

# **Al-marsad's Narrative Report for 2012**

**Presented January 2013**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Eight years passed since the establishment of “Al-marsad – Arab Human Rights Center in Golan Heights” where the board of directors and the team each year look back to see what we have achieved and contributed to the issue of human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan. Considering that our aim was to establish a professional, sustainable and transparent human rights organization, the question is: have we succeeded to achieve this mission? What have we succeeded to achieve as a legal organisation? Establishing a new organisation to deal with human rights issues in the occupied Golan was a courageous step which was confronted by numerous factual challenges. Al-Marsad has succeeded in the most part to solve and/or overcome these challenges.

We can say for sure the commitment of the founders, local staff and international volunteers over the previous years despite the funding restrictions was the main reason behind the survival and continuation of the organization. This created a sense of credibility within the local population as activities became more visible and networks with other international human rights organisations grew stronger. Such organisations expressed their constant willingness to cooperate and help and since we are the only human rights organisation in the occupied Golan, this is of special importance as we are the only resort for people who have had violations committed against them or their private properties.

During 2012 Al- marsad continued to strive to acquire adequate funding to bolster the organization and achieve a level of stability. On this level, it is certain that the generous support of Misereor as the main partner of the organization with a core funding for the period 2010-2012 had a crucial impact on strengthening it, making it more sustainable and credible. This support paved the way for professional advocacy activities, assisted the research projects, developed the human rights field tour program, strength the internship program of internationals as well as developed the training of local staff in order to improve their overall legal knowledge.

This report aims to provide a comprehensive review of the significant impact of Al-marsad's activities for 2012 as well as an in-depth assessment of the organisations shortcomings.

### **1.1.1 Organisation Background**

Al-Marsad - Arab Human Rights Centre in Golan Heights is an independent non-profit legal human rights organisation, located in Majdal Shams, in the occupied Syrian Golan. The center was established by a group of lawyers and professionals in the fields of health, education, journalism and engineering - mostly town-planners - as well as human rights defenders and other interested community members and registered in June 2004 with the Israeli ministry of Justice by virtue of the illegal Israeli annexation of the Golan and the application of Israeli civil laws on this region and the remained small part of its indigenous Syrian population.

We keep moving forward in strengthening ties with a number of local human rights organizations in Palestine/Israel and with international human rights organisations. We believe these relationships are indispensable to our work, especially given the rich experience these organisations have in many fields of expertise, as well as their established international connections.

### **1.1.2 The focus of Al-Marsad**

Since the beginning of the occupation political decisions are being taken every day by the Israeli authorities in order to create a *fait accompli* situation by changing the landscape and impose new realities on the ground. Military system were established prior to the annexation of the Golan on December 14, 1981. Military orders issued to uproot the native inhabitants and prevent them from returning to their cities and villages, which were subsequently eradicated. At the mean time, Israeli authorities launched a systematic campaign of settlements building on the ruins of those towns and villages, into which Jewish settlers were transferred. These settlers then took control of the land and water, marginalizing indigenous Syrian population who remained in the Golan and making life unbearable for them at all levels.

In the aftermath of the annexation of the Golan, Israeli authorities continued to practice these same policies under the guise of implementing the Israeli law that was now applicable therein. Israel continued its settlement policies and exploited all the natural resources of the area for the benefit of the settlements and the Israeli economy. Authorities also continue to restrict the rights of the Syrian inhabitants in contravention of the principles of international human rights and humanitarian law.

This situation, in the view of Al-marsad necessitates the constant monitoring and documentation of human rights and humanitarian law violations. Al-marsad attempts to consider the possible implications of Israeli policies on the legal status of the occupied Golan and the fundamental rights of its indigenous Syrian population and as such has designed an ambitious but viable action plan.

In contrast to other societies, there is an absence of civil society institutions, in particular those addressing human rights concerns in the Golan. Al-marsad seeks to address this absence, monitoring and documenting the serious violations taking place in our community, and filling this gap so that the international community will have a greater awareness of the human rights situation in the Golan.

### **1.1.3 Al-marsad's Mission**

Al-marsad's mission remains as clear as ever working to protect and promote human rights and respect for the rule of law in the occupied Golan with a commitment to the overall application of international law; international humanitarian and human rights law.

