



AL-MARSAD
ANNUAL ACTIVITIES REPORT 2018
ISSUED MAY 2019

AL-MARSAD

ARAB HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE IN THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

www.golan-marsad.org



Workshop for young native Syrians at Al-Marsad's office in Majdal Shams, Occupied Syrian Golan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Changes in the Situational Context and the Organization's Activities**
- 3. Important Changes within Al-Marsad**
- 4. Research Reports**
- 5. Promoting Human Rights in the Occupied Syrian Golan**
- 6. Outputs Delivered to the Target Group**
- 7. Staff Members' Activities**
- 8. Conclusions and Highlights**

1. INTRODUCTION

Al-Marsad – Arab Human Rights Centre in Golan Heights (‘Al-Marsad’), as the only human rights organization in the occupied Syrian Golan (‘Golan’), has continued its efforts to monitor, document, research, and raise awareness for the human rights situation in the region. This has included examining and confronting Israeli policies at the national and international level that violate human rights law and international humanitarian law. This report discusses Al-Marsad’s activities over the past year and how these activities have contributed to the overall protection of and respect for human rights in the Golan.

The information covered in this report comes from Al-Marsad’s daily work, activities, and project outputs. Al-Marsad’s projects primarily involve: legal research, correspondence with Israeli authorities; workshops for the local Syrian community; legal aid consultations and representation; field visits for local and international delegations; meetings and correspondence with journalists, international non-profit organization partners, government officials, and politicians; and, the development and publication of in-depth legal reports.



Field tour being led by Wael Tarabieh, head of Al-Marsad’s Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Program.

In 2018, Al-Marsad grew in numerous ways, building on the organization’s past work to create new avenues for engagement. With this increased outreach within the Syrian community and internationally, the local population’s confidence in Al-Marsad has grown as more individuals, groups, politicians, international organizations, and other

stakeholders in the region have approached Al-Marsad to cooperate, obtain legal advice, request information, and/or file complaints against various Israeli authorities. Al-Marsad has also expanded its resources to work more on economic, social and cultural rights issues. In 2018, Al-Marsad launched a pilot project on economic, social and cultural rights that has led to the creation of a new, full economic, social, and cultural rights program at the beginning of 2019.

The following summarizes Al-Marsad's activities during 2018.

2. CHANGES IN THE SITUATIONAL CONTEXT AND THE ORGANIZATION'S ACTIVITIES

The daily living situation of the native Syrian population in the Golan remains precarious and challenging. Israel continues to attempt to benefit from the ongoing conflict in Syria to strengthen its control on the Golan and claim 'sovereignty' over the region. Israel does this by expanding its settlement activities, exploiting the Golan's natural resources (creating 'facts on the ground'), and accelerating 'Israelization' policies designed to undermine Syrian-Arab culture and identity.

Israel continues to implement discriminatory policies against the Syrian community (approx. 27,000 persons) while offering state support for Israeli settlers (approx. 27,000 persons as well). This translates to systemic inequality that damages the native population while strengthening the occupying power's presence in the region.

2018 witnessed increased 'Israelization' policies in schools and local services across the Golan. This was evidenced most clearly by Israel holding local municipal elections in the Golan for the first time since occupation began. Israel used the elections as a tool to try to project legitimacy. The community collectively decided to boycott the elections, however, and turnout for the elections only reached just over one percent across four of the five Syrian villages. The new leaders in place, therefore, continue to lack legitimacy in the eyes of the native population.

Israeli authorities have also started massively expanding their efforts to manipulate the Golan's natural resources. An Israeli company, with the support of the government, spent 2018 trying to acquire all the necessary licences to build a large wind farm project (around 52 wind turbines) on Syirans' private lands in the Golan. The project has numerous harmful implications for the native Syrian community and is being progressed in coordination with Israel's overall goal to take advantage of the conflict in Syria to solidify its hold on the Golan. Israel often uses the Syrian conflict to exacerbate political divisions in the local community.



English class for local Syrian students hosted by an international intern at Al-Marsad.

As part of its policy to restrict native Syrian residential and industrial expansion, Israel continues to engage in building demolitions for structures constructed without proper Israeli permissions. Due to discriminatory planning policies, it is extremely difficult for Syrians to obtain proper building permits, therefore, they are forced to build without them. This leads Israeli authorities to constantly issue demolition orders against native Syrians' building projects.

