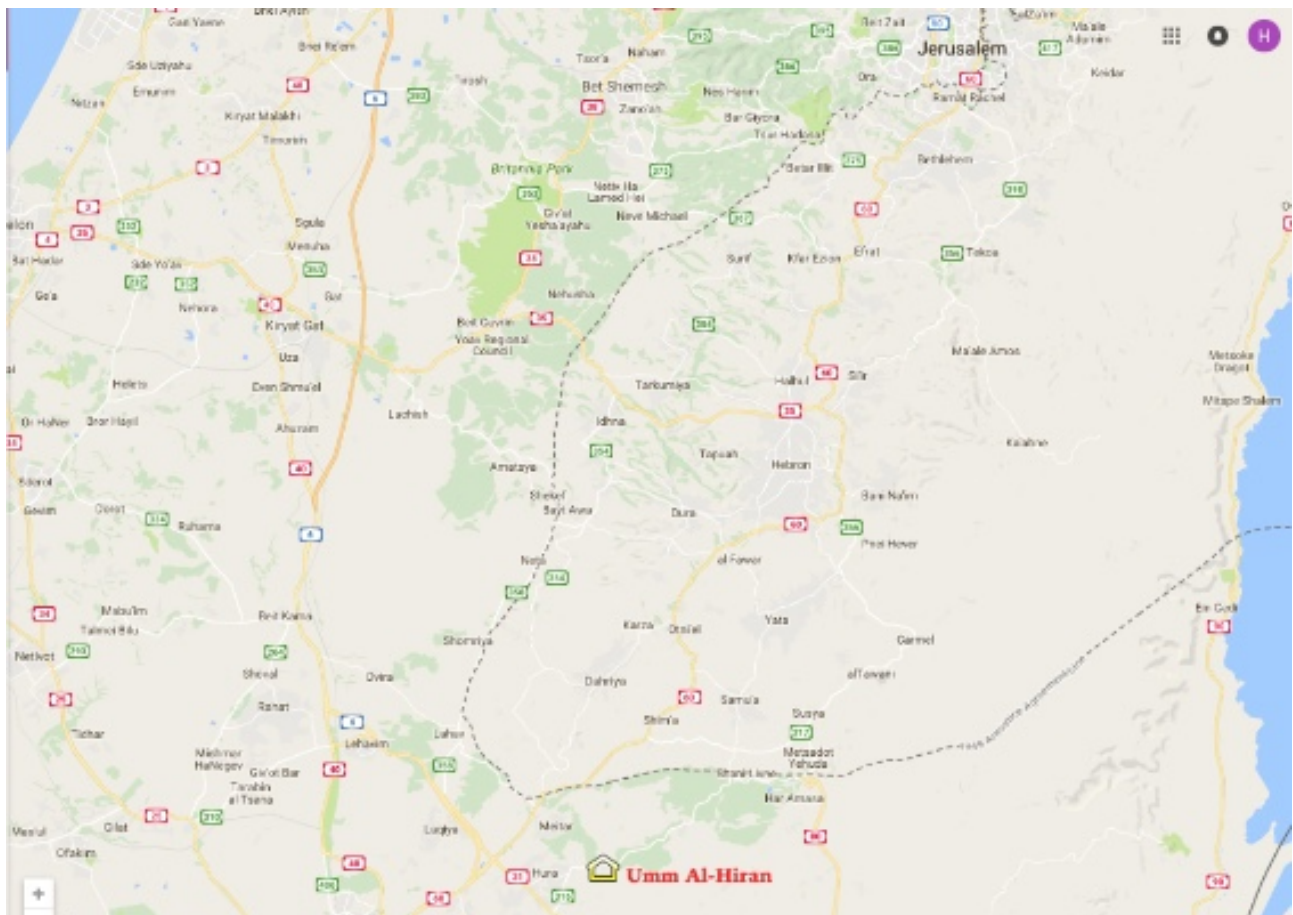**24.01.2017**

A Tale of two Villages: Umm al-Hiran and Amona

Umm al-Hiran

Umm al-Hiran is one of dozens of so-called 'unrecognized villages' in Israel's south, in which approximately 100,000 **Bedouin citizens of Israel** live without electricity, water or the other basic services the state should provide. It is located in the Wadi Atir area of the Negev desert, eight kilometres north-east of the Bedouin township of Hura. It is part of the same valley as Susiya, a Palestinian village in the West Bank also at risk of demolition. In 2015 the population of the village was just over 1,000, having grown from around 200 in 1956 when it was first established.