Since its establishment, Al-marsad has been attempting to document human rights violations perpetrated by Israel (the occupying power) against civilians and their private properties. Special focus is given to civil, political, economic, social and

cultural rights, as well as humanitarian law principles: expulsion of native Syrian population (ethnic cleansing), the control of land and water by Israel, separated families, settlement expansion, annexation, landmine problems, housing rights and planning restrictions. Through its work Al-Marsad tries to monitor and document human rights and humanitarian law violations and urge the international community to pressure Israel to respect international law, stop its violations and end its occupation of the Syrian Golan.

#### **1.1.4 Al-marsad's Vision**

Al-marsad seeks to establish a consolidate and efficient modern institution that advocate for the protection of human rights standards, struggle against war, colonialism and occupation and helps to develop a culture of respect for human rights and humanitarian law principles. We seek to achieve this by observing and documenting human rights and humanitarian law violations, working to influence policies and pushing to hold accountable those responsible for committing or condoning human rights violations and international crimes.

Al-marsad also aims at developing itself so as to become a basic reference source for those seeking information on human rights violations in the occupied Golan.

Al-marsad will furthermore attempt to fortify both its presence and build awareness of human rights and humanitarian law on local, regional and international levels.

#### **1.1.5 Al-marsad's overall goals**

In the course of its strategic planning work Al-marsad has discussed and now adheres to three overall goals. These goals have guided all the organisations strategies and activities in the past years and will also in the coming periods. Al-marsad concentrates on

- 1) Building a solid non-governmental, civilian and independent institution, whose members, contributors and staff have a clear picture of their role within, and can develop their and their volunteer's capacity and abide to a shared internal governance structure.
- 2) Becoming the No. 1 resource for research and legal advice on human rights violations (since 1967) in the occupied Golan.
- 3) Working and thriving within a regional and international network, which disseminates knowledge and expertise, raises awareness about basic human rights (locally) and the humanitarian situation (internationally) as well as markets its research and ideas according to an internally and commonly developed advocacy strategy.

#### **1.1.6 Opportunities and Threats of the current organisational status**

Al-marsad is a small organization, which has several opportunities but still faces threats that need to be addressed in the course of a strategic planning exercise. In the latest planning the following SWOTS were identified and updated:

##### ***Strengths and Opportunities***

- The commitment and passion of the volunteers in the organisation, both local and international, remains one of the biggest strengths of Al-Marsad.
- The endurance of staff and volunteers over the last few years despite the difficult funding situation.
- The credibility within the local population grows as activities became more visible.
- The rich networks with other international human rights organisations.
- The assistance and support of other Palestinian and international organisations who express their constant willingness to help.
- Al-Marsad is the only human rights organisation in the occupied Golan, which is of special importance as we are the only resort for people to deal with violations committed against them or their private properties.
- As the only human rights organisation in the occupied Golan funding opportunities may be more accessible.
- Huge opportunity for building legal credibility through the initial research that has been conducted since its inception.
- Positive development within local staff in terms of received training and legal knowledge.
- An increasing number of international volunteers have conducted professional legal reports and greatly enhanced the opportunity for funding resources because of commitment, professional legal knowledge and English language skills. This internship programme has gone from strength to strength, with 7 interns conducting research on a variety of important topics in the last 12 months. Al-Marsad aspires to continue to develop and strengthen the programme on an ongoing basis.

### ***Threats and Weaknesses***

- There is a danger that certain donors may attempt to impose their own agenda in return for funding.
- There may be double-standard policy used by the international community to deal with violations of the international law.
- There may be an absence of guarantees for future funding.
- There may be the failure of the international community to speak out and to act against ongoing human rights abuses.
- Most of the work is done on voluntary basis (due to visa and financial restrictions volunteers cannot stay all the time to do this job) therefore the personnel of the organisation are always at risk
- There is a risk of losing credibility locally because funding will not allow for employing a qualified lawyer to give pro bono legal services to the people (as promised)
- Frustration of staff, when funding will not suffice.

### **Al-marsad carried out the following major activities in 2012:**

- Continuou monitoring and documenting specific human rights violations in a professional way, through the gathering of first-hand accounts by eyewitnesses and victims.