Israeli authorities are also still planning to designate 20,000 acres of land around Majdal Shams and Ein Qynia, two remaining Syrian villages, as a national park. This will further restrict native village expansion. Land shortages have led some local Syrians to start signing agreements with Israeli authorities that state that their ancestral Syrian lands are Israeli owned simply to obtain permission to build on the lands. Others are increasingly building in their fields, which reduces the available land for agriculture development.



Hearing for Al-Marsad's objections on behalf of the native Syrian population against the 'Hermon National Park Plan.'

As a result of changes on the ground in the Golan in 2018, Al-Marsad has committed more resources to local community organizing and targeting the international community for assistance in combatting Israel's discriminatory occupation. In its community engagement efforts, Al-Marsad has been able to serve as a centerpiece for peaceful debate and campaigning against Israel's newest oppressive measures.

Internationally, Al-Marsad has developed new relationships with larger international non-profit organizations in an effort to bring more attention to the issues impacting the Golan. With regards to intergovernmental engagement, Al-Marsad has continued to build on its strong relationships at the European Union ('EU'), especially with Member State missions to the EU and with the EU's diplomatic mission in Tel-Aviv. Towards the end of 2018, Al-Marsad decided to focus more efforts on advocacy at the United Nations ('UN'). Part of these efforts included the submission and then in person presentation of a parallel report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

As mentioned in Al-Marsad's 2017 activities report, Al-Marsad established a strategic project/partnership with Cornell University Law School's International Human Rights Clinic. In 2018, this partnership continued to develop with Cornell becoming more involved in Al-Marsad's work with various UN human rights bodies. As part of its joint work with Cornell, Al-Marsad organized dozens of interviews for Cornell's team with the native Syrian population and several field visits to supplement the desk research

already done by the Clinic. The result of Cornell's visit was a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee.

3. IMPORTANT CHANGES WITHIN AL-MARSAD

The General Assembly and the Board of Directors held four meetings during 2018. Two new members joined the General Assembly.

Al-Marsad's Board:

A. Committee

1. Atef Safadi, press photographer with European Pressphoto Agency (EPA);
2. Naif Fakhreldeen, M.A Veterinarian; and,
3. Madad Ewidat, farmer.

B. Audit Control Committee

4. Madad Kalany, M.A in Aviation Communications; and,
5. Dr. Munir Fakher Eldin, Assistant Professor of Arab Studies at Birzeit University.

Four international interns from Italy, Ireland, the U.S., and the U.K. joined Al-Marsad during 2018. Additionally, four local interns joined Al-Marsad to help with the 'New Ways of Seeing' pilot project, which is supported by the European Endowment for Democracy. Al-Marsad's individual staff activities are described further in Section 7 of this report.

A large change in Al-Marsad's work has been its new focus on grassroots organizing support. Al-Marsad still operates as the only human rights organization in the Golan but continues to build strong relationships with other grassroots initiatives in the region. In 2018, these initiatives included the parent committees, farmer cooperatives, young activist movements, and worker's groups. Several members of these collectives are in regular contact with and volunteer for Al-Marsad to achieve the community's goals. Al-Marsad's closest grassroots cooperation has been with the Fateh Mudarris Centre, which was founded and is run by a group of local artists and community activists. Al-Marsad has partnered with the Fateh Mudarris Centre to run cultural rights activities and has even built an internship program with the Centre for local activists.

