

New Illegal Settlement Project

- New hotel will be built in Jabal Al-Sheikh (Hermon Mount) Resort-

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Mock Photographs: Dor Architecture and Town Planning

The management of the Mount Hermon Ski Resort, established by the settlement of Neve Ativ, intends to construct a new hotel in the resort area. Neve-Ativ was built upon the ruins of the Syrian village of Jubatha al-Zeit, which was demolished by the occupation authorities as part of their 1967 ethnic cleansing project.

The ski resort was first established in December 1971, located at an elevation of between 1,600 meters at the entrance to the resort, and 2,040 meters at the upper ski track. It extends over an area of 2,443 dunums. (1)

The resort is the most important stream of finance for the settlement of Neve Ativ, given that annually it receives approximately 450,000 visitors, including 50,000 skiers.

The idea of the hotel project came about, as stated by the resort director and Neve Ativ settlement resident, Rafael Neve, as part of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the ski resort. The 5-star hotel will contain 120 rooms, and be built at a cost of 200 million shekels. (2)

The hotel project is in line with the occupation government's plan to double the number of settlers in the Golan, with the Ministry of Tourism having allocated more than 60 million shekels (17 Million USD) as part of a plan to develop tourism infrastructure in the Golan, including the hotel sector. (3)

It should be noted that the occupation authorities began to establish settlements just a few months after the beginning of the occupation, and established the ski resort less than four years after the occupation of the Golan Heights. This blatantly exposes the expansionist and colonial plans of the Jewish state. No set of authorities would have practiced ethnic cleansing, and established settlements and tourism projects in the area they militarily occupy, if they had the will to return the area to its rightful owners.

In addition to the negative environmental impact resulting from the construction of the hotel, and the accompanying intensification of tourism, the hotel is likely to have a negative economic impact for the local indigenous population. This is especially so for the residents of the village of Majdal Shams, located on the slopes of Jabal Al-Sheikh close to the ski resort and on the road leading to the resort which also runs via the army camps in the region. The residents of Neve-Ativ settlement have long expressed their annoyance with this, and have tried to repeatedly convince the army authorities to change the route of this road so that it does not pass through Majdal Shams. They have now proposed a new road, directly linking the resort and the settlement and bypassing Majdal Shams, thus guaranteeing them a maximum benefit from the tourism sector, to the detriment of indigenous Syrians.

For material and topographical reasons, the army authorities refused to respond to the settlers' demands. As such, some settlers have resorted to violence, during the skiing seasons repeatedly preventing tourists from stopping in Majdal Shams on route to the resort, and even forcing them to an

alternative route crossing Neve-Ativ settlement. Despite this aggressive behavior by the settlers, the occupation police did not intervene, provoking the ire of the local indigenous people involved in the tourism sector, who had to forcibly expel them.

Since the local Syrian population has established economic facilities related to tourism in the northern Golan, especially those related to the ski season, several attacks on these facilities have been recorded, including:

- Destruction of a shop for renting and selling ski equipment, owned by a local resident from the village of Majdal Shams. (4)
- Preventing tourists from entering the resort because they rented ski equipment from a store owned by a local resident of the village of Majdal Shams, and defaming the owner of the store as a terrorist. (5)
- Attacking a car belonging to tourists who were staying in a room let by a resident of Majdal Shams.
- Two years ago, the Street Paving Authority raising the height of the paving on the sides of Jabal Al-Sheikh Road in the area where it crosses Majdal Shams, and where stalls owned by members of the local population that sell food and drink, ski equipment, and cold weather protection are located. This is to prevent tourists from stopping in front of these facilities and using their services.

From the perspective of the local population, the aim of such hostility is to strike at the most important material resource for them in winter - winter tourism - in which a large section of the local population is involved, and to divert this resource to the settler community.

Although the occupation authorities place the new hotel project within the framework of the government's plan to develop tourism in the occupied Golan, in order to support the economy of the settler community, the previously mentioned settler attacks support the belief among the local indigenous population that this project carries a hidden goal. This belief is that the real goal is to target their sources of livelihood. In addition to tourist shops, there are many families in the Syrian villages of the Golan that operate tourist hosting units (Zimmers). The hotel project will constitute a severe economic blow to the owners of these facilities.