- Based on that, Al-marsad legal researchers (both employees and volunteers) conducted the following reports:
  - A Consideration of the Legality and Consequences of Israeli Exploitation of the Water Resources of the Occupied Syrian Golan' by Kathy Keary (published)
  - 'Forced Eviction and Internal Displacement in the Occupied Syrian Golan' by Karen Hanlon (under publishing)
  - A Report on "From peaceful demonstrations to armed conflict; International Humanitarian intervention in the case of Syria" (under editing – to be published by Feb-March 2013).
- During 2012 Almarsad worked extensively and systematically on the issue of land mines located inside and around the occupied populated Syrian villages and in the agriculture fields.
- Worth mentioning that Al-marsad's team has been working on the land mine issue for several years, but during 2012 our work on this issue became more intensive specifically with regard to correspondence with the Israeli authorities.
- During 2012 and as a result to intensive correspondence with the Israeli land mine authority, we succeeded to get an official promise about plans to remove land mine fields which located inside the village of Majdal Shams during 2013-2014.
- Al-marsad's lawyer follows with the Israeli Ministry of Defence to bring for the removing of a military compound which located inside Majdal Shams and clean the land mine fields around it.
- Al-marsad team was active in supporting a theatre festival held in the Golan.
- A joint lecture with "Zochrot" which is an Israeli human rights organization dealing with the rights of Palestinian refugees.
- Participation in a lectures on the Refugee rights in "Berim" village which was depopulated in 1948.
- Hosting a French delegation from French Catholic Committees.
- Interviews with local and international media.
- Participation on activities with "OPGAI- Initiative for Palestine and Occupied Golan".
- Camps of Palestinian youth.
- International camp of American Jewish and Arabs, "Jitli Camp"
- Hosting a delegation of Jewish and Arabs supporters of peace from peace and democracy institute
- Hosting two German Girls students in Al-marsad offices and apartment and facilitating their work in conducting a report on the impacts of living near a border on urban planning.
- Following the solidarity campaign with Palestinian prisoners.
- Visiting schools and talk about the children rights
- Conducting a human rights field tour program and hosting tens of Palestians, Israeli and international delegations
- Hosting a church delegation from Holland
- Organize a visit of ILO delegation to the Golan and a meetings with workers in Almarsad,s offices

- Joining the Palestinian conference on land and environment in Beitlehem
- Hosting a Brazilian delegation “Fiakampazina”.

## **1.2 INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN AL-MARSAD**

### **A. Staff**

Al-marsad’s administrative assistant Mrs. Majdoleen Safadi has taken control of overall running of the Al-marsad office. Her main duties include office accounting and financial management, monitoring of Al-Marsads correspondences, assisting in the drafting of funding proposals and general office administration. She ensures that the office is efficiently and professionally organised and as such her role is vital to the development of the organization.

Mr. Salman Fakher-Eldeen continued his employment with Al-marsad as a coordinator and public relations officer. He conducts the human rights field tour program and has played a vital role organizing and hosting all visitors and delegates to Al-marsad and informing them of the human rights situation in the Occupied Golan. This on the ground personal introduction to the situation in the Golan is important for illustrating how the occupation has affected the region.

He has been active in assisting the research carried out in Al-marsad trough arranging the translation of reports and the organization and translation of interviews with the local population, he plays an important supportive role assisting the research of the visiting international interns.

Salman also manages the volunteers ensuring their time in the Golan is as enjoyable and productive as possible. As well as assisting them with their research this involves arranging trips and acting as tour guide for them.

During the first half of 2012 our lawyer Abulkher Abu Jabal has continued to provide crucial legal advice to the Arab population of the Golan. He has continued to worke extensively on the problem of family separation for the local indigenous communities which became more complicated and caused serious humanitarian impacts on the separated families due to the armed conflict in the country. In addition, Abualkher has been intense his work on the land mine project where he conducting daily correspondence with the Israel authorities and the ministry of defense claiming them to remove the land mine fields which located inside the Arab villages of the Golan in adjacent to it.

