

Ambassador Lars Faaborg-Andersen
Delegation of the European Union to Israel
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BY EMAIL

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Re – URGENT – Demolition of home in Occupied Syrian Golan by Israeli authorities

Dear Ambassador Faaborg-Andersen,

I am the director of Al-Marsad – Arab Human Rights Centre in the Golan Heights. Al-Marsad is a non-profit human rights organisation that monitors and documents violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by Israel in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

I am writing to inform you that on Wednesday 7 September, the Israeli authorities demolished the home of Mr Bassam Ibrahim in Majdal Shams in the Occupied Syrian Golan.¹ This is the first time that the Israeli authorities have demolished a home in the Occupied Syrian Golan for over thirty years. There is serious concern that this action marks the adoption of a new systematic policy of 'administrative' home demolitions directed at the native Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan. This would be the extension of a policy that has been applied to homes belonging to the Palestinian populations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel for a considerable time.² Currently, the Syrian owners of between 80 - 90 houses have been notified that their homes are due to be demolished.

The Israeli authorities justified the destruction of Mr Bassam Ibrahim's home on the basis that it was built without the necessary permit. However, as a result of the severe restrictions imposed by Israeli planning committees, it is close to impossible for the native Syrian population in the remaining five Syrian villages in the Occupied Syrian Golan to obtain the necessary building permits. Therefore, the Syrian population is forced to build homes without building permits, as this is the only way to meet their housing needs given unprecedented levels of overcrowding in the remaining Syrian villages in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

¹ <http://golan-marsad.org/en/press-release-israeli-authorities-demolish-home-in-majdal-shams-in-the-occupied-syrian-golan/> .

² Please see the following website for additional information about the Israeli government's policy of home demolitions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: <http://icahd.org/faqs-home-demolitions/> .

These discriminatory housing policies implemented by the Israeli authorities against the Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan violate multiple international human rights standards, in addition to provisions of international humanitarian law. Indeed, Israel's policy of home demolitions constitutes a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 which prohibits 'extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly' by an occupying power.³

Furthermore, whilst the Israeli authorities are implementing discriminatory housing policies against the Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan, the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Occupied Syrian Golan continues unchecked. Indeed, last year, the Israeli government announced plans for 100,000 new settlers to relocate to the Occupied Syrian Golan over the next five years.⁴

Finally, the issues above are particularly concerning at a time when the Israeli government has been seeking to profit from the conflict in Syria by calling for international recognition of Israel's illegal annexation of the Occupied Syrian Golan.⁵

Hence, I respectfully call on the EU, in line with its obligations under international law, to urgently raise these issues with the Israeli government through existing bilateral channels, and at the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly; and obtain binding commitments that Israel will comply with its obligations under international law.

Specifically, that Israel will immediately:

- End all discriminatory policies against the native Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan;
- Cancel all home demolition orders targeting the Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan;
- Stop the construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, and the illegal extraction of natural resources in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

In addition, I would like to invite a fact-finding delegation from your embassy to the Occupied Syrian Golan in order to witness firsthand the degrading human rights situation here.

Equally, I would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your colleagues at the embassy in Tel Aviv.

³ Article 147 Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949.

⁴ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/03/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-israel-golan-heights.html?_r=1

⁵ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/syrians-reject-israel-vow-control-golan-160417130848101.html>

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this important matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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