹⁰Masalha, Nur: Land Without a People, 1997

A year later, on the 23rd of November, the head of the Eshkol Regional Council complains about a mishap in the Ramat Hovav drainage pipe that leads to the spraying area. 2,500 m³ per day are poured into the Sekher stream and from there to the Besor stream, polluting the reservoir. Nineteen days later, an inspector of the N.P.S. complains about the overflow of the evaporation pools of Ramat Hovav's Machteshim factory. After a window of 4 years and a 6 million dollar investment, the government begins to run Ramat Hovav. In the next few years, the amount of toxic waste arriving at the site reaches as high as 40,000 tons, estimated to be only half of the toxic waste in Israel at the time. (At the time, no law requires that toxic waste be sent to Ramat Hovav at all.)¹¹

In 1988, Ramat Hovav reaches a crisis-point. *February*: On the 4th, a fire at Ramat Hovav bursts out, causing poisonous smoke to drift southwards. Two days later, the press reports that two female soldiers are hospitalized following the spread of poisonous gas from a fire within the dumping site. *August*: Mid-month, the press widely reports headaches, dizziness, nausea of soldiers serving in a military base near Ramat-Hovav; on the 13th, the media discloses a military document prohibiting the stationing of soldiers on the site for three successive years. A few months later, little has changed for the better at Ramat Hovav, but the awareness of the problem has reached a high pitch. *November*: On the 19th, workers from Ramat Hovav are hospitalized. *December*: At the start of the month, the District Engineer of the Ministry of Health informs the Machteshim plant that it is infringing upon the conditions of its business license by channeling its drainage to the river valley instead of transporting it to the hazardous materials dumping site. Two days later, on the 7th, the press reports complaints from the Bedouin of the Ramat-Hovav area: the hazardous waste has caused disappearance of sexual desire. By the end of the year, the 23rd, the Ministry of Interior complains to the Machteshim plant about the channeling of waste to the wadi and the concentration of barrels of waste in the plant's courtyard.

The next year, Ramat Hovav Industrial Council is formed to oversee and incorporate all factories involved in waste disposal on the grounds of Ramat Hovav. In February, outcrops of the Eocene chalk under Ramat Hovav show fractures which, if present also in the buried Eocene rocks, may serve as passages for quick leakage of the waste liquids into the underlying rocks. On the 3rd of December, the press reports the death of 40 sheep from drinking the drainage of Ramat Hovav's Machteshim plant. In addition to the death of the sheep, the shepherd and his daughter are hospitalized.

In 1990, the government passes a law requiring that all toxic wastes be sent to Ramat Hovav. A year later, Ramat Hovav cannot handle the increased load, and the government declares the site criminally negligent.

In 1993, the forced removals and containment of Bedouin to the Siyag continue to take place, when members of the Al-Tukhi clan are transferred from their original location before 1948, Al-Halassa (today known as Halutza/Revivim area), to join the rest of the Al-Azzazme tribe next to Ramat Hovav. The Abu-Qardud and Zaanun families from Mount Negev are also forcibly removed to Ramat Hovav at the end of August. The entire El Azzazme tribe begins another stage of resistance against another forced relocation: this time into the urban township Segev Shalom.

The next year, after nearly a half-century under Israeli rule, the unrecognized villages finally 'receive' their first health clinic, in the village of Algrin. Representatives of the community of Wadi el-Na'am began to take action towards building a clinic in their village.

¹¹ According to Alon Tal, Director of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, the government argues that transport to the site should be free, so as to concentrate as much waste in one place as possible. Green organizations argue that the price for processing the waste should be high, as should be the cost of getting caught for violating environmental protections, so as to encourage companies to invest in green processing technologies and in proper treatment at the waste source.

In 1997, the government designates Ramat Hovav the first site for dangerous refuse in Israel. Later that year, an explosion occurs in tin barrels storing organo-phosphorus pesticides. Residents within a 1 km radius must evacuate. The villages Wadi el Na'am, Wadi el Amshash, and Bir Hadaj, including around 7,000-8,000 residents, suffer daily danger to their health simply by living near the site.