Dr. Nizar Ayoub continued in his role as consultant with Al-marsad. He has been active in establishing and developing the internship programme, and also reviewing, editing and assisting the interns with their research. Dr. Ayoub was also responsible for applications for funding and establishing good relationships with donors. He has been busy drafting a variety of reports including a strategic plan for 2013-2015. He has also compiled and sent a variety of funding proposal packs to potential donors. Dr. Ayoub has also been involved in networking with other NGOs. Strong relationships with other human rights organizations provides a valuable support structure and a wealth of experience to learn from. In 2012 Dr. Ayoub represented Al-marsad in the international conference held in Tunis under the title of “Arab Spring and Human Rights” where he gave a speech

regarding the developments on Syrian and the danger of the transmission of the revolution from peaceful demonstrations to armed conflict. Dr. Ayoub took this opportunity to address to the conference the human rights situation in the Golan and the impacts of the situation in Syrian on the Golan and it Syrian population.

### **C. Interns**

Al-Marsad has hosted three international interns during 2012.

The interns assisted the work of Al-Marsad by:

- undertaking legal research, (the report on Syrian case: from peaceful demonstration to civil war)
- conducting interviews with Majdal Shams residents,
- writing position papers on various topics including land mines and women's rights
- help with the creation of activity plan and strategy plan for 2013 - 2015
- monitoring the English-language press,
- assisting in the drafting of financial proposals to be submitted to various potential Al-Marsad donors
- Al-marsad has hosted two German female student for one monthe and our staff helped them in conducting their university thesis on the issue of urban palning, occupied Majdal Shams as a model.

Al-Marsad,s internship program and accepting international legal interns stills of great benefit to both the organisation and the individual intern themselves. The link between Al-Marsad and international interns from many countries of the world, such as, UK, Germany, USA, France, Spain, Newzeland, Ireland, Italy has strengthened the organization and contributed to the process of the creation of professional, credible and efficient human rights institution in the Golan and minimized the lack of information regarding the plight of the people of the Syrian Golan within the international community and that having people come directly to the area to live and work within the context of human rights is of vital importance. To date all of the interns' that have worked with the organisation state that they have found the experience beneficial on a multitude of levels.

“Completing an internship with Al-Marsad was a fantastic experience on both a personal and professional level. It provided vital experience required for individuals pursuing a career in human rights and facilitated the experience of another culture.” – Hannah Russell Legal Intern with Al Marsad April 2010.

### **D. Composition of Al-Marsad's Board of Directors**

1. Dr. Samia Abu Jabal, President. Gynecologist.
2. Dr. Munir Fakher Eldin, Assistant Professor of Arab Studies at Birzeit University
3. Majeed Safadi, LLM Journalism. Director of Al Jazeera camera staff Israel/Palestine.
4. Jamel Abu Jabal, PhD Jurisprudence.
5. Atef Safadi, press photographer EPA.
6. Naif Fakhreldeen, LLM Veterinary.
7. Madad Kalani, LLM Communications.
8. Madad Ewidat, farmer.

## **E. Composition of Al-Marsad's team**

1. Dr. Nizar Ayoub, Consultant/Legal researcher. PhD International Law, Institute of State and Law, Moscow. Lawyer-Member of Israel Bar.
2. Abulkher Abu Jabal, MA Jurisprudence, St. Petersburg University, Lawyer Member of Israel Bar.
3. Salman Fakherldeen, Public Relations Officer
4. Mrs Majdoleen Safadi, Administrative Officer

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of Al-Marsad remain the same with each passing year; to develop, grow stronger and raise awareness for the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. This section will assess their outcomes.

*Objective one: Al-Marsad attempts to become a reference point regarding international human rights and humanitarian law in the occupied Golan for concerned organisations and individuals at the local and international levels*

One of the main objects of Al-Marsad's work for 2012 was to keep striving in order to make the organisation a unique source of information by monitoring and documenting certain types of violations. Fieldworker's document violations in specific cases take surveys and affidavits and are archived in a way that allows for the preparation of legal studies, reports, position papers, submissions, open letters and press releases.

Al-Marsad has gathered a considerable number of affidavits from victims and eye-witnesses of human rights violations in the occupied Golan. These affidavits pertained to violations associated with the issues of separation of families, land mines issues, exploitation of the natural resources and forcible eviction and population transfer.

Important documents have been compiled and disseminated to officials, academics, human rights and civil society organisations, human rights activists, and other concerned parties. This makes Al-Marsad a main resource for information-sharing through meetings and contacts with UN Special committee for the investigation of Israeli practices in Palestinian and Occupied Arab Territories, and representatives of different UN human rights mechanisms like (Committee for Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), UN-OHCHR and other UN officials, International Labour Organization (ILO).

