

FOLLOW-UP

Bedouin Probe Seen As 'Farce'

A government investigation into racial slurs reportedly made against Bedouins by an Israeli official is a "farce," say advocates for the Bedouins.

The inquiry, headed by Doron Mor, an employee of the Ministry of Education, was established to determine whether the comments made by Moshe Shohat, head of the ministry's Authority for Bedouin Education in the South, were aimed at Bedouins in general or at a particular group.

A Ministry of Education spokeswoman, Orit Reuveni, initially denied that Shohat made the comments. Reuveni now



Bedouin activist Amal Elsana-Alhjoor:
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acknowledges he uttered the remarks but said they were misunderstood. The comments were directed only at a particular group of Bedouins, she said, who have "waged a ceaseless personal battle against him."

Alex Biletzki, a lawyer and consultant for The Bedouin Campaign, a private educational program sponsored by Shatil, said: "This is the first time Bedouins are organizing publicly against Jewish discrimination. The inquiry is an obvious farce.

"I asked Dr. Mor to look at a book written by Shohat called the 'Inheritance of Bedouin Culture,' where the cover sports a Bedouin eating rice with his hands and inside contains racist comments. But he refused to look at the book claiming that his mandate was to investigate only Shohat's comments as reported in Yediot Achronot's excerpt from The Jewish Week."

Shohat was quoted last month in The Jewish Week as saying that Bedouins are a "blood-thirsty people who commit polygamy, have 30 children and continue to expand their illegal settlements, taking over state land."

Shohat also further questioned providing indoor plumbing in Bedouin schools. "In their culture they take care of their needs outdoors. They don't even know how to flush a toilet," he said in that interview.

Biletzki said the only acceptable result would be the firing of Shohat. "If he's not gone by the beginning of the school year, then 50,000 Bedouin students will not be going to school and we will be taking this to the Supreme Court."

The Organization of Unrecognized Bedouin Villages has repeatedly criticized Shohat for discrimination and mishandling of funds in his 15 years in charge of Bedouin Education in the South.

Mor, who said he was not given a deadline to finish his probe and issue a report, said he has spoken to "30 Bedouin sheiks who have nothing but praiseworthy things to say about Shohat."

"Something's not kosher," says Amal Elsana-Alhjoor, a Bedouin feminist activist, "that a Jew needs to represent Bedouin interests when we have over 100,000 Bedouins who are supposedly full Israeli citizens who can represent us in the government."

Shohat's comments were taken up on the Knesset floor recently by Arab Knesset members Azmi Bishara and Talab A-Sana. They claimed Jewish discrimination against the Bedouins and called for Shohat's resignation.

While being questioned by Mor as part of his probe, a reporter was told no less than three times that "if you are truly an Orthodox Jewish Zionist you will write another article talking about how much the government and Mr. Shohat have done for the Bedouins."

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