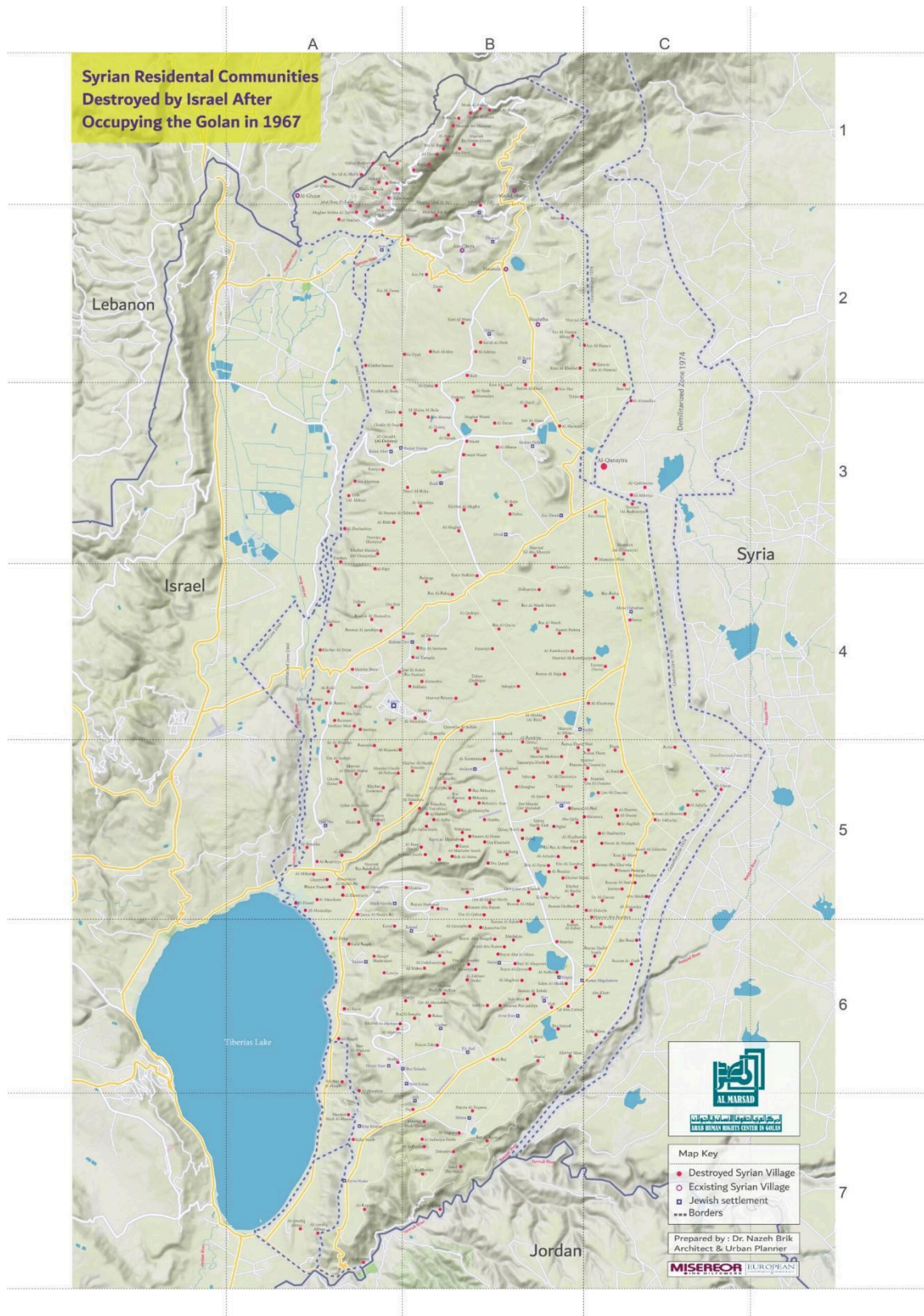


Al-Marsad Annual Activity Report 2023

Issued April 2024



مركز العرياء لحقوق الانسان في الجولان
ARAB HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER IN GOLAN



Updated Map of the Syrian residential communities destroyed by Israel after occupying the Golan in 1967

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1. INTRODUCTION

Al-Marsad – Arab Human Rights Centre in Golan Heights ('Al-Marsad') pursued its core activities during 2023 of monitoring, documenting, researching, and raising awareness of the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. This report explores the organization's research activities, awareness-raising/advocacy, Cultural festival "**Golan Cultural Days - 3**", and legal aid provided to the Syrian community in the occupied Golan during the reporting period. The activities include, among others, correspondence with Israeli authorities; workshops for the local community; legal aid (consultations and litigation); Advocacy; field visits for local and international delegations; The organization of a Third cultural festival; meetings and correspondence with journalists, government officials, and politicians.

