

## **Al-Marsad meets with the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel**

Al-Marsad – Arab Human Rights Center in Golan Heights

September 27, 2023

Al-Marsad representative Nizar Ayoub met on Friday, September 22, 2023, at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel, and briefed them on the human rights situation in the occupied Golan and the discriminatory policies pursued by the Israeli authority against them. The meeting was held during Al-Marsad's participation in the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva from September 11 to October 13, 2023. It was set after the committee contacted Al-Marsad to provide information concerning Israeli discriminatory policies that violate human rights and international humanitarian law in the occupied Golan.

The meeting discussed the land appropriation in the Golan and Israel's seizure of 56% of the lands that were used by the residents of the five Syrian villages for grazing, agriculture, and urban expansion. This land seizure has been undertaken through military legislation present since the 1967 occupation to declare military areas and through local planning laws to declare vast nature reserves. The committee was informed of the systematic discrimination policies that target indigenous Syrians, particularly the discrimination in planning policies, the strict restrictions they impose on land uses, and the expansion of building areas. These policies prevent the Syrian population from meeting the level of urban development they require, exacerbating the widespread housing crisis due to the lack of land allocated for construction and housing. Planning policy is a powerful tool to subjugate and control Arabs, which makes the discrimination, persecution, exclusion, and marginalization that specifically targets Arabs an essential feature of its policies in all aspects of life.

Al-Marsad briefed the committee's representatives on the methods used by the occupation authority to alter the Syrian identity of the residents of the Golan by creating a narrative that ignored their cultural and political identity—utilizing educational extracurricular activities in schools, summer activities, and camps to focus on their sectarian identity instead of Syrian identity through the ideological agendas promoted by youth organizations. To achieve these goals, Israel encourages participation with the Zionistically oriented “Druze Scouts,” the “Druze Youth Movement,” and the “Working and Educated Youth” organization and promotes civil service as a condition for obtaining some privileges and as an introduction and preparation for upcoming military service, raising serious concerns among the Syrians of the Golan.

The meeting tackled the events that took place in the Golan on June 20, 2023, as a result of the occupation authority sending hundreds of special police forces to the Golan to protect work on the wind turbine project and to suppress the protest of the Syrian population, most of whom oppose the project. They closed agricultural roads, preventing farmers from reaching their lands, and dispersed the peaceful demonstrators, who had gathered in a protest to express their rejection of the project, by using excessive force, tear gas, rubber bullets, live ammunition, and water cannons. Excessive force injured 27 people, including five in critical condition, due to targeting the upper parts of the body, especially the head and eyes.