While it is true that the hotel project may provide some employment for the local population, this will be outweighed by the sharp decline in the material returns from the tourism sector for the local community. This is especially so given the hotel will also contain restaurants, cafes and ski equipment shops.

Furthermore, the employment policy adopted by the "Jewish state" is based on keeping the majority of the Arab labor force in low-paying manual labor roles, and subsuming them into the Jewish labor market rather. This undermines their economic independence, and gives the occupation a

broader scope to control the lives of the indigenous population on a social, cultural and political level.

While the Planning and Building Committee refuses to give local Syrian residents building permits to establish tourist hosting units in the Birkat Ram (Ram Sea) area and its surroundings, at the instigation of the Nature and Parks Authority under the pretext of the environmental damage resulting from the construction of these units, this authority has not yet objected to the new hotel project in the Jabal Al-Sheikh (Hermon) resort. This is despite the resort being located in the Hermon Nature Reserve, and despite its knowledge that the increase in tourism will have negative effects on the flora and fauna of the area.

Equally, when the "Hermon" nature reserve, which covers an area of approximately 80,000 dunams, was approved, the Nature and Parks Authority excluded the ski site from the environmental restrictions imposed as a result of the nature reserve. In effect this means that the laws governing nature reserves do not apply to the ski resort. Not only that, at the same time the Nature and Parks Authority confiscated thousands of dunams from the municipality boundaries of the villages of Majdal Shams and Ain Qinya, and annexed them to the Hermon nature reserve. This was despite the objection of the mayors of these two villages, given a large part of these lands constituted a reserve stock for the urban expansion of these villages. (6)

The same authority (the Nature and Parks Authority) strongly objected to and fought the establishment of a new residential neighborhood for the residents of Majdal Shams (New Majdal), on the pretext that the neighborhood project "*threatens the Hermon Reserve*", due to its "*devastating*" effects on the vegetation cover. (7)

Furthermore, in the vicinity of another area approved for construction of a new neighborhood (the Al-Qatia' area), only a few hundred meters away from the Jewish settlement of Nimrud. The Nature and Parks Authority has never objected to expanding the municipality boundaries of this settlement.

This behavior clearly exposes the double standards adopted by the institutions of the occupying power, and confirms the extent and the deep influence of the ideology of ethnic planning on Israeli institutions.

Margins:

(1) Hermon Resort website: - <https://skishermon.co.il/about/>

(2) A hotel will be built on the Hermon site. (Hebrew)

- https://emek.mynet.co.il/local_news/article/h1ur0ddvq

- Israel's next tourist hit. (Hebrew)

http://www.rashuiot.co.il/html5/arclookup.taf?&_id=56071&did=1118&g=1118&title=%E4%EC%E4%E9%E8%20%E4%FA%E9%E9%F8%E5%FA%E9%20%E4%E1%E0%20%F9%EC%20%E9%F9%F8%E0%EC%3F

(3) Resolution number 864 of the government of December 26, 2021, a plan to encourage sustainable demographic growth in the localities of the Golan and Katzrin Regional Council for the years 2022-2025. (Hebrew)

https://www.gov.il/he/departments/policies/dec_864_2021

(4) An interview with the owner of a ski equipment shops in Majdal Shams

(5) An interview with the owner of a ski equipment shops in Majdal Shams.

In addition, see Haaretz newspaper report: "Who does the Hermon site belong to?"

<https://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/2008-02-26/ty-article/0000017f-e990-dc91-a17f-fd9d8a7b0000>

(6) See: "Natural Reserves in the Golan," on the Al-Marsad website

<https://golan-marsad.org/ar/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ad%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b7%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%b9%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d9%88%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ad%d8%aa%d9%84-2/>

(7) Rare nature in danger at the foot of Mount Hermon. (Hebrew)

- <https://www.teva.org.il/campaigns/3842>

The Hermon Nature Reserve is in danger of extinction

- <https://www.ynet.co.il/environment-science/article/SyzTwT93u>