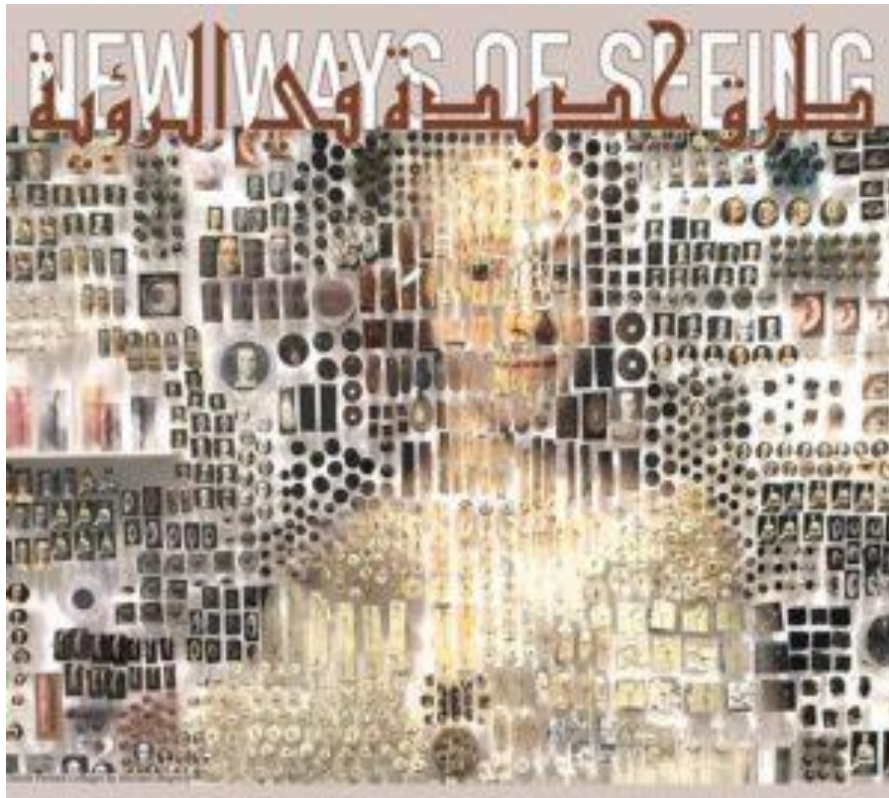
Increased cooperation with the local community has resulted in a greater demand for legal advice and has led to more communication and complaints being filed with the Israeli authorities (e.g. Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education, Local Councils, local planning committees, etc.).

Regionally, Al-Marsad has shifted its work to engage with more like-minded partners. Al-Marsad has been working with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel -ACRI on different human rights issues. Al-Marsad has also established a new relationship with Planers for Human Rights -Bimkom. Al-Marsad continues to maintain good relations with regional organizations like Al-Haq, Al-Mezan, The Civic Coalition for Defending Palestinian's Rights in Jerusalem, Adalah, Who Profits, and De-Colonizer.

Internationally, Al-Marsad has also altered its activities to utilize various partnerships. In 2018, Al-Marsad began working more closely with Amnesty International, Human

Rights Watch, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Al-Marsad has also built up its strong working relationships with European organizations, including EuroMed Rights, CIDSE, EuMEP, and others. Al-Marsad is now expanding its work into the U.S. where it is beginning to build partnerships with dozens of organizations to facilitate its advocacy efforts.

These new and ongoing partnerships with international and regional non-profit organizations allow Al-Marsad to expand its advocacy reach, obtain support for project activities, and provide effective legal advice and representation to local Syrians.



4. RESEARCH REPORTS

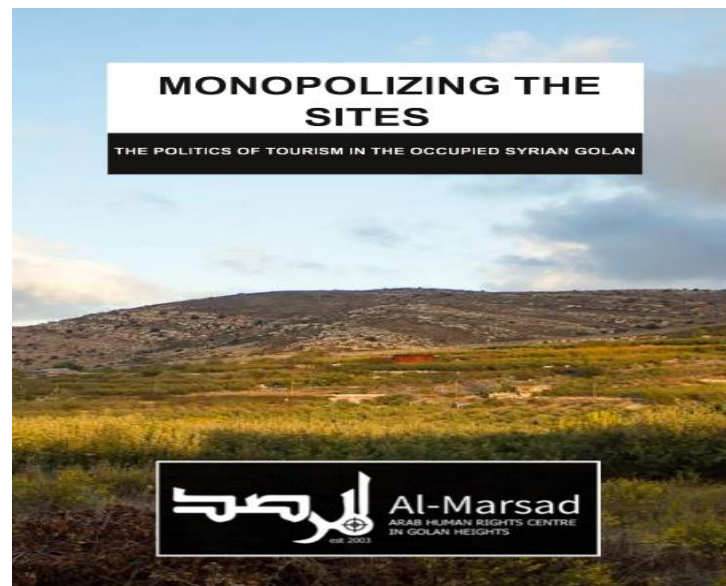
Al-Marsad's legal work in 2018 focussed on current discriminatory Israeli policy initiatives, including: settlement expansion; natural resource exploitation; planning and housing regulations; forcible transfer; economic, social, and cultural rights restrictions; and, property destruction.