Opening ceremony of the cultural festival "Golan Cultural Days," Second year

Al-Marsad continued during 2023 to deepen cooperation with the indigenous Syrian community, overcoming challenges that influenced it and strengthening its international and local credibility and reputation as the only human rights NGO in the occupied Syrian Golan. Besides, the organization is still intensively engaged in the legal activity of supporting the Syrian community's peaceful struggle against the wind farm project cooperation with dozens of local agriculture cooperatives and hundreds of Syrian farmers. Moreover, Al-Marsad strengthened its collaboration with different grassroots initiatives and groups in the Golan, such as the Fateh Al-Mudarris Centre for Culture and Arts, the Golan for Developing Arab Villages and others.

The Israeli occupation authority is taking advantage of the ongoing conflict in Syria proper and the de facto division of the country into several interties to strengthen its control over the Golan. Hence, they continue to create new facts on the ground that are difficult to hang in the future, mainly through the expansion of the Illegal settlement and resettlement of Jewish settlers. This will increase uncertainty about the future of the remaining Syrian community in the occupied Golan and more than half a million displaced persons.

The Syrian community suffers from Israel's discriminatory policies, which violate their fundamental rights, including the right to adequate housing; The seizure of land and severe restrictions on the use of land for urban planning and expansion; the presence of dozens of minefields between agricultural fields and adjacent to Arab villages; Frequent power cuts in Syrian towns, especially in the freezing winter, due to defects and shortcomings in the electricity networks inside the villages. Moreover, the Israeli authorities refuse to register newborns whose families stay abroad for work or study because they were born to families with Israeli residency. Still, they choose their "life centre" outside Israel.

2. CHANGES IN THE SITUATIONAL CONTEXT AND THE ORGANIZATION'S ACTIVITIES

As usual, the Israeli authorities took advantage of the military conflict in Syria to impose new facts to prolong the occupation by setting new facts on the ground while pursuing discriminatory policies against the remaining indigenous Syrian community on the occupied Golan. Israel also utilized the "Trump Declaration," which recognized Israel's 'sovereignty' over the Golan in 2019 to escalate settlement expansion, exploitation of natural resources, and Israelization policies designed to undermine the Syrian identity of the remaining indigenous Syrian community.

Israel continues developing wind farm projects (24 wind turbines, up to 220 meters in height each) owned by Energex Renewable Energies Ltd. Despite massive public opposition, the company began implementing the project after obtaining building permits. As mentioned,

Al-Marsad has been following the developments on the ground, affording legal aid and consultations to thousands of affected farmers and eight agriculture cooperatives. We also keep cooperating with our partners, the Association of Civil Rights in Israel ('ACRI') and Planners for Planning Rights ('BIMKOM'), to contest the project from a legal perspective.

Contesting the project angered the company and a few local agents in the Golan. As a result, they launched a systematic slander campaign at the beginning of 2019 targeting the organization, its staff, and their families, which has lasted until now. Al-Marsad administration has recently decided to file a defamation case against these people before the Nazareth District Court to silence them.

On 20 June 2023, Israel sent hundreds of Special Police officers to the Golan to protect the wind turbine project being resisted by Syrian residents. The state forces blocked community access points and dispersed peaceful demonstrators who had gathered for a vigil on their lands. Police deployed tear gas, water cannons, rubber bullets, and live rounds, injuring 27, including five in critical condition. This is a violent response to the legitimate longstanding protest of the people of the Golan against energy projects seeking to profit during the occupation.

As a result of these bloody confrontations, resulting from the use of excessive force by the Police and random shooting at the upper extremities of the bodies of peaceful protesters, the company stopped the project implementation, and police forces withdrew from the agriculture fields. The Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin established a committee led by his primary consultant. The committee comprises a dozen members representing native Syrians in the Golan, including Al-Marsad's lawyer, Druze's leadership in Israel, an EnergeX representative, and representatives of several Israeli ministries and security agencies. The committee has been negotiated for a few weeks without reaching any significant understanding. While the EnergeX company insists on implementing the project, the representatives of the native Syrian community categorically oppose the project.

