

The Bedouin Encampment of Khan Al-Ahmar (Part Two)

by Hugh Fitzgerald



But aren't the Bedouin being relocated "far away," as so many seem to think? **No, they will be moving less than four miles away**, to become a part of the Arab village of Abu Dis. The Bedouins being moved will have permanent, solid homes built by the Israelis, given to them for free. They will for the first time in their lives have full access to running water and electricity. A real schoolhouse has been built for their children, to replace the mud-and-tire "school" they had at Khan al-Ahmar. They are being moved, as Naomi Linder Khan has written, "into an all-expenses-paid, fully developed plot of land and paid tens of thousands of dollars by the state to move in. In fact, several years ago, another branch of the Jahalin clan agreed to precisely this treatment and voluntarily relocated; the families that remained in Khan al Ahmar agreed to move as well, but were bullied or patronized by their 'representatives' into retracting their consent and have been dragged through Israel's courts ever since."

But what will happen to the shepherds and their sheep? Won't this spell the end of a hallowed way of life?

In fact, **80% of the residents of Khan al Ahmar abandoned shepherding long ago, and now are employed in Ma'ale Adumim, Kfar Adumim and other Israeli communities** in the area – and have been for many years. As Naomi Linder Kahn has noted, "shepherding is a hobby for most, a means of supplementing income and maintaining their connection to Bedouin folklore. The Bedouin of Khan al Ahmar, like Bedouin tribes throughout the Middle East, abandoned their nomadic existence generations

ago; the structures (as opposed to tents) at Khan al Ahmar are a very good indication of this trend."

They will, of course, still have their jobs in Israel, earning wages far above what they would make in the "Palestinian" parts of the West Bank. Not only that, but the Israeli government has committed itself to giving tens of thousands of dollars to these Bedouin families. Remember that all these brand-new houses, with electricity and water, this brand-new school that replaces a mud-and-tire school, are being given to the Bedouin for agreeing to move off of land that was never owned by them in the first place. This is not an example of an Israeli "threat to the two-state solution," much less of a "war crime" (but for the predictable ill-informed outrage, see Theresa May, the E.U., the ICC, Amnesty International, etc.). Rather, it's an example of a hugely generous settlement that legally Israel had no obligation to make to these squatters.

And what of the charge that Israel rushed this decision through, without giving the Bedouin a chance to adequately make their case? In fact, **the litigation over Khan al-Ahmar has been going on for ten years**. During that time the Israeli government offered six different sites to which the Bedouin could be relocated. They rejected all six, though some admitted they wanted to accept the offer, but their P.A. handlers insisted that they remain in Khan al-Ahmar, to be exploited for propaganda effect.

When they made their last offer of relocation, the Israelis said that, in case of rejection, the Bedouin would be moved four miles down the road, to the outskirts of Abu Dis, the nearest Arab village. There was again an appeal by the lawyers for the Bedouin to halt the relocation. Finally, after ten years of hearings, on September 5, 2018, the Israeli Supreme Court finally said that the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar could proceed.

The lawyers for the Bedouins argued that they did not have any

of the necessary permits to build because they knew they would not be granted them, so why should they have even bothered to apply? They claimed that no Arabs in the West Bank had ever been granted building permits. It turns out that the State of Israel has authorized 14,000 separate building permits in the Arab sector during the very years when Khan al-Ahmar was submitting petitions to the Supreme Court.

It will be fascinating to see – if we are somehow allowed to – how these Bedouin react to their new homes, with electricity, water, and many modern conveniences that the Palestinian Authority never even tried to provide. Behind closed doors they will be flabbergasted at the creature comforts that are now theirs. That is how will they react when the cameras are not on them, and they are not being coached by Mahmoud Abbas' men to exhibit feigned sadness, and a desperate longing for their former homes. It will be fascinating, too, to observe how the world's media manage to cover this spanking-new village with its brand-new solid houses (no tents, no shacks) and schoolhouse, turning a story that shows Israel's generosity into one that will, of course, be used to illustrate its unending villainy.

First published in