Al-Marsad still striving to achieve consultative status with ECOSOC so that the organisation can increase its access to international human rights bodies and thereby further highlight the violations of human rights and humanitarian law occurring in the occupied Syrian Golan. Unfortunately, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations at its 2013 regular session, held from 21-30 January 2013, decided to defer consideration of Al-marsad's application where it will continue its review of the application during its 2013 resumed session, tentatively scheduled from 21-30 May 2013. The defer of our application happens for the third time in row.

Al-Marsad's internship program from its office in Majdal Shams became stable and sustainable in 2012 and. This program has provided a great opportunity for recently graduated students to learn both about the situation of the Golan in general and also about the international humanitarian law and human rights law violations occurring in the Golan under Israel's illegal occupation in three-month blocks.

Al-Marsad has also more engaged in providing advocacy and free legal service to the Arab local community of the Syrian Golan who have been subjected to both violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law by Israel the occupying power; this is an area which the organisation would like to build on for the future.

***Objective two: To raise awareness about human rights situation in the occupied Golan at the national and international levels***

During 2012 Al-Marsad was engaged in an advocacy work, which raises awareness in the international community, media and international organisations regarding the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and its legal status.

Al-marsad was more active at the international level during 2012. Al-marsad,s staff attended a number of local conferences which increased opportunities to network with other human rights groups in the region and highlight the human rights and humanitarian law violations occurring in the occupied Golan. Also Al-Marsads hosting of various different delegations throughout 2012 serves to imprint in the minds of individuals the effects of the violations on the people in their day to day lives

Al-marsad in a position to say that its work has caused the organization to become a reference point for human rights organizations and other NGO's regarding human rights situation in occupied Golan.

***Objective three: Develop the institutional capacity of Al-marsad***

During 2012 Al-marsad continued to build itself as a professional, credible and sustainable organisation by ensuring the timely submission of fundraising proposals, reports, and work plans to its donors. It held regular meetings and contacts with representatives of the donor community, and its Acing Director worked continuously to seek long-term core-funding opportunities for the organization. Thanks to the generous support of Misereor core funding, the result is that Al-marsad is becoming more comfortable in its funding for the near future. A three-years strategic plans also help attract the attention of potential donor organization as it demonstrates that Al-marsad has a sound plan and is thus a good local partner for international organizations.

Also during 2012, Al-marsad proceeded with efforts to develop and acquire a meeting hall and library space in its offices to serve its employees and volunteers dealing with legal research and to provide a place for public activities related to human rights issues that concern the population.

***Objective four: Al-marsad aims to actively engage with the local community to educate and raise awareness amongst the various sectors about their human rights.***

Al-marsad recognises how important it is to involve all areas of the community in the promotion and expansion of human rights advocacy. Therefore we hope to create a number of different workshops aimed at various members of the Syrian Golan population.

During 2012 Al-marsad's team has provided crucial legal advice to the Arab population of the Golan. He has continued to work extensively on the problem of family separation for the local indigenous communities which became more complicated and caused serious humanitarian impacts on the separated families due to the civil war in Syria. In addition, the team has been intense his work on the land mine project where he conducting daily discussions and evaluation with the local community in addition to intensive correspondence with the Israel authorities and the ministry of defense claiming them to remove the land mine fields which located inside the Arab villages of the Golan and these adjacent to it.

#### **1.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Al-marsad is proud of all that it accomplished during the year of 2012 but the financial restraints are always evident. But the Misereors commitment to keep supporting Al-marsad's core program contributes to the organizations stability and sustainability. The conduction of legal research, monitoring and documentation, capacity building of the organisation and workload management has been a constant struggle in all levels with modest resources. This always creates an unstable environment in which Al-marsad conducts its work.

In 2012 the internship program became stable and it obviously will provide a higher profile for Al-marsad to achieve its main goals. Worth mentioning, that the new office space and a meeting hall constitute an effective instrument for enabling al-marsad to establish solid relations with the local community on the level of raising awareness about various human rights issues.

The year 2012 was an important and crucial for Al-marsad and its team. The organisation continues to evolve and became more professional and well known pursuant to the essential work in the occupied Golan as strong and professional human rights organisation. The completion of three new legal reports and proceeding with the publication process is evidence of the high level of professional legal research being carried out due to close cooperation between the local staff and international interns.

**END**