



General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 July 2020

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-fourth session

15 June–3 July 2020

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

GE.20-08946(E)



* 2 0 0 8 9 4 6 *

Please recycle The recycling symbol, consisting of three chasing arrows forming a triangle.



The killing of the Saudi tribal leader "Abdul Rahim Al-Hwaiti" and the forced displacement of his tribe

Preamble

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights condemns the Saudi government's forced evictions of local residents, chief among them the al-Hawatyat tribe, as part of the construction of "NEOM" project that was announced and led by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman within Vision 2030. Maat is deeply concerned over the government's excessive violence against the residents of Al-Khuraybah village, which is said to be part of the first phase of Saudi Arabia's planned megacity "NEOM", as reported by partner local and international sources. These sources added that the conflict between security forces and the Saudi tribal citizens protesting the eviction has turned deadly in a gunfight leading to the death of the Saudi citizen Abdul Rahim Al-Hwaiti, who appeared in a video posted on social media decrying the development project and expressing his refusal to give up his ancestral home.

Maat would like to stress the fact that the forced eviction of the population, their displacement from their ancestral lands, and their removal from their social surroundings, is unjustified and represents a grave violation of international law. Therefore, Maat submits this intervention to guide the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and to testify before the council in the case of murdering the Saudi tribal citizen Abdul Rahim Ahmed Mahmoud Al-Huwaiti, as well as the forced displacement of members of his tribe by the Saudi authorities in a clear violation of international law and human rights.

NEOM and the forced displacement of Saudi citizens

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for which Saudi Arabia voted in favor in 2007 states in Article 10 that "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return."¹ However, in January 2020, the Government of Saudi Arabia announced plans to begin work on a project called NEOM, to build the world's most advanced city. But, the realization of the project requires the forced relocation of thousands of indigenous populations from their ancestral homes, a process targeting the evacuation of 20 thousand citizens by 2022.²

In a related context, the land earmarked for NEOM is already inhabited by tribes and peoples, chief among them the al-Hawatyat tribe. At least 20,000 persons associated with the al-Hawatyat tribe will lose their homes in the process. Members of the al-Hawatyat tribe have attempted to negotiate with the government for a compromise that would allow them continued enjoyment of their land without adversely affecting the NEOM project. But when their endeavors failed, some activists took an even sharper tone with the government, steadfastly refusing government compensation and categorically refusing to be removed.³

Maat would like to affirm that the rights of indigenous persons to the free enjoyment of their land are uncontested and well-established in international law. Moreover, it calls upon the international companies involved in the project to lobby the government to negotiate with the indigenous residents, including the al-Huwaytat tribe, towards a solution that allows local residents to maintain uninterrupted and undiluted rights to their ancestral land from one hand, and allows the government to proceed its developmental vision from the other hand.

¹ إعلان الأمم المتحدة بشأن حقوق الشعوب الأصلية، مكتبة حقوق الإنسان، 13 سبتمبر 2007. <https://cutt.us/yefev>

² التهجير القسري يهدد قبيلة الحويطات مع بدء السعودية مشروع نيوم، المنظمة الأوروبية السعودية لحقوق الإنسان، 3 أبريل 2020. <https://cutt.us/eA10Q>

³ نفس المصدر السابق ذكره

The killing of the tribal Saudi citizen, "Abdul Rahim Al-Hwaiti", and the forced eviction of his tribe

Howaiti's shooting caused uproar on social media, with many activists circulating his images and video clips in which he documented the details of his story with the Saudi authorities and the forced removal of Al-Khuraybah residents. Some activists, who are believed to be from Al-Huwaitat, launched a social media campaign in January 2020 to criticize the Saudi government and express their refusal against leaving their lands, under the Arabic hashtag # الحويطات_ضد_ترحيل_نيوم (Al-Howeitah against displacement Neom). The launched campaign has caused a fierce debate, with many accusing the crown prince of carrying out brutal acts against indigenous population, and others urging the Saudi government to reconsider the decision to relocate people from the area.

The first group affirmed its support of Saudi Arabia's Vision for 2030, and its developmental projects, but a number of them only reject the plans to deport residents from their ancestral homes. Another group, on the other hand, accused the security forces of carrying out brutal acts against Al-Huwait tribe for the sake of realizing the goals of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Footage purported to be from the incident and events leading up to the gunfight between the Howaiti, who refused giving up his home, and the security forces has circulated online. The armed clash ended with the death of Howaiti, leaving behind a boy and two girls.⁴

Two days after the circulation of the incident online by activists, the Saudi authorities acknowledged security forces had shot the "wanted" citizen Abdul-Rahim al-Howaiti dead in Al-Khuraybah on Monday, April 13, 2020, after he refused to surrender and had opened fire on the forces came to arrest him in Tabuk.

Maat, therefore, appeals the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to invite Saudi Arabia to provide all information and give all the testimonies and documents related to the case of Al-Hwaiti's murder, and to hold those responsible for this crime accountable.

Recommendations

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights believes that civil society organization play a crucial role in raising awareness among peoples of their rights, and in fulfillment of its role as a human rights organization seeking to promote the human rights approach and the use of its mechanisms to uphold the pillars of democracy in the Middle East and the whole world, Maat recommends the Saudi government to reconsider its decision to forcibly evict the residents of the areas chosen to be part of the "NEOM" project, try looking for other alternatives, consult with the communities affected by the decision, and acknowledge the population's right to seek legal redress and review the decision before an independent, impartial and competent judicial authorities. Maat calls upon the Saudi government to compensate those affected by the evictions, and to provide satisfactory material compensation to al-Howaiti tribe for the suffering they have gone through.

Maat calls on the international community to intervene to stop the forcible eviction of thousands of residents from the villages included in the "NEOM" project, as well as to lobby the Saudi authorities for negotiation with the local residents, in order to preserve their rights and amicably resolve their outstanding disputes.

⁴ عربي، BBC عبد الرحيم الحويطي: قضية مقتله تعيد الجدل حو "تهجير" قبيلة الحويطات ومشروع نيوم في السعودية، 16 أبريل 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/trending-52284686>