3. IMPORTANT CHANGES WITHIN AL-MARSAD

The organization continues to increase its advocacy work among the local community and internationally regarding the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. The "Golan Cultural Days—3" festival was held for the third time from 29 July to 6 August 2023 in cooperation with several local initiatives, including the Fateh Al-Mudarris Centre for Culture and Arts, women and youth initiatives, and the Golan for Developing Arab Villages.

"Jawlan Cultural Days" Festival: Art workshop for children

The Board:

A. Committee

1. Hiba Abu Saleh, Private law office.
2. Madaa Al-Mughrabi, Dentist.
3. Madad Kalany. Engineer.
4. Madad Ewidat, farmer.

B. Audit Control Committee

1. Shada Safadi. Artist and community activist.
2. Wesam Sharaf. Human rights lawyer.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES

The organization's team conducted in 2023 the planned activities of legal research, UN submissions, a cultural festival, and advocacy. It cooperated with local and international NGOs and coalitions, mainly with the ESCR-Net, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Euro-Med Network for Human Rights, and various local human NGOs and activists.

5. REPORTS AND SUBMISSIONS

- The Israeli Occupation Government Plan to Consolidate and Expand its Settlement Project in the Occupied Syrian Golan 2022-2025.

<https://golan-marsad.org/report-the-israeli-occupation-government-plan-to-consolidate-and-expand-its-settlement-project-in-the-occupied-syrian-golan-2022-2025/>

- Report – New illegal settlement project- new hotel.

<https://golan-marsad.org/new-illegal-settlement-project-new-hotel/>

- Position paper: Overview of the real estate settlement in the occupied Golan (Arab).

<https://golan-marsad.org/ar/%d9%82%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a1%d8%a9-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%b9%d9%85%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%85%d8%b3%d8%ad-%d9%88%d8%aa%d8%b3%d9%88%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%b6%d9%8a-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84/>

- Israeli discriminatory policies against the Syrian indigenous community of the occupied Golan. Report to the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem and Israel.

6. Legal aid and representation:

- 331 in-house legal consultations on various issues: Labor rights, Wind turbine projects, planning and housing rights, and policies of Israeli authorities (local councils, ministries, government companies, social security).
- Follow-up case of family unification in cooperation with ACRI.
- Providing legal support for the agriculture cooperatives and farmers to support their legal struggle against the wind turbine project implemented by “Energex for Renewable Energy.” In this context, Al-Marsad achieved several activities, including:
 - Conducting 8 Meetings at the Al-Marsad office with the heads of the agriculture cooperatives to follow up on the wind turbine project implementation.
 - Continuo provided extensive legal support to 6 agriculture cooperatives in front of their private law office, “Tadmor Levy,” to facilitate their case of challenging private contracts with “Energex for Renewable Energy”.
- A letter to the Israel Police under the Freedom of Information Law asks whether Energy paid the police officers who backed up Energex on 09/12/2021.
- Write a letter to the Local Planning Committee to reveal information regarding acceptable amounts paid due to building violations in the five Syrian villages in the Golan.
- Four workshops with local activists while preparing for the festival (Jawlan Cultural Days).
- Three workshops by Zoom with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI).
- Two cases were filed to the District Labor Court in Nazareth (case No. 11818-07-21 and case No. 18959-04-22)

- Three cases are being evaluated, and potential compensation amounts are calculated.
- Coordinate with ACRI to file a petition to challenge the poor electricity network in the Syrian villages and to end the daily electricity cuts, mainly during the winter. ACRI Team (4 Lawyers) will visit the Golan to conduct a field tour to learn about the problems of the electricity network on the 3rd of August.
- Follow up with Tadmor Levy Law Firm on the civil case to challenge the legal aspects of the wind farm project. The lawyer works closely with the law firm, coordinates meetings, and explains to the agriculture cooperatives and their members the legal dimensions and development of the case. The lawyer participates in the hearings, conducts research, gathers core information for the case, and prepares and approves 94 sworn statements of local farmers affected by the wind farm.
- Signing dozens of powers of attorney and approval of dozens of affidavits regarding the turbines project.
- Submitting an objection to a general building plan of the village Majdal Shams.
- Representing Al-Marsad in meetings with a senior official from the Israeli Prime Minister's Office and representatives of government ministries to discuss different aspects of the wind turbine project (3 sessions). The role of the Al-Marsad lawyer is to inform the government representatives of the project's legal aspects and existing violations.
- Al-Marsad lawyer accompanied several farmers to the Tiberias police station to file a complaint accusing Energex company of fraud regarding the wind turbine project.
- Al-Marsad seeks to afford constant legal support for agriculture cooperatives and farmers in their legal struggle against the wind turbine project implemented by "Energex for Renewable Energy." In this context, Al-Marsad achieved several activities, including:
 - Weekly meetings with the heads of the agriculture cooperatives to follow up on the wind turbine project developments.
- Prepare and approve dozens of sworn statements from local farmers regarding the wind turbine case.

