THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE for Palestinian Human Rights

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BULLETIN

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The United States government has now committed its taxpayers to guaranteeing $400 million in loans to Israel for housing needed for immigrants from the Soviet Union. The US guarantee was delayed until our government was convinced that the housing would not be erected in the Occupied Territories.

An editorial in the Wall Street Journal of April 14, 1990 contended that there are two Israels. One is the Israel of "hasbara", the Hebrew word for "explanation" - the Israel whose image is projected to the outside world, particularly the U.S. The other is the real Israel.

Frank Collins, an insightful Middle East observer and writer who has made many visits to the Bedouin villages and towns in the Negev, authored the following for publication in the April issue of The Washington Report on the Middle East.

THE TWO FACES OF ISRAEL

While the Israeli government is seeking $10 billion in US grants and US-guaranteed loans for resettling immigrants from the Soviet Union on one hand, with the other it is demolishing homes belonging to Arab citizens of Israel.

Since the founding of the State, Israel has denied building permits to most Arabs saying that master plans for their villages had not been adopted. With a rapidly expanding population, Israeli Arabs have been forced to build without permits. Now tens of thousands of these homes are subject to demolition on the grounds that they are "illegal". Without attracting much attention abroad, hundreds of them have already been destroyed with the use of military force.

The demolition of homes is particularly grievous in the case of the Bedouin in the Negev. After being ousted from their original homes, the Bedouin rebuilt (illegally by necessity) in scattered villages in the northern Negev. Because of their extreme poverty, most of these "illegal" villages are little more than collections of corrugated iron shacks, but nevertheless dear to their owners and their only shelter from the elements.

The Israeli plan is to resettle the Negev Bedouin, clearly against their wishes, in "concentration" towns. Nearly 8,000 Bedouin homes are slated to be destroyed in order to implement this scheme by force.

The process is proceeding gradually but steadily. In the last week of January of this year, 18 Bedouin homeowners were summoned to court to show cause why they should not be ordered to destroy their own homes. As in most court cases involving Palestinian property, the verdicts are predetermined. In one typical case among those called to court, the owner was ordered to destroy his home and to pay a fine of more than $1500. Further, if this owner rebuilds on that site within three years after the demolition, he will be liable to imprisonment for four months.

So far, more than one hundred Bedouin homes have been destroyed, most of them by the military as the owners refuse to destroy their own homes.

The enormity of the latest Israeli multi-billion dollar demand should not be lost on the United States Congress. In essence, it is a demand that the United States provide housing for new immigrants who are fleeing economic hardship in the Soviet Union, while at the same time the Israeli government is embarked on a program to destroy the housing of Bedouin whose ancestors have lived in the Negev since Byzantine times.