The people of of Umm al-Hiran are part of the Abu al Qi'an tribe, originally from Khirbet Zubaleh. In 1956, the Israeli military government forcibly moved the Qi'an family to the location where they live today. (Their former land was given to Kibbutz Shoval as agricultural land.) From this point onwards, they built houses from stone and other materials, paved roads, built wells and farmed the surrounding land. Before their arrival, says Sheikh Farhoud Abu al Qi'an, "It was a desert, with no roads, water, houses or services." Despite the fact that the Qi'an family was settled in its current location by the state itself, its homes have never been connected to the electricity or water grids.

In 2001 the state put forward a proposal to build a new town, Hiran, for Jewish residents on the site of the village. The proposal would relocate the Bedouins of Umm al-Hiran to the Bedouin township of Hura, one of seven Bedouin townships in the Negev, all of which are at the bottom of the country's socio-economic index. These townships are specifically designated towns intended to 'contain' expelled Bedouins. They are characterised by overcrowding, a lack of adequate services and the highest percentage of unemployment and poverty in Israel.

In 2004, the state filed lawsuits to evacuate the villagers on the basis that they were trespassers who were squatting illegally. The court. however, ruled that the villagers were, legally, 'permanent residents', but at the same time concluded that because the land was held from the state free of charge, their residency could be revoked at any time.

The plan to relocate the Bedouin villagers and build the new township was revived in 2015. Two legal proceedings were started against the villagers of Umm al-Hiran by the State Attorney: one to evacuate the village, and one to demolish the village itself. Israel's High Court of Justice ruled that the state could change its mind and take back the land it gave to the al-Qi'an family.

A petition from late May 2015 was rejected by the Supreme Court, with Justice Elyakim Rubinstein arguing that the petition was an indirect attack against the establishment of the new Jewish town, Hiran, a challenge which should be raised elsewhere. It was further argued that the government's action did not violate the community's legal rights, and that the harm that would be caused by the evictions and demolitions was 'proportionate' and within acceptable boundaries.

Members of the Knesset voted 24-1 against sending the issue of Umm al-Hiran to its Internal Affairs and Environment Committee. The newly appointed Justice Minister, Ayelet Shaked, argued that the demolitions did not indicate discrimination against Bedouins or Arabs, but that since the village was unrecognised, its

residents were not eligible for any compensation. Supreme Court Justice Daphne Barak Erez criticised the government's actions, arguing that it should reconsider the proposed compensation, given the Bedouins had lived in Umm al-Hiran for decades. She proposed considering offering a plot in the new town for the existing residents.

On 11 June 2015, hundreds of protesters attended a demonstration in Beersheba against the destruction of Umm al-Hiran. They marched from the town's open-air Bedouin market to the city's government buildings. The demonstration was attended by Joint List MKs Ahmad Tibi, Hanin Zoabi and Taleb Abu Arar.

"The government has no problem with Jewish citizens living on this property, so why should they have a problem with us?" asked Raed Abu al-Qi'an, a resident and activist from the village. "They allow rural communities to be built for Jews across the Negev, why not us? We have always said, and continue to say, that we have no objections to Jewish families living here or nearby us, but not in place of us. That is racism and injustice."

The community that is to form the projected village of Hiran consists of roughly 30 religious families who currently live in a gated community in the Jewish National Fund Forest of Yatir, some kilometres away from the Bedouin village. They are former West Bank settlers who have returned to Israel to colonise Bedouin lands.

18.01.2017: Two people are killed and several others wounded when hundreds of fully armed police arrive at Umm el-Hiran around 5 a.m., pulling drivers out of vehicles, and attacking and threatening others. Police fire tear gas and sponge-tipped bullets; there are also reports of live ammunition being used. The night before, state authorities had been pressuring residents to sign an agreement to leave voluntarily but negotiations broke down.

Police officers shoot and kill a resident of Umm el-Hiran, school teacher Yaqub Musa Abu Qi'an, claiming he drove his vehicle and struck and killed at least one officer. Police also quickly claim, without offering any evidence, that Abu Qi'an had 'connections' to ISIS. The police officer who was killed was named as 34-year-old Erez Levy. Local residents and activists at the scene deny the police version of events, saying that Qi'an's car veered toward the officers only after he was shot and lost control of the vehicle.

