

Ambassador Lars Faaborg-Andersen
Delegation of the European Union to Israel
Paz Tower 15th - 16th floors
5-7 Shoham Street
Ramat Gan - P.O.Box 3513
Israel

14 November 2016

Re – Construction of 1600 settlement units in the Occupied Syrian Golan and the appropriation of Syrian land as part of the 'Hermon National Park' plan

Dear Ambassador,

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 inform you that on 26 October, the Israeli Finance Ministry approved plans for the construction of 1600 settlement units in the illegal Israeli settlement of Katzrin in the Occupied Syrian Golan. Katzrin is the largest Israeli settlement (population 8000) in the Occupied Syrian Golan.¹ It was built over the destroyed Syrian villages of Qasrin, Shqef and Sanawber whose inhabitants were either forced to leave their homes by the Israeli army or were displaced by fighting, at the time of the Israeli occupation in 1967.

This will be the largest expansion of an illegal Israeli settlement in the Occupied Syrian Golan since the 1980s. Hence, this announcement is even more concerning and clearly marks a concrete step in the Israeli government's plans, announced last year, to increase the number of Israeli settlers living in the Occupied Syrian Golan by 100,000 over the next five years.² Furthermore, this follows recent approval by the Israeli government for a \$108 million investment to establish 750 Israeli settlement 'farming estates' on 7,400 acres of land in the Occupied Syrian Golan.³

The approval to expand the illegal Israeli settlement of Katzrin comes at a time when discriminatory housing and planning policies targeting the native Syrian population of the Occupied Syrian Golan are becoming even more severe. As you will be aware from my previous correspondence,⁴ in September, the Israeli authorities illegally demolished a Syrian home in the

¹ In addition, Katzrin is home to various illegal settlement industries such as wine and olive production, water bottling, food manufacture, and the exploration of natural resources.

² http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/03/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-israel-golan-heights.html?_r=1

³ <http://www.pressreader.com/usa/the-jewish-voice/20140117/281956015640299>

⁴ Sent on 19 September 2016.

village of Majdal Shams. And, currently, between 80-90 other Syrian home owners have been issued with orders for the demolition of their houses.

In addition, the Israeli authorities are seeking to expropriate over 20,000 acres of land that has been used by the native Syrian residents of Majdal Shams and Ein Qynia since Ottoman rule for agriculture and urbanization.⁵ If approved the 'Hermon National Park' plan would, in particular, surround Majdal Shams in the north and west. Therefore, the only area available for urban expansion of the village would be agricultural land in the south – a main source of livelihood for the local Syrian population (it is not possible to expand the village to the east given its close proximity to the fortified ceasefire line).

The designation of land by the Israeli authorities as a 'national park', 'abandoned property' or for 'military or public needs' has been, and continues to be, a regularly used tactic to either prevent the expansion of Syrian and Palestinian communities under occupation, or to appropriate land for settlement construction.⁶

Hence, I respectfully call on the European Union to strongly condemn plans for the construction of 1600 settlement units in the illegal settlement of Katzrin and the planned expropriation of Syrian land under the guise of the 'Hermon National Park' plan; and along with its international partners, obtain binding commitments from Israel that it will stop these activities.

Finally, I would also like to reiterate my suggestion that the embassy send a fact-finding mission to the Occupied Syrian Golan to witness firsthand the deteriorating human rights situation here, in addition to scheduling a meeting with Al-Marsad representatives at the embassy to discuss these issues in more detail.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of these important matters. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



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⁵ <http://golan-marsad.org/press-release-al-marsad-submits-objection-to-hermon-national-park-plan/>

⁶ A detailed explanation of these policies (in a Palestinian context) can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Israel has applied the same policies in the Occupied Syrian Golan.