

AL-MARSAD's Narrative Report for 2007

Presented in January 2008

I. INTRODUCTION

AL-MARSAD is proud to present its narrative report for 2007, outlining major developments within the organisation and covering its major activities for the year. AL-MARSAD has been serving the Occupied Golan society for three years, and each year we look back to see what we have contributed to the quest for human rights and the respect for the rule of law. What difference have we made as an organization? Operating under occupation does not lend itself to having "typical years" and 2007 definitely has been no exception. The year has challenged Al-Marsad's organizational capacity to function under severely deteriorating external conditions as well as significant internal changes. Al-Marsad has resiliently met these challenges by adapting its resources and areas of focus to make 2007 a strong year for the organization and its partners. This report aims to provide a review of the significant impacts of Al-Marsad activities in 2007 as well as an assessment of the organizations shortcomings.

Organization Background

Al Marsad - The Arab Center for Human Rights in the Golan is an independent non-profit legal human rights organization, located in Majdal Shams, in the Occupied Syrian Golan. The center was founded in October 2003 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.

Our initiative has drawn thus far on local and individual resources and we commenced work on voluntary basis. We are currently engaged in establishing close ties with a number of local human rights organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and with international human rights organizations. We believe these relationships are indispensable to our work, especially given the rich experience these organizations have in many fields of expertise, as well as their established international connections.

The focus of Al Marsad

Sine the beginning of the occupation, political decisions are being taken every day by Israel (the occupying power) in order to change the realities on the ground. Different tools are being used in this context: Hundreds of military orders were issued during the period prior to the annexation of the Golan on December 14, 1981. Such orders served to uproot the native inhabitants and prevent them from returning to their cities and villages, which were eradicated. Israeli authorities built settlements on the remains of those towns and villages, and Jewish settlers were transferred there, later controlling the land and water, marginalizing the Syrian Arabs 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 practise these same policies, but they instead claimed to be implementing 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 Al Marsad view 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 therefore 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.

The Center was founded in October 2003 by a group of lawyers and professionals in the fields of health, education, journalism and engineering - mostly town-planners - as well as human rights activists and other community members. As a nascent human rights organization whose work is based mainly on voluntary efforts by locals and internationals Al Marsad has been establishing close linkages and relations with a number of Palestinian human rights organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and international human rights organizations. We believe that the

relationship with such experienced organizations is important to our work and help us improve the quality of our work.

AL-MARSAD's Mission

AL-MARSAD works 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 Modern International Law, international humanitarian and human rights law.

Since its establishment, AL-MARSAD has been trying 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.

AL-MARSAD's Vision

AL-MARSAD seeks to establish a modern and efficient institution that struggles against war, colonialism, occupation and helps to develop a culture of respect for human rights and humanitarian law principles by observing and documenting human right 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.

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 in it, can develop their and their volunteers capacity and abide to a shared internal governance structure.
- 2) Becoming the Nr. 1 resource for research and legal advise on human rights violations (from 1967 on) 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.

Opportunities and Threats of the current organizational status (October 2007)

AL-MARSAD is a small and still relatively new organization, which has several opportunities and 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 of the volunteers in the organisation remains the biggest strengths of AL-MARSAD, both local and international

The endurance of staff and volunteers over the last 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 willingness of other Palestinian and international organisations who are expressing their constant willingness to help

AL-MARSAD is the only human rights organization in the Occupied Golan, which gives 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 organization in the Occupied Golan funding opportunities may be more accessible.

Huge opportunity for building legal credibility through the first researches that have been conducted in 2007

Huge positive development within local staff in terms of received training and legal knowledge

An international long term volunteer from Ireland has greatly enhanced the opportunity for funding resources because of commitment, professional legal knowledge and English language skills.

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 (volunteers cannot stay all the time to do this job) and that therefore the personnel of the organization is always at risk

Risk to lose credibility locally because funding will not allow employing a qualified lawyer to give pro bono legal services to the people (as promised)

Frustration of staff, when funding will not suffice

I. AL-MARSAD carried out the following major activities in 2007:

- Started professionally monitoring and documenting specific human rights violations through the gathering of first-hand accounts by eyewitnesses and victims.
- Intervened with Israel authorities, as well as the international community to draw attention to specific human rights violations through oral and written interventions.
- Provided legal advice and counseling to victims of human rights violations, and intervened on their behalf to the relevant authorities.
- Conducted local media activities to increase awareness of Al-MARSAD's work and the human rights discourse.
- Carried out human rights education and awareness-raising activities targeting such groups as lawyers, women, and human rights activists regarding international human rights laws and principles.
- Undertook legal research and developed study reports, briefs, press releases, interventions, and alerts for action on different human rights issues of concern, to raise awareness of the human rights situation.
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II. INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN AL-MARSAD

1. Human resources

A. Appointment of staff on part time basis:

Following the new developments, Al-MARSAD hired for the first time two staff employees on part time basis. This became available in October, 2007 regarding the generous support received from Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Foundation s (EMHRF). A committee of three members of Al-MARSAD board of directors considered the applications for these available positions. On 15 October Mr. Salman Fakher-Eldden began his employment with Al-MARSAD as a coordinator and Mr. Naif Fakher-Eldden began his position of public relation and fundraising

B. Voluntary staff

During the year 2007 Al-MARSAD's work and activities continue relying on volunteers. Dr. Nizar Ayoub was committed to direct (acting director) the organization voluntary, and to conduct legal work based on international human rights and humanitarian law in addition to networking with donors and local and international human rights organizations. Dr. Jamil Abu-Jabal continued volunteering in conducting administrative and financial issues. Both volunteers coordinate with Mrs. Samia Abu-Jabal, AL-MARSAD, and president. Furthermore, Al-MARSAD continued utilizing the voluntary services of Mr. Abu ALkheir as a lawyer.