Among those wounded was Joint List chairman MK Ayman Odeh, who police shot in the head and back with sponge-tipped bullets. Odeh was brought to Soroka Hospital in Beersheba in stable condition. MK Odeh arrived at Umm el-Hiran early on Wednesday morning in order to stand alongside the villagers, who were told by Israeli authorities that the demolition would take place imminently. By late morning, bulldozers, trucks, and demolition equipment had begun preparing to clear and demolish the village.
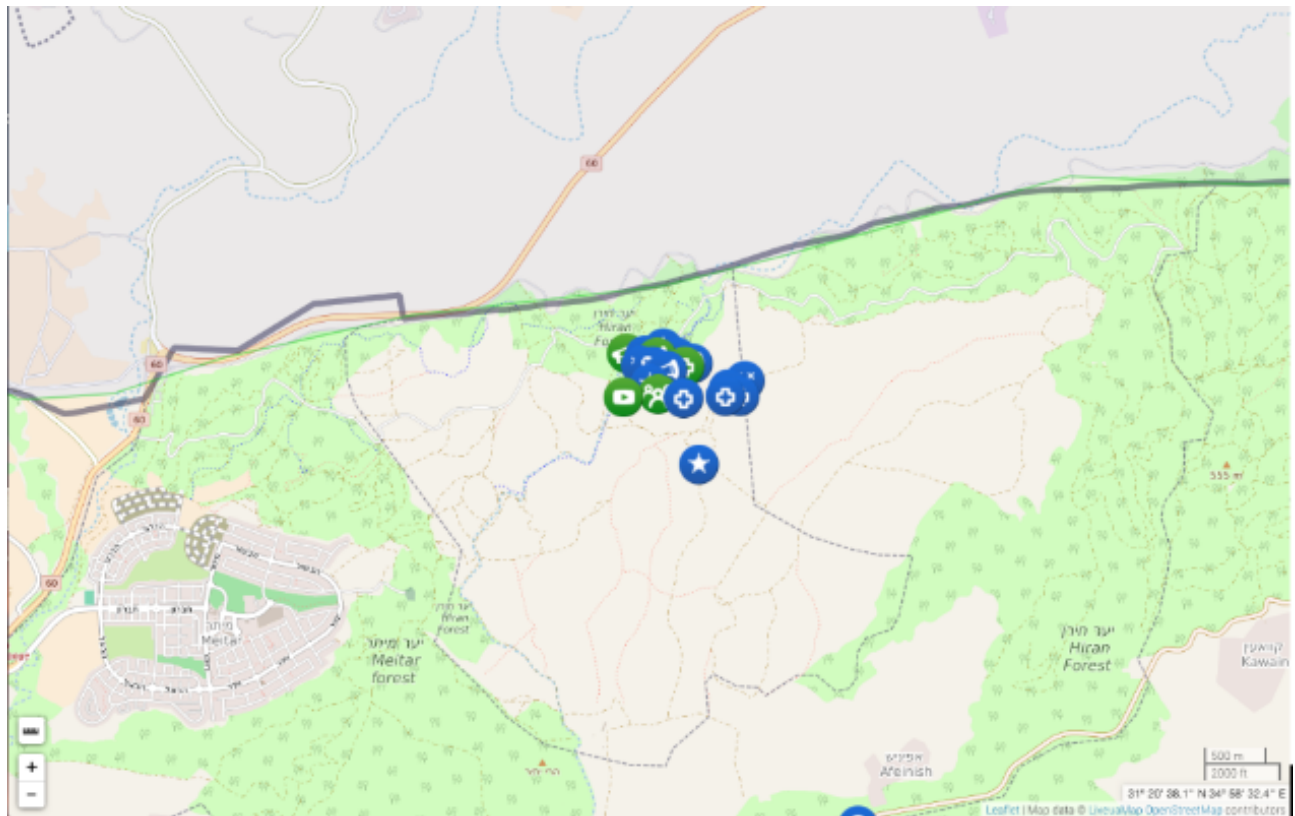
You can find a 'live' map of the situation at Umm al-Hiran at:
https://israelpalestine.liveuamap.com/en/2017/18-january-israeli-police-in-umm-al-hiran

You can read a detailed account of the events at Umm al-Hiran written by Jonathan Cook at:
http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/01/umm-al-hiran-continuing-nakba-170122085822718.html

Amona

There are currently around 600,000 Israeli settlers living in the Occupied Territories of Palestine: 400,000 in some 130 settlements in the West Bank and a further 200,000 in 12 'neighbourhoods' in East Jerusalem, built on land annexed by Israel after 1967. The number of settlers has increased significantly in the past two years and will increase further with 600 new homes newly scheduled for Jerusalem and 2,500 homes just announced for the West Bank.

