

# Resolving the Khan al-Ahmar Issue

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Jul 29, 2021

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Brief Analysis

**The new Israeli government, with Naftali Bennett at the helm, has once again demonstrated a flexibility and willingness to compromise in its approach to resolving crises.**

**T**he relocation of the Bedouins from Khan al-Ahmar, which was detained by the Netanyahu government and became a controversy in the international arena, has been resolved through a compromise proposal, an agreement between the Bedouins and the Israeli government. One remaining question is whether the Palestinian Authority and the European Union will allow the families to move to a more permanent residence, as per the agreement, or pressure the residents to stay due to the site's strategic significance.

The current compromise revolves around the several hundred or so residents from the Bedouin Jahalin tribe who live under unsuitable living conditions in tents and temporary tin buildings clustered near the Jerusalem-Jericho Road in the lands of the settlement of Kfar Adumim. According to the Bedouins, their residence there dates back to the 1950s, when they were expelled from the Arad Valley by the Israeli army after the murder of soldier Pinchas Sela from the Science Corps.

As shepherds, the Bedouin wandered with their herds between the valley of Jericho and the desert area. In recent decades, however, these families ended their nomadic lifestyle and set up tents west of the Good Samaritan site, in [Area C of the West Bank \(https://www.anera.org/what-are-area-a-area-b-and-area-c-in-the-west-bank/\)](https://www.anera.org/what-are-area-a-area-b-and-area-c-in-the-west-bank/). Area C is managed by the Israeli military administration in accordance with the interim agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The place was later named Khan al-Ahmar after an archeological site located a few kilometers from the site. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were good neighborly relations between the Bedouins and the Israeli residents of Kfar Adumim, the neighboring Israeli settlement established in the late 1970s.



(/sites/default/files/2021-07/PNG%20image.png)

In those years, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority dealt with the definition of Israeli "Settlements Blocs" in the West Bank, which would remain under Israeli control under a permanent agreement. In return, Israel would compensate the Palestinian state with land elsewhere. Israel proposed a border line in which the bloc of settlements that included the Israeli city of Ma'ale Adumim and the surrounding settlements—such as Kfar Adumim—to be on the Israeli side. However, the Palestinian Authority refused to consider Gush Adumim as part of the land swap, claiming that such a land swap would divide the northern and southern West Bank, preventing a contiguous Palestinian state.

During this period—and encouraged by then Palestinian prime minister **Salam Fayyad's plan** (<https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/FC11A804CC0C13B88525790A004CA9E1>) to exercise control over of Area C—dozens of tin structures, tents, barracks, and sheepfolds were erected on state lands allocated to Israeli settlements and along the strategic traffic routes, without permits from the authorities and in violation of the Military Administration law. The Bedouin settlement expanded and new roads were laid. New structures included additional tents (although not all were inhabited) and an ecological school.

The Civil Administration issued **demolition orders** ([https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-bedouin-courts-international-news-jerusalem-5b0ff934d54645dca32201faae990dd4?utm\\_campaign=SocialFlow&utm\\_medium=AP&utm\\_source=Twitter](https://apnews.com/article/united-nations-bedouin-courts-international-news-jerusalem-5b0ff934d54645dca32201faae990dd4?utm_campaign=SocialFlow&utm_medium=AP&utm_source=Twitter)) in 2010 for the illegal structures, but these orders were not implemented due to political pressure from left-wing Israeli and European organizations. However, nearby Israeli communities subsequently petitioned the Supreme Court over the issue. In 2018, after years of deliberations it issued an order allowing the Civil Administration to evacuate the Bedouins from Kfar Adumim lands but obliging the administration to offer the Bedouin an adequate alternative housing solution.

Proposals submitted by the Civil Administration to the Bedouin to relocate onto building plots—which would include public infrastructure and compensation—were rejected on various grounds, often due to the political pressure of the Palestinian Authority and backed and assisted by European organizations. As such, Khan al-Ahmar has become a symbol in the struggle for Area C. Likewise in violation of Israeli law and the lawsuit, EU representatives erected light buildings for the Bedouin on these state lands. Under pressure from various factors in the EU, the site has even won the protection of German Prime Minister Angela Merkel.

The Civil Administration's law enforcement agencies froze construction on the site and prevented any development or strengthening of dilapidated buildings in the area, preserving the inhumane conditions of the Bedouins. However, a large group of settlers from Kfar Adumim came to the aid of their Bedouin neighbors for humanitarian assistance.

At first, these were introductory meetings to understand the neighbor's needs. However, these meetings have evolved into a network of aid and friendships that culminated in facilitating a **hearing implant transplant**

(<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-hospital-helps-deaf-palestinian-children-hear-for-first-time/>) in the ear of a deaf Bedouin child. And given the region's harsh weather, the Israelis came to the [aid of their neighbors](https://www.ha-makom.co.il/post/revital-kfar-adumim) (<https://www.ha-makom.co.il/post/revital-kfar-adumim>) when a building caught fire and other buildings collapsed in the floods. It turned out that despite the international controversy, the human connection still exists, as it should.

During the elections, the right-wing Yamina party—led by Naftali Bennett—stated that as soon as it came to power, it would evacuate Khan al-Ahmar. However, the new Foreign Minister Yair Lapid [asked the Supreme Court](https://www.timesofisrael.com/lapid-requests-delay-in-contentious-demolition-of-west-bank-bedouin-village/) (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/lapid-requests-delay-in-contentious-demolition-of-west-bank-bedouin-village/>) earlier this month to postpone the deadline of evacuation so that the new government could discuss the matter again. A few days later, reports came of a [compromise proposal](https://themedialine.org/by-region/khan-al-ahmar-compromise-revealed-resettlement-in-negev-permanent-residency-for-evacuation/) (<https://themedialine.org/by-region/khan-al-ahmar-compromise-revealed-resettlement-in-negev-permanent-residency-for-evacuation/>) agreed by the Bedouin families, according to which the Bedouin would be relocate to the Arad Valley within Israeli territory and near other members of the Jahalin tribe in the area. Those who had been relocated would receive residential land, financial compensation, and Permanent Resident status in Israel.

As in the crisis of the Eviatar outpost, there appears to be a welcome trend of PM Naftali Bennett resolving conflicts by way of compromise and agreements. There is no doubt that the proposed agreement will benefit the Bedouin families. Now, the question is whether the Palestinian Authority and the European Union will allow the Bedouins to implement the agreement and improve their living conditions, or whether Khan al-Ahmar will once again become hostages to a political struggle. ❖

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