That spring, a fire in Ramat Hovav's dumps causes the explosion of highly toxic "Cutnion" and PCB's. Soon after, Wadi el-Na'am Sheikh Labad Abu Afash approaches the director of the Southern district of General Health Fund, Mr. Peretz Goza, requesting on behalf of the local committee that a clinic be opened next to Wadi el Na'am's school. United Health Fund places a trailer in the village of Wadi el Na'am, to serve as a clinic. Later, the General Health Fund brings in a similar trailer. Consequently, at a meeting between representatives of the community and Mr. Ari Lavi from General Health Fund, Mr Lavi announces that the Fund is waiting for an official okay to run the clinic. Instead, two demolition orders are issued for the trailers and they are removed from the site.

In 1998, government health statistics concerning the health status of the Bedouin reveals that 9.6% of Bedouin children are hospitalized during the first year of their life and 50% of Bedouin women do not receive pre-natal care. The Bedouin infant mortality rate is one of the highest in the world, at 17 per 1000. A High Court Appeal Regarding Medical Rights of Bedouin in Unrecognized Villages is victorious. Conflicts between the Bedouin Administration and the Health Ministry prevent implementation of the decision.

In 1999, the government finds that in 23 cases, toluene emissions levels from Bromine Compounds in Ramat Hovav deviate drastically from accepted standards. The IDF vacates Manos camp, two km north of Ramat Hovav, due to soldiers' complaints regarding toxic odors. That April, the Ministry of Health passes a resolution approving the establishment of a medical clinic at Wadi el Na'am. The Ministry agrees to provide funding for these services, and transportation to neighboring recognized townships with clinic services for Bedouin families until the clinics are built.¹²

In January of 2000, after the High Court grants the Ministry of Health permission to build 6 clinics in unrecognized villages in the Negev, clinics are established in Dreijatt, and in Abu Qweidar, but not in Wadi el Na'am, the largest of the three villages included in the 1998 High Court Appeal.

In October 2000, with the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, Arab citizens all over Israel engage in solidarity protests with their fellow Palestinians. Poorly prepared Israeli security forces kill 13 Arab citizens of Israel during demonstrations. The same month, yet another fire breaks out at Ramat Hovav's barrel storage area. The fire department is unable to reach the fire due to the improper size of the barrels and general lack of adherence to fire code.

The Clinic at Wadi el'Na'am

One month later, *Bustan* forms a coalition of NGO's and volunteers of many backgrounds and

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¹²Despite a Supreme Court ruling that the Ministry of Health must provide a timetable within 60 days for the establishment of Mother & Child clinics, the Ministry of Health fails to abide by the Court's ruling to build all the clinics or even provide a timetable for the clinic at Wadi el Na'am.

traditions to construct the Wadi el Na'am Medical Clinic for Ramat Hovav workers and for women who lack access to the regional kupa cholim while their husbands are at work. The clinic initiative aims to push past inter-ministerial conflicts in the way of progress, to highlight the most unrecognized of unrecognized villages, and to create a fact on the ground that can draw attention to the wider issue of environmental racism in the Negev.

In March of the next year, Ramat Hovav receives an administrative closure order due to an explosion in a container of organic waste which caught fire. At the same time, Al-Quds al-Arabi reports that Israeli companies are engaging in illegal dumping of toxic waste to avoid the cost of treatment and transport to Ramat Hovav.

At the start of the millennium, Ramat Hovav's principle plant, the Machteshim Chemical Works, Ltd., receives numerous awards and certificates for environmental management.