C. Interns

AL-MARSAD hosted one intern during 2007. His name is Mr. Declan Gannon. Mr. Gannon supported Al-MARSAD by undertaking legal research, assisting with the

drafting of the annual report, and regularly drafting interventions, press releases, short memos, as well as monitoring the English-language press, editing affidavits translated into.

3. External consultant

In 2006, AI-MARSAD began to cooperate with Susanna Kruger who expressed readiness to volunteer, conducting external consultation and helping in capacity building of AL-MARSAD. Susanna is a specialist in consultancy and evaluation and preparing her PhD on this field. Susanna's help to AL-MARSAD was very crucial for the development of the organization, its structure and members. The work with Susanna for over two years made AL-MARSAD more successful and professional human rights organisation, building itself a strong reputation of credibility and impartiality based most significantly on its documentation of human rights violations.

III Objectives

The following section lays out the objectives Al-MARSAD set to accomplish during 2007, and assesses 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 organizations and individuals at the local and international levels

One of the main objects of Al-MARSAD's work is to make the organization 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. Many interviews were conducted by the organization's fieldworker's, lawyer and legal researchers as a preparatory step for publishing future studies in 2008 concerning separated families, settlements, trees uprooting. Furthermore, press releases and open letters are prepared and disseminated to local and international organizations and individuals.

AL-MARSAD gathered 42 affidavits from victims and eye-witnesses of human rights violations in the Occupied Golan. These affidavits pertained to violations associated with the separated families, settlements, landmines, uprooting of trees. These efforts meets AL-MARSAD's objective to document and monitor human rights and humanitarian law violations by conducting fieldwork and establishing a databank by the end of 2009.

The gathered information from monitoring and documentation disseminated to officials, academics, human rights and civil society organizations, 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.

During 2007, much of Al-MARSAD volunteer Lawyer efforts focused on providing free legal aid and counseling for individual victims of human rights abuses regarding such issues as prisoners, uprooting of trees, separated families, travel restrictions, landmines.

Al-Marsad over the past number of years has run an internship program from its office in Majdal Shams. 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 the illegal Occupation of Israel.

Al-Marsad has also, when possible, provided 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

Al-MARSAD is attempting to develop an advocacy plan, which raises awareness in the international community, media and international organizations regarding human rights situation in the Occupied Syrian Golan and its legal status. In this regard, AL-MARSAD is planning to launch his first campaign related to Israeli practices of forcible transfer and separated families and its impacts on Syrian population late 2008.

Al-MARSAD was more active at the international level during 2007. To date members of the Al Marsad members have participated in various human rights training course. Such training courses have been held in Geneva at the ISHR, and the UN-OHCHR training course for minorities and indigenous people in Geneva.

The organization's work in this area has caused Al-MARSAD to become a reference point for human rights organizations and other non-governmental organisation regarding human rights situation in Occupied Golan.

Objective three: Develop the institutional capacity of Al-MARSAD

A major aspect of the third objective was the development of Al-MARSAD's future strategic plan for 2008-2009, which was at first anticipated to be a two-year. The strategic planning process was conducted under the guidance and supervision of Mrs Susanna Krueger who is international consultant. The plan ultimately allowed Al-MARSAD to reassess its mission and vision, its values, mandate, goals, and objectives, and how it conducts its work in the field of human rights and the rule of law. The strategic plan aims to keep Al-MARSAD's work focused on what it does best, and lays the groundwork for the execution and management of the organization's tasks and staff, respectively.

The result was a well-considered plan that was drafted after staff workshops, and input by its board and partner. As part of the plan, Al-MARSAD also developed a two-year action plan that will allow it to manage its time and human resources, and allow the organisation to be held accountable by its donor organizations.

Al-MARSAD is keen to continue to build itself as a 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 Acting Director worked continuously to seek long-term core-funding opportunities for Al-MARSAD. The result is that Al-MARSAD I is becoming more comfortable in its funding for the near future. The two-year strategic plan also helps attract the attention of potential donor organisation as it demonstrates that Al-MARSAD has a sound plan and is thus a good local partner for international organizations.

Also during 2007, AI-MARSAD assessed the feasibility of acquiring and building up a library space in its offices, and started looking for the financial resources to undertake such a project.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

While AI-MARSAD is proud of all that it accomplished in 2007 and is enthusiastic about the two-year strategic plan that it worked hard to develop, it realizes that certain lessons have been learned. Workload management was a constant struggle in all levels without resources. This always creates a reality for unstable environment in which AI-MARSAD conducts its work. This reality was kept in mind during the planning process, which hopefully contributed for its solving.

The careful strategic planning AI-MARSAD undertook in 2007 will propel it towards pilot period in the two years to come. Also thanks to this process, the organization will be able to overcome future challenges and become more democratic, professional and sustainable in the future.

The year 2007 was an important one of assessment for AI-MARSAD, and 2008 will be a year of consolidation of and focus on ensuring the respect of human rights and the rule of law. Empowered by its strategic plan, AI-MARSAD is poised to continue its essential work in the Occupied Golan as strong and professional human rights organization.