7. Local Advocacy (Field visits, workshops, journalists, interns)

8. 17 legal discussions/workshops with the local agriculture cooperatives, including with Tadmor Levy Law Firm;
9. five workshops with local activists in the course of preparing for the third round of the festival (Jawlan Cultural Days);
10. four workshops by Zoom with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and BIMKOM to discuss the developments on the wind turbine project and the objection to challenging the general master plan of Majdal Shams.
11. Organizing a joint workshop in cooperation with Fateh Al-Mudarris Centre for Culture and Arts dedicated to the younger generation on psychological catharsis, listening, and emotional support for dealing with stress and anxiety during wars and conflicts.
12. Organizing a joint workshop in cooperation with Fateh Al-Mudarris Centre for Culture and Arts in the field of theatre, acting and storytelling, dedicated to the younger generation, as tools for self-awareness and dealing with the feelings and contradictions surrounding young people's lives.

13. Communicating with the Cultural Department of the Spanish consulate in Jerusalem, discussing the possibilities of cooperation and round-trip participation in the program "Internationalization of Spanish culture," which will extend over 2024 and include artistic exchanges, partnerships, and mutual artistic residencies.
14. Meetings and Follow-up with the documentary filmmaker, Salim Abu Jabal, to provide him with the necessary data to complete the script for his documentary film about the wind turbine project in the Golan.
15. Coordinated and planned workshops related to screenwriting, filming, and editing in cooperation with and through the project of filmmaker Salim Abu Jabal and in coordination with the Fatih Al-Modarres Center for Arts and Culture.
16. Preparations for the launch of the "Cinema Club" project during the spring of 2024. joint activity in cooperation with Fateh Al-Mudarris Centre for Culture and Arts

8. International advocacy

- Follow-up and sustainable coordination with the International Network for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR-NET). Solidarity statement published:
<https://golan-marsad.org/stop-state-repression-of-communities-resisting-wind-farm-development-in-occupied-syrian-golan/>
- Following up with The London School of Economics (LSE) on issues related to the Joint project with Bir Zeit University and Al-Marsad. "Mapping the resistance." A website was launched.
- Preparing meetings for the International Labor Organization (ILO) visit to the Golan on 02/04/2023.
<https://golan-marsad.org/the-international-labor-organization-meets-at-the-al-marsad/>



Work Meeting with the ILO - Al-Marsad offices

- There will be a multitude of meetings at the Al-Marsad office with donors, international and local groups, journalists, and individuals, and field tours will be conducted for them to learn about the human rights situation in the Golan.
- Meeting with UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem and Israel, UN headquarters, Geneva, September 22, 2023.



Al-Marsad meets with the UN independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel.

- Application for membership with the EUROMED RIGHTS.
 - Follow-up and sustainable coordination with the International Network for Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR-NET). Solidarity statement published: <https://golan-marsad.org/stop-state-repression-of-communities-resisting-wind-farm-development-in-occupied-syrian-golan/>
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9. **Cultural Festival: “Jawlan Cultural Days - 2”**

Jawlan Cultural Days: Main poster



“Golan Cultural Days - 3” is the second edition of the cultural festival organized by Al-Marsad in cooperation with local grassroots and partners. This year, the festival's activities lasted over nine consecutive days, including theatre performances, discussion workshops, musical evenings, and an arts camp for children. Last year, young and university student volunteers had a significant role in organizing and running the festival. This year, there is a good turnout and local contribution to support the festival, in addition to the Palestinian assistance represented by the “Takatuf Grant” by the Abdul Mohsin Al Qattan Foundation.



Golan Cultural Days (3rd Cycle) July 30-August 6’ 2023



One of the seminars during the festival

links and documentation about the festival: [Facebook](#)

“Jawlan Cultural Days” – Daily Field Tour

This step will strengthen the sense of togetherness in our Jawlan, building hope and urging creative youth competencies to take action, influence, and make a change. We believe that the public space is not the preserve of the elite or any authority and that we deserve, as individuals and as a community, to celebrate qualitative cultural content that is available to all and respects our minds, away from the prevailing culture of consumption.