While it costs about \$65 to hire a driver to dump a five-ton truck of waste in the West Bank, to dispose of the same volume at *Ramat Hovav* costs more than \$11,000. By the end of the year, Ramat Hovav reports that only 18-19% of the toxic waste that should be delivered to the site ever arrives. The rest is dumped illegally throughout the West Bank, Gaza and Israel. In the past several years, Ramat Hovav's principle plant, the Machteshim Chemical Works, Ltd., has received numerous awards and certificates for environmental management.¹³

Throughout the year, *Bustan* leads a unique partnership in developing plans to build a health clinic for workers and their families in Wadi el Na'am, using healthy, sustainable, inexpensive materials readily at hand. *Bustan* engages in months of consultation and networking to select leading urban planners, engineers, environmental architects, doctors and activists, from Kibbutz Samar, Lotan and Ketura and the Ein Gedi Field School. That summer, the pace picks up in Wadi el Na'am village. Four houses are destroyed in July, and 40 people become homeless. Eight Wadi el Na'am houses are demolished in October, and 110 people became homeless. Another house in Wadi el Na'am is demolished in December.

On January 22nd, 2003, the Ministry of Environment submits a document attesting that 75% of waste does not undergo purification prior to reaching Ramat Hovav's oxygenation pools. On November 4th, a fire erupts at Ramat Hovav's Bromine Compounds plant, causing an evacuation of the factory workers. Despite the ongoing problem, no sound emergency measures exist to notify the villagers of the need to evacuate after a fire.

In April of 2003, *Bustan* gathers a team of 400 experts and volunteers to physically build the Wadi el Na'am clinic with the community over 2 weeks. A series of hands-on workshops teaching techniques for

¹³From the Ramat Hovav website: "For safety and quality of the environment: ISO-14001 - the prestigious International Standard of Environmental Quality Management. Makhteshim was one of the first companies in Israel, and among the first 1,000 organizations in the world, to receive ISO-14001 Certification. The Environment Shield for the Industry of the Ministry of the Environment and Israel Manufacturers Association was awarded to Makhteshim twice. Makhteshim later won the "Diligent Plant" award, following her consistent and unrelenting efforts to preserve the environment. The "Yoseftal" Safety Award for the highest rating of 7 safety shields. Israeli Standard No. 4481 for the Company's certified safety and sanitation systems. For general quality: Israel Standard Institute's Product Quality standard: ISO 9000 - Israel's Standard Institute's international standard for production quality management. The Golden Badge - Israel's Standard Institute's prestigious badge awarded to organizations that have accumulated five quality tags - confirming that their products and management system comply with the highest quality standards. For nurturing the environmental and beautifying the surroundings: The Council for Beautiful Israel's awards: "The Beauty Banner", "The Golden Star", and "Outstanding Plant of the Decade"

building with sustainable materials are held followed by human rights awareness sessions detailing the challenges faced by Bedouin in Unrecognized Villages and Recognized Townships. The clinic, replete with solar panels, a garden, and a drip-water collection system, is completed in two weeks. At the end of the work-camp, village Sheikh, *Bustan* member and Machteshim chemical plant worker Haj Ibrahim Abu-Afash invites the builders to a chafla (feast) in honor of the clinic and the expected birth of his last child. In the weeks and month following, *Bustan* collects medical supplies and furniture to stock the clinic.

In Wadi el Na'am, the majority of residents are members of the General Health Fund, but the Fund does not agree to operate in Wadi el Na'am. The Association of Civil Rights in Israel files a High-Court Appeal over-ruling the Interior Ministry's refusal to provide a permit for the building of a health clinic, granting the Ministry of Health the right to build a medical clinic at Wadi el Na'am. The Kupat Cholim Klalit, a Health Fund, is designated to take over the clinic.¹⁴

The courts delay handing down a final verdict clearing up inter-ministerial conflicts concerning the provision of a health clinic at Wadi el Na'am, for over 5 years. The plans for forming a clinic on paper are jammed in an entire machine of bureaucratic bodies. Throughout May of 2004, *Bustan* works with Bedouin partners from Soroka Hospital in Beer Sheva and from Wadi Naam, as well as Physicians for Human Rights, to create a team of doctors to staff the clinic. A team of government doctors is established; however, the government eventually informs Wadi el Na'am and *Bustan* that it is *unwilling to risk the health of their doctors* by stationing them so close to Ramat Hovav. Other doctors simply refuse to work in a building denied a permit.

