

Eric Schmidt
CEO, Google

21 June 2016

Re – Google Maps no longer shows the names of destroyed Syrian villages in the Occupied Syrian Golan

Dear Mr Schmidt,

I am the director of Al-Marsad – Arab Human Rights Centre in the Golan Heights. Al-Marsad – a non-profit human rights organisation – was established to monitor and document violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law committed by Israel in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

I am writing to notify you that Google Maps no longer shows the names of the Syrian villages that were destroyed by Israel since its military occupation of the Syrian Golan during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Al-Marsad has been informed that Google Maps previously showed the names of these destroyed Syrian villages – now, instead, it only shows the names of the illegal Israeli settlements built on their ruins.

During the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Israel successfully captured 70% of the Syrian Golan.¹ Consequently, approximately 130,000 native Syrian inhabitants were forcibly transferred or displaced from their homes and forbidden from returning.² The Israeli military then began a widespread campaign to demolish their homes that resulted in the destruction of two cities, and over 300 villages and farms.³ Only five small villages in the valley of Mount Hermon escaped the campaign of destruction. Israeli settlements – illegal under international law – were then built over destroyed Syrian villages and farms, in so doing, control was taken of the land and natural resources.⁴

Today, there are at least 20,000 Israeli settlers in the Occupied Syrian Golan, living in over 32 illegal settlements.⁵

The forcible transfer of native Syrian inhabitants from the Syrian Golan; the destruction of their homes; the expropriation of land and natural resources; and the transfer of Israeli settlers into the

¹ S Abu Fakhr, 'Voices from the Golan', (2000) 29:4, Journal of Palestine Studies, available at <http://www.palestine-studies.org/jps/fulltext/40836>.

² Syria: Forty Years On, People Displaced From The Golan Remain in Waiting, (2007), IDMC Internal Displaced Monitoring Centre, 31 October 2007, available at <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Middle-East/Syria/pdf/Syria-October-2007.pdf>.

³ Al-Marsad research – soon to be published.

⁴ R Murphy & D Gannon, Changing the Landscape: Israel's Gross Violations of International Law in the Occupied Syrian Golan, (2008), available at: http://golan-marsad.org/wp-content/uploads/Changing_The_Landscape.pdf.

⁵ International Labour Organisation, The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, (2015), available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_368279.pdf.

Syrian Golan; by Israel, has violated multiple rules of international law⁶ and has been strongly condemned by the international community.⁷

Given the suffering endured by the native Syrian population of the Occupied Syrian Golan and the historic and ongoing violations of international law committed by Israel, it is deeply regrettable that Google Maps no longer shows the names of the destroyed Syrian villages, and, as such, Google has become complicit in Israel's attempts to delete the existence of these villages from history. Instead, Google must take an objective approach, in line with international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and stop supporting Israel's narrative of the landscape of the Occupied Syrian Golan.

Now that Al-Marsad has brought this issue to Google's attention, given Google's admirable position that 'You can make money without doing evil' and the responsibility of businesses to respect and promote human rights, Al-Marsad looks forward to Google amending its Maps function to show the names of the destroyed Syrian villages in the Occupied Syrian Golan, based on official Syrian maps prior to 1967, as soon as possible.

I thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this important matter, and I am at your disposition for any additional information you may require.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



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Director, Al-Marsad
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⁶ Including but not limited to: Articles 49 and 53 Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), Article 55 Hague Regulations (1907).

⁷ Including but not limited to: UN Security Council resolutions 446 (22 March 1979), 452 (20 July 1979), 465 (1 March 1980), 497 (17 December 1981).