In 2018, Al-Marsad published the following reports:

- Legal report on settlement business in the Golan with comprehensive list of every Israeli business registered in a Golan settlement: '*Selling Settlements – The Occupied Golan's Settlement Industries*'
<http://golan-marsad.org/wp-content/uploads/Selling-Settlements-%E2%80%93-The-Occupied-Golan%E2%80%99s-Settlement-Industries.pdf>



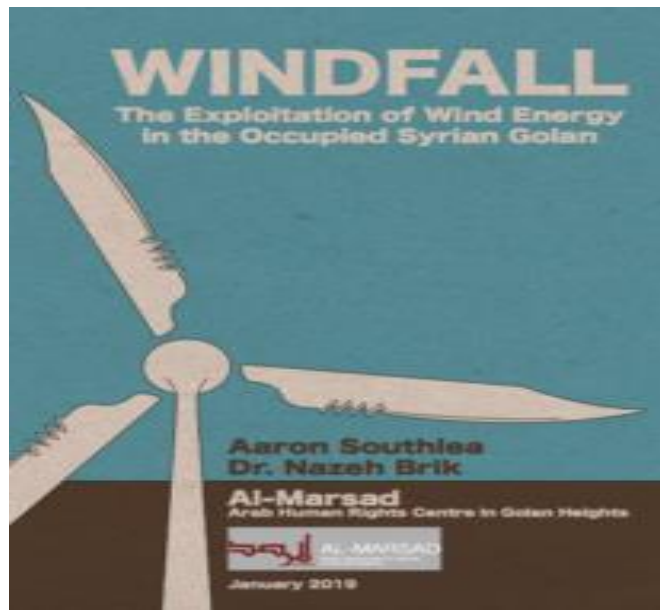
- Legal report on Israel's manipulation of the tourist industry in the Golan: *'Monopolizing the Sites – The Politics of Tourism in the Golan'*
<http://golan-marsad.org/wp-content/uploads/Monopolizing-the-Sites-The-Politics-of-Tourism-in-the-Golan.pdf>



- Legal report on local elections in the Golan: *'More Shadows than Lights: Local Elections in the Occupied Syrian Golan'*
<http://golan-marsad.org/publications/more-shadows-than-lights-local-election-in-the-occupied-syrian-golan-2/>



- Legal report on the manipulation of natural resources in the Golan: ‘*Windfall: The Exploitation of Wind Energy in the Occupied Syrian Golan*’
<http://golan-marsad.org/wp-content/uploads/Windfall-%E2%80%93-The-Exploitation-of-Wind-Energy-in-the-Occupied-Syrian-Golan.pdf>
http://golan-marsad.org/publications/winfall_arabic_for_net-1/



5. PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE GOLAN

With increased media coverage and global attention on the Golan, Al-Marsad has massively increased its advocacy and awareness raising efforts. Al-Marsad has continued to see an increase in traffic on its website and social media platforms. This has allowed Al-Marsad to interact more easily and clearly with individual civilians around the world as well as journalists, interested organizations and stakeholders, and intergovernmental institutions.

As stated above, in 2018 Al-Marsad enormously increased its local grassroots advocacy. For the first time in many years, the local community, with Al-Marsad's support, created and maintained its own initiatives to contest Israel's occupation. Most of these local, grassroots movements addressed Israel's attempts to hold municipal elections and support for the development of dangerous wind farm project in the region.

Throughout 2018, Al-Marsad continued to expand its work with Israeli and Palestinian organizations engaged in similar human rights work. New connections were built with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, while Al-Marsad continued its close relationships with Adalah, Who Profits, Al-Haq, and others. Al-Marsad uses these partnerships to build coalition support on different human rights issues impacting the Golan and to offer support and solidarity where it is needed.

Furthermore, Al-Marsad has increased its activity with international organizations working on human rights in Israel-Palestine and Syria. Al-Marsad has maintained a relationship with Cornell University while building a new relationship with the London School of Economics to support a research project entitled 'Mapping Memories of Resistance: The Untold Story of the Occupation of the Golan.' Al-Marsad also hosted a group of students doing primary research on the Golan from Columbia University.

