

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

10 May 2016

Re – Issues of importance for EU-Israel Association Council meeting in June 2016

Dear Ambassador Faaborg-Andersen,

I am the director of Al-Marsad – Arab Human Rights Centre in the Occupied Syrian Golan. Al-Marsad was established in 2003 to document the human rights violations perpetrated by Israel against the native Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan. Special focus is given to: Israeli settlement expansion; land expropriation and exploitation of natural resources by Israeli authorities and private companies; discriminatory land, housing and development plans for the Syrian population; deployment of landmines and Israeli military compounds in Syrian civilian areas; family separation due to the expulsion of the overwhelming majority of the native Syrian population during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; and lack of decision making powers for the Syrian population in local services that affect them.

First, given Israel's recent alarming statements regarding the sovereignty of the Occupied Syrian Golan, I wish to express my gratitude to the EU and EU member states for their statements rejecting these illegal claims.

Second, I am writing to you and your EU member state embassy colleagues, to respectfully request that the EU raise serious concerns about Israel's discriminatory and illegal policies towards the native Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan; and Israel's recent rhetoric regarding the sovereignty of the Occupied Syrian Golan; during the upcoming EU-Israel Association Council meeting, and obtain binding commitments from Israel that it will desist from such activities.

Furthermore, I request that this be reflected in the subsequent statement of the EU, following the Association meeting. Unfortunately, I note that no mention of the situation in the Occupied Syrian Golan is found in the statement of the previous Association meeting.¹

Al-Marsad – as the only human rights organisation representing the interests of the Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan – would gladly coordinate a fact-finding delegation by representatives of the EU and member states to the Occupied Syrian Golan in order that you witness the human rights violations occurring here, first hand.

However, in the meantime, please find below a summary of urgent issues that must be addressed in the upcoming EU-Israel Association Council meeting:

¹ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/132046.pdf

1. Continuation of discriminatory policies by Israel against the native Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan

- Discriminatory land, housing and development policies have meant that existing Syrian residential areas are densely populated, as horizontal expansion on surrounding land is not possible. Israel seeks to expropriate land owned by the Syrian population by declaring it green areas, vital areas for public benefit, or state land, in order to prevent the Syrian population from using it for construction, or other purposes, such as farming and grazing. As such, Syrian residential areas are only able to expand upwards – a stark contrast to the ever increasing outward expansion of illegal settlements. Not only do these policies have an adverse effect on available housing, they also severely inhibit the improvement of road and sewage systems; the construction of educational, health and cultural institutions; and the establishment of infrastructure for industrial areas.²
- The continued deployment of landmines and Israeli army bases in and around Syrian residential and civilian areas. Since 1967 Israel has utilized vast areas of land in the Occupied Syrian Golan for military training and bases, leaving behind substantial amounts of military remains and landmines. The Israeli military has neglected to maintain much of this land, which has resulted in the loss of innocent civilian lives. Numerous land mines have been laid in and adjacent to Syrian villages on the pretext of security – often within just a few metres of people’s houses and where their children play. In addition, Israel has planted approximately 76 mine fields over large areas of agricultural land and those allocated for grazing.³
- Lack of decision making and participatory powers in the education system. Following the occupation of the Syrian Golan, a new curriculum and school system was forced on the Syrian population. These changes sought to disregard and diminish the Syrian identity and culture, as well as the civilization and history of the local community. Today, the Israeli curriculum does not facilitate Arab cultural activities and the Syrian population has little say in how their schools are run and what their children are taught. ⁴

2. Israeli claims of sovereignty of Occupied Syrian Golan, increased settlement expansion and the illegal exploitation of natural resources

Israel is cynically seeking to profit from the ongoing conflict in Syria by calling for international recognition of Israel’s illegal annexation and military occupation of the Occupied Syrian Golan.⁵

² Discriminatory land, housing and development policies violate multiples rules of international law, including, but not limited to: A.1 & A.26 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); A.5 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); A1 & A.11 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

³ The continued deployment of landmines and Israeli army bases in Syrian residential and civilian areas violates multiples rules of international law, including, but not limited to: A.6 & A.12 ICCPR; A.5 ICERD; A.6 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); A.3 Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

⁴ Lack of decision making and participatory powers in the education system violates multiple rules of international law, including, but not limited to: A.1, A.13 & A.15 CESC; A.5 CERD; A.27 ICCPR; A.29 & A.30 CRC.

⁵ <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.714813>

Whilst, the international community has rejected these claims,⁶ Israel is using tried and tested tactics on the ground to further its goals, including increased settlement expansion and the exploitation of natural resources – both illegal practices under international law.⁷ 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,⁸ and this year a two-year permit extension was approved for Afek Oil and Gas- Genie Energy USA to explore oil at up to 10 sites in the Occupied Syrian Golan.⁹

These serious violations of international law not only have severe consequences for the Syrian population of the Occupied Syrian Golan, but also create an obstacle to achieve durable peace in the Middle East. Therefore, I respectfully call on the EU to obtain binding commitments from Israel in the upcoming EU-Israel Association Council meeting that Israel will abide by its obligations under international law, and, in particular:

- End discriminatory policies against the native Syrian population in the Occupied Syrian Golan and instead promote and protect the fundamental human rights of the native Syrian population.
- Desist from making inflammatory statements regarding the sovereignty of Occupied Syrian Golan.
- Stop the construction and expansion of settlements in the Occupied Syrian Golan.
- Stop the illegal exploration and extraction of natural resources in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

I thank you in advance for your time and consideration of these important matters. Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



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CC: Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs

⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/rejects-israel-claim-syria-golan-heights-160426195853040.html>

⁷ Actions which violate multiples rules of international law, including, but not limited to: A.49 Fourth Geneva Convention; A.55 of the Hague Regulations.

⁸ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/03/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-israel-golan-heights.html?_r=1

⁹ <http://www.jpost.com/Business-and-Innovation/Environment/Drilling-to-go-on-in-the-Golan-443533>