As well as the main settlements, which Israel fully supports and for which it provides and maintains the infrastructure, settlers have created some 120 unsanctioned settlements or outposts. Every large settlement has an unauthorized, unofficial but tacitly-approved add-on, usually on a hill-top. The settlement of Itamar, for example, has Har Gideon and Givat Arnon. Elon Moreh has Havat Skali. Yitzhar has Mitzpe Yitzhar and Givat Tkuma.

Amona is an outpost of about 330 people (42 families) in the central West Bank, north-east of Ramallah. Located on a hill overlooking the settlement of Ofra, the outpost was founded in 1995 by settlers from Ofra who brought in first one and then an entire camp of trailers and placed them next to water tanks previously sited there by the Israeli Mekorot water company.

The outpost was built on lands owned by Palestinians who, after a long legal battle, successfully petitioned Israeli courts for the outpost's removal. In 2006 the Supreme Court of Israel ruled the outpost illegal under Israeli law. In May 2014 an Israeli police investigation revealed the entire outpost lay on private Palestinian land, and that documents used by settlers to claim they had purchased the sites were forged. In December 2014, the Israeli High Court ordered the state to completely evacuate and demolish the settlement within two years i.e. by the 25th December 2016.

17.12.2016: The settlement is preparing for the evacuation. Hundreds of young people have arrived there over the weekend, turning the evacuation into a mass event. The road to the outpost goes through the older and larger settlement of Ofra. A small, handwritten sign points toward an adjacent hill and a narrow road that has only recently been paved or upgraded. The road is strewn with dozens of tires dispersed by young, radical, right-wing Israelis known as 'hilltop youth', ready to be ignited if the government tries to carry out a forced eviction of the outpost.

On Saturday night Netanyahu's chief of staff Yoav Horowitz meets with Amona residents and Samaria Regional Council, Yossi Dagan. Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit proposes a compromise deal to temporarily move the people of Amona to nearby plots of land while trying to figure out where to move them more permanently. After reaching an agreement, the sides go to Jerusalem to meet with Netanyahu and Education Minister Naftali Bennett at the Prime Minister's Office.

18.12.2016: A deal is struck for the 42 families at the outpost to leave in return for significant financial compensation and a promise that a replacement settlement will be built for them elsewhere. After night-long negotiations the Amona settlers announce that they they have accepted Israel's promise to build 52 homes and public buildings for them at a nearby location.

The Israeli government will spend more than $35 million to resettle and compensate Amona's residents. According to Israel's Channel 10 news, most of the $35 million will go on infrastructure, landscaping and public building at Shvut Rachel, a settlement to which Amona residents will eventually move. About $10.3 million will go to families for 'rehabilitation' of their lives. Meanwhile, 24 families will remain on the mountain in a nearby plot. In order to finance the deal, the government has approved across-the-board cuts to the 2017-2018 budget.

20.12.2016: The plan by the Israeli government to build 24 temporary houses for Amona residents on nearby land, known as Parcel 38, falls through because of Palestinian legal challenges. The state petitions the Supreme Court for an additional delay of the outpost's eviction. The state's attorneys says in their request that the evacuation plan has been derailed after a Palestinian man filed an objection. The man claims to have links to the land through relatives in Jordan.

22.12.2016: The High Court of Justice grants the state's request to extend the deadline for the evacuation of Amona for another 45 days. The extension gives them until February 8 to evacuate.

02.01.2017: An order allowing the relocation of the residents of the Amona outpost in the West Bank to new plots on the same hill is signed by the Israel Defense Forces. The order, which would allow the homes to be built on land regarded by Israel as abandoned by its Palestinian owners, is signed by Israel Defense Forces Central Command Major Gen. Roni Numa who states that the owner's identities are unknown to the government and they may have left prior to Israel gaining control of the area in 1967.

Additionally, the order allows the government to break down the plots of land into smaller lots, should new ownership claims arise for portions of the plots. Should this happen the government could return the claimed lots to the Palestinians owners, but maintain control of the adjacent lots.