

Ruth Davidson MSP
Leader of the Scottish Conservative Party
Scottish Conservative Central Office
67 Northumberland Street
Edinburgh, EH3 6JG
Scotland

5 September 2016

Re – Delegation of Conservative members of the Scottish Parliament to the Occupied Syrian Golan

Dear Ms Davidson,

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 express my concern regarding the recent visit of a delegation of nine Conservative members of the Scottish Parliament to the Occupied Syrian Golan, as part of a trip that also included Israel and the Occupied West Bank.

From media reports, I understand that the delegation visited a winery in an Israeli settlement in the Occupied Syrian Golan. As I imagine that you are aware, such settlements are illegal according to international law, and their construction and expansion at the expense of the native Syrian inhabitants¹ have been repeatedly condemned by the international community.² I am highly concerned that the delegation has visited a winery in an illegal Israeli settlement without providing any explanation of the purpose of the visit. In effect, this sends a message that the Scottish Conservative party endorses the illegal activities of this settlement - built on land illegally appropriated from its original Syrian owners. Even more worrying is the fact that the Scottish Conservative party has refused to answer questions about whether the delegation raised the broader issue of the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Syrian Golan during its visit.³

In addition, I am deeply concerned by comments made by John Lamont MSP, who I understand led the delegation. In describing the visit, Mr Lamont stated that “*on Israel’s northern border with Syria*

¹ Following Israel’s military occupation in 1967 of the Syrian Golan, approximately 130,000 native Syrian inhabitants were forcibly transferred or displaced from their homes and forbidden from returning. Subsequently, the Israeli military began a widespread campaign to demolish their homes, resulting in the destruction of two cities and over 300 villages and farms. These were replaced by Israeli settlements, often using the same stones from the destroyed villages and farms. Today, there are at least 21,000 Israeli settlers in the Occupied Syrian Golan, living in over 33 illegal settlements, whilst the remaining native Syrian population suffers from continued violations of their basic human rights.

² 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).

³ <https://www.holyrood.com/articles/news/scottish-tories-lobby-closer-links-between-scotland-and-israel>

we witnessed first-hand the devastating civil war raging metres away from Israel". The only part of Syria that Israel borders is the Occupied Syrian Golan. The fighting in Syria is not taking place metres away from Israel, it is taking place metres away from the Occupied Syrian Golan. From Mr Lamont's comments, it appears that he considers that the Occupied Syrian Golan is part of Israel, which it is not.

Finally, I am highly disappointed that the delegation did not contact Al-Marsad or other representatives of the Syrian community in the Occupied Syrian Golan in order to discuss the daily challenges faced by the remaining native Syrian population in the Syrian Golan due to Israel's illegal occupation. This would have ensured that the delegation obtained a more balanced view of the situation in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

Given the serious issues that I raise above, I am sure that you can understand my concern. Hence, I would be grateful if you could please confirm:

- The reason for the visit of the delegation to a winery in an illegal settlement in the Occupied Syrian Golan;
- That, the issue of the construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Syrian Golan was raised by the delegation during its visit;
- That, the Scottish Conservative Party is opposed to the construction and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Syrian Golan, in particular, plans announced last year to increase the number of Israeli settlers in the Occupied Syrian Golan by 100,000 over the next five years;
- That, the Scottish Conservative party is in line with the position of the international community⁴ and recognises that the Syrian Golan is occupied Syrian territory and is not part of the State of Israel;
- That, any future delegations from the Scottish Conservative party to the Occupied Syrian Golan will meet with representatives from Al-Marsad or other members of the Syrian community, in order that they can obtain a balanced perspective of the situation in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

⁴ See recent statements from the [United Nations](#), [United States](#), [European Union](#) and [Britain](#) rejecting Israel's latest rhetoric regarding sovereignty of the Occupied Syrian Golan.

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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