The support of these schools is often coupled with expanding support from international non-profit organizations. In Europe, Al-Marsad has expanded its relationships with FIDH, CIDSE, EuMEP, ECCP, CNCD-11.11.11, EuroMed Rights, and others to support its work at the EU and within EU Member States. Al-Marsad has also started expanding its campaigning in the U.S. for the first time. In 2018, Al-Marsad began working with a large group of organizations in the U.S. focused on responsible tourism in Israel-Palestine and the Golan. This coalition has been the foundation for increased activities and coordination with U.S. non-profit organizations engaged in human rights work in the Middle East. These partnerships will facilitate Al-Marsad's overall movement towards growing its presence in the U.S.

Al-Marsad has supplemented all of its local and regional work with intergovernmental advocacy. Towards the end of 2018, Al-Marsad submitted a parallel report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Earlier in 2018, in partnership with Cornell University, Al-Marsad submitted a report to the UN Human Rights Committee regarding the "list of issues" to be taken up in its periodic review of Israel. These reports will hopefully be followed up on in 2019 with a large increase in awareness raising, shadow and parallel report submissions, and in-person briefings at the UN in Geneva and New York.

Al-Marsad continues to have strong relationships with journalists around the globe as well. Al-Marsad provides journalists with current information on the Golan and also has facilitated different reporters' work by assisting them with securing interviews and researching information on different issues.

As always, Al-Marsad remains in contact with Israeli authorities, ministries (e.g. Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Education, Ministry of the Interior, the Israeli Comptroller, the Landmine Authority, planning committees, etc.), and the Israeli controlled Local Councils in the native Syrian villages.

6. OUTPUTS DELIVERED TO THE TARGET GROUP

The native Syrian community of the Golan is the main target group of Al-Marsad's work. Supplemental target groups include Israeli civilians and authorities, international non-profit organizations, state-level politicians, and intergovernmental institutions. In 2018, Al-Marsad's outputs include:

- Conducted over 300 legal consultations on political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights issues (e.g. housing rights, right to education, permanent residency status, equal access to utilities, etc.).
- Represented 42 local persons and one group at a hearing for objections filed with the district planning committee against the 'Hermon National Park Plan.' The hearing took place in August 2018 and the objections were partially accepted.
- Raised awareness regionally, internationally, and within the local community for the disastrous implications of Israel's local elections in the Golan.
- Raised awareness locally, regionally, and internationally for the issues surrounding the wind farm project that is set to be built on native Syrians' private lands. This included the production of a full legal report on the project's implications.
- Successfully lobbied for two landmine fields inside and around the Syrian village Majdal Shams to be cleared by Israeli authorities. Both fields are still not officially declared safe.
- Filed two administrative petitions under the Law of the Right to Obtain Information 1998 regarding utility prices and municipal taxes for people with special needs in the Syrian villages.
- Corresponded with the Israeli-controlled Local Councils regarding discriminatory electricity prices in the Syrian villages.
- Corresponded with local planning committees to scrutinise the maintenance of infrastructure in the Syrian village Majdal Shams.
- Corresponded with the Israeli Ministry of the Interior regarding applications for permanent residency.
- Produced four in-depth legal reports on human rights and humanitarian law issues in the Golan.
- Produced one comprehensive book on the human rights situation in the Golan.
- Drafted and submitted one report to the UN. Began drafting a second report to the UN that was submitted at the beginning of 2019.
- Worked with politicians around the world to advocate for basic human rights to be afforded to the native population of the Golan and for Israel to be held accountable for its violations of international law.

7. STAFF MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

Staff engaged in the following activities throughout 2018:

A. Majdoleen Safadi, Accountant

- Prepared salaries and transferred them to employee's bank accounts;
- Conducted daily administrative and financial tasks;
- Paid taxes and office bills, monitored Al-Marsad's bank account, and followed up on financial issues with the accounting office and the program auditor;
- Prepared financial reports in coordination with the program auditor; and,

- Updated the organization's website, entering data on a regular basis;

B. Wael Tarabieh – Project Coordinator

- Created, developed, and managed all elements of Al-Marsad's new program on economic, social, and cultural rights;
- Organized and implemented all the workshops carried out for the 'New Ways of Seeing' project;
- Completed all administrative, management, monitoring, and evaluation tasks for the 'New Ways of Seeing' project;
- Coordinated with local grassroots movements in the Golan to assist them in their activist and cultural activities; and,
- Hosted tours and provided presentations on the Golan, its history, and Al-Marsad's work for visiting delegations.