Festival volunteers and activists

10. STAFF MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

Staff engaged in the following activities throughout 2021:

A. Salam Said Ahmad, Executive Secretary/Accountant

- Conducted daily administrative and financial tasks;
- Prepared salaries and transferred them to employee's bank accounts;
- Paid taxes and office bills, monitored Al-Marsad's bank account, and followed up on financial issues with the accounting office and the program auditor;
- Prepared financial reports in coordination with the program auditor; and,
- Updated the organization's website, entering data regularly;

B. Wael Tarabieh – Manager, Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Program

- Led the Economic, Social, and Cultural rights program;
- facilitate non-legal workshops and provide consultations.
- Coordinate and lead the annual cultural festival "Golan Cultural Days";
- Conduct research papers and draft statements;
- Represent the organization in local and international conferences, workshops, and activities related to its work;
- Administer and feed the organization's website and Facebook page;
- Conduct field tours for local and international groups, journalists, and diplomats.

C. Karama Abu Saleh, Lawyer

- Provided legal advice to the Arab population of the Golan (More than 1000 consultations to local community groups and individuals in 2021);
- Corresponded with various Israeli ministries and authorities (e.g., Ministry of Defence, Ministry of the Interior, the Israeli Comptroller, Local Councils, the Landmine Authority, Ministry of Education, and the Israeli local and district planning committees);
- Followed up on Al-Marsad's file with the Israeli non-profit registrar office in Jerusalem as required by law;
- Followed up on Israel's obligations to clear landmine fields with the Israeli Comptroller and the Israeli army; and,
- Represented local workers and filed cases with the Israeli Labor Court.

D. Nizar Ayoub, Director

- Led the organization's daily work;
- Led the internship program (contacted interns, chose interns, supervised the interns' daily work, and assisted them in conducting their research);
- Conducted legal research (drafted statements, position papers, and legal reports);
- Followed up with Al-Marsad's applications for consultative status with ECOSOC and The European-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN);
- Conducted fundraising (contacted donors, drafted funding proposals, and established relationships with donors);
- Reported to donors;
- Networked with local, regional, and international human rights non-profits; and,
- Conducted interviews on behalf of Al-Marsad.

E. Nazeh Brik, Senior researcher

- Research settlements, settlement expansion, and discrimination in housing rights against the indigenous Syrian community;
- Update the map of “Syrian residential communities destroyed by Israel after occupying the Golan in 1967;
- Lead a program “settlement monitor”;
- Conduct field tours for local and international groups, journalists, and diplomats;
- Represent the organization in local and international conferences, workshops, and activities related to its work;

F. Interns

The International Interns Program has not regained momentum since the COVID-19 Pandemic coronavirus outbreak in early 2020. Therefore, a few interns were engaged remotely in helping the organization draft legal research and submissions during 2022.

Throughout 2022, dozens of local interns contributed to Al-Marsad’s work. The interns were intensively engaged mainly in supporting the cultural festival “Golan Cultural Days—2.”

11. CONCLUSIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS

Al-Marsad pursued its core human rights activities of conducting legal research, providing legal services (representations and consultations), performing local and international advocacy, and conducting the festival “Jawlan Cultural Days 3,” which will take place from July 30- August 6, 2023. Al-Marsad maintained productive cooperation and partnership with human rights organizations in Palestine/Israel, basically ACRI, BIMKOM, and Adalah.

The organization’s team continued investigating and researching the human rights situation in the Golan, reporting to the relevant Israeli authorities, and challenging human rights violations and discriminatory policies before Israeli authorities and courts.

International and Local coalitions and partnerships enabled the organization to conduct advocacy activities to raise awareness about the human rights situation in the occupied Golan. We keep witnessing monumental achievements in local advocacy among the indigenous Syrian population of the Golan.

- Al-Marsad has also preserved its advocacy before the U.N and several international NGOs, mainly the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-NET), Cornell University Law Clinic, International Labor Organization (ILO), the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem and Israel, Business & Human Rights Resource Center, International Federation for Human rights (FIDH), Euro-Med Network for Human Rights, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS).

Al-Marsad’s workload still increased to meet the local Syrian community's growing demands and maintain cooperation with regional and international partners. The organization puts enormous efforts into mobilizing new funding sources to meet these challenges.