The next month, the Ministry of Health releases Ben Gurion University Professor Batia Sarov's research findings explicating the health problems in a 20km vicinity of Ramat Hovav. The study, funded in large part by Ramat Hovav, finds higher rates of cancer and

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mortality for the 350,000 people in the area, amounting to a public health crisis. The preliminary study, released prematurely to the media before final review, is publically discredited. However its final conclusions – that Bedouin and Jewish residents near Ramat Hovav are significantly more susceptible than the rest of the population to miscarriages, severe birth defects, and respiratory diseases – are accepted several months later. *Bustan's* friend and partner, Ibrahim Abu-Afash informs a team of *Bustan* volunteers that his wife has miscarried their last child.

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In October of 2004, the construction of a so-called Israel Defense Forces 'Boot Camp City' under the jurisdiction of the Ramat Hovav Regional Council is approved following a tour by Deputy Minister of Defense Ze'ev Boim at the Ramat Hovav industrial zone. One month later, on the 28th of November, the Israel government unanimously approves a decision to abate

¹⁴The proposed clinic location is a point of contention with the Planning and Building Committee, the Bedouin villagers reject the proposed location, fearing this is an attempt to transfer them into a southern neighborhood of the Planned Township, Segev Shalom 10km from Ramat Hovav. The villagers of Wadi el Na'am propose three alternative locations to the Israel Lands Authority, as they do not want to live inside a township. All locations are rejected.

pollution from the industrial zone of Ramat Hovav.¹⁵

Environment Ministry data shows that from 2000-2005, the state awarded over NIS 500 million in grants to factories emitting excess pollutants (i.e. beyond their business permits), particularly Teva Pharmaceuticals (Israel's largest drug company) at Ramat Hovav.¹⁶ In June 2006, in an early manifestation of the Law for the Encouragement of Capital Investments (which offers very large tax exemptions to corporations, including exemption from taxes on dividends) Teva considers building a new \$160 million plant in the Negev. Industry sources tell Haaretz that Teva is considering building a factory in either Ramat Hovav or Mishor Rotem in the Negev. However, it is also considering various locations overseas.

Throughout the spring of 2006, *Bustan* surveys the health impacts of industrial infrastructure on workers and their families. Returning to Wadi el-Na'am for a regular field visit, *Bustan* finds that Sheikh Haj Ibrahim has just retired after decades at the Machtshim chemical plant. That day, several members of Najib's family have visited the clinic. Little has changed in terms of the health picture in Wadi el-Na'am. However, Najib comments, "Our health is still bad, and getting worse, but these things take time. Three years ago, we had no hope that anyone would take real note of us. Before, no one knew we existed. We were the most unrecognized of the unrecognized villages. Today, Wadi Na'am is internationally known and visited by people from all over the world. We are the most recognized of both the recognized and unrecognized villages in the Negev."

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**-Najib Abu Arabiyeh,
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¹⁵According to Alon Tal, in *Pollution in a Promised Land* (University of California Press, 2002), as of 2005, the Ramat Hovav Industrial Council is scheduled to begin to dry out and remediate the joint evaporation pond area, which spans some 150 hectares and constitutes a source of stench and air pollution, with completion scheduled for 2012. By June 30, 2006, individual industrial plants in Ramat Hovav are to be responsible for treating their own wastes rather than transferring them to join facilities. The plants are also to be required to treat excessive air pollutant emissions. According to the action plan, proposed by the Ministry of the Environment, pollutant emissions are to be gradually reduced until full cessation in 2007.

¹⁶Research by the Israel Union of Environmental Defense