C. Karama Abu Saleh, Lawyer

- Provided legal advice to the Arab population of the Golan (300 consultations to local community groups and individuals in 2018);
- Corresponded with various Israeli ministries and authorities (e.g. Ministry of Defense, Ministry of the Interior, the Israeli Comptroller, Local Councils, the Landmine Authority, Ministry of Education, Israeli Water Company – Mekorot, and the Israeli local and district planning committees);
- Followed up on Al-Marsad's file with the Israeli non-profit registrar office in Jerusalem as required by law;
- Followed up on Israel's obligations to clear landmine fields with the Israeli Comptroller and the Israeli army; and,
- Represented local workers at and filed cases with the Israeli labour court.

D. Nizar Ayoub, Director

- Led the organization's daily work;
- Led the internship program (contacted interns, chose interns, supervised the interns' daily work, and assisted them in conducting their research);
- Conducted legal research (drafted statements, position papers, and legal reports);
- Followed up with Al-Marsad's applications for consultative status with ECOSOC and The European-Mediterranean Human Rights Network;
- Conducted fundraising (contacted donors, drafted funding proposals, and established relationships with donors);
- Reported to donors;
- Networked with local, regional, and international human rights non-profit organizations; and,
- Conducted interviews on behalf of Al-Marsad.

E. Nazeh Brik

- Observed, documented, and researched settlement expansion activities in the Golan

F. Interns

- Throughout 2018, four international interns contributed to Al-Marsad work. The interns conducted their research in cooperation with the local staff and under the daily supervision of the Director in the Syrian village Majdal Shams. Additionally, Al-Marsad hosted four local Syrian interns to participate in the 'New Ways of Seeing' pilot project under the supervision of the project's manager, Wael Tarabieh.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS

In 2018, Al-Marsad was able to achieve almost all of its stated project goals and objectives. The positive results of this work can be seen in increasing public activism within the native Syrian community and a greater global awareness for the plight of local Syrians in the Golan.

Al-Marsad's greatest achievements in 2018 came from its advocacy and outreach work as well as its increased direct services to the native Syrian population. Al-Marsad has established new connections and maintained strong, old relationships with key representatives at the EU, within EU Member States, and within the UN human rights mechanisms. Al-Marsad also spent the later part of 2018 forming a foundation to shift some advocacy efforts to the U.S.

As articulated above, Al-Marsad continued to participate in and contribute to multiple collaborative initiatives with different non-profit organisations engaged in issues relevant to Al-Marsad's work. A clear indication of the successes of Al-Marsad's outreach activities over the past year has been the substantial rise in the number people and groups contacting Al-Marsad for field visits and alternative tours of the Golan.

In focusing new efforts on serving the local community, Al-Marsad has managed to greatly strengthen its relationships with the native Syrians of the Golan. In 2018, these new community engagement efforts included support for local grassroots initiatives and the continuation of direct, pro bono legal services for the community. This has allowed Al-Marsad to develop partnerships with grassroots movements in order to empower the native community to play an increased role in standing up for its basic rights. This new engagement has been pursued in combination with Al-Marsad's extensive direct legal services program that provided over 300 legal consultations to native Syrians throughout 2018.

Looking towards the future, lots work remains to be done. For instance, the contested wind farm project discussed above is still being considered by the Israeli government for full licencing. Al-Marsad plans to fight this project however it can. Additionally, many people – in particular women – are still reluctant to discuss human rights violations for fear of reprisals from the Israeli authorities or because they believe that change is not possible. Al-Marsad will continue to engage marginalized groups within the community, as it has done with the launching of the 'New Ways of Seeing' project, to encourage them to stand up for their basic human rights. This goal serves as the foundational motivation for Al-Marsad's launching of a full economic, social, and cultural rights program at the start of 2019.



Field workshop for young native Syrians to discuss the history of the Golan before and after the occupation.

Despite the many obstacles that lay ahead, Al-Marsad remains fully committed to delivering effective, on the ground services to native Syrians in the Golan while campaigning locally and around the globe for the protection of basic human rights and international law in the region.