

Al-Marsad and Bimkom challenging the detailed master plan of Majdal Shams

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Majdal Shams – Occupied Syrian Golan (1967) - Source: Wikimedia.org

Al-Marsad-The Arab Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Golan, and Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights, presented before the Planning and Building Committee - Northern District in the city of Nazareth, on November 24, 2024, their objection to Majdal Shams master plan (No. 0773945-256) for the Syrian town of Majdal Shams which was submitted to the Committee on 29 June 2023.

The objection addressed the plan's shortcomings and repercussions on the village's housing situation. The objectors stressed in the session that the proposed plan does not respond in the short and long term to the population's housing needs and ignores their traditions and social and political peculiarities.

- The plan, like its predecessors, heavily relies on vertical construction, a concept vehemently rejected by the residents. This approach not only worsens the already dire overcrowding crisis but also disregards the community's housing culture of private houses with green spaces around them. A private home is not just a structure; it's a symbol of an individual's most important aspirations and a fundamental condition of family privacy, a value they all hold dear.

- The objection argued that the intensive vertical construction (six floors) in the village's old fabric is not feasible. The existing infrastructure, such as narrow streets and the absence of parking spaces, cannot accommodate the residential units the plan discusses. Therefore, this absorptive capacity remains far from reality; it cannot cover housing needs.

- The plan includes the "New Majdal Shams" neighbourhood project, which was approved and scheduled to be established at the Ministry of Construction and Housing initiative. It extends over 370 dunums and accommodates 700 residential units. However, this project has not been agreed upon within the Majdal Shams community. A broad segment of the population rejects it, as it will be built on the lands of the village of Jabatha Al-Zeit, a place of deep historical

significance destroyed by the occupation. In 1967, its population (2,990 people) was forcibly displaced. This segment believes that establishing this neighbourhood is an attack on the property of the displaced residents of the village of Jubatha al-Zeit.

- In addition, the right to housing in this neighbourhood may not necessarily be limited to the people of Majdal Shams. Instead, the Ministry of Housing may open the door for residents of the remaining Golan villages to obtain housing, as it is responsible for marketing building permits and the possibility of marketing building vouchers to residents outside the Golan. Therefore, the calculations mentioned in the plan regarding this neighbourhood's coverage of part of the housing need for Majdal Shams are unrealistic, exacerbating the housing crisis.

- The master plan seized the lands of the Majdal Shams Endowments (Waqf), located north of the village, declaring them "state lands," and annexed by the planning authorities to the "Hermon" nature reserve. The objection demanded that the appropriation act of these lands and return them to the village's property to be part of the urban areas, especially since the Waqf and civil society in the village prepared a plan for this area (within the framework of alternative planning). Building vouchers were distributed to a large segment of the youth.

- Al-Marsad and Bimkom also highlighted the crucial need for regulatory action in the current master plan. This action is necessary to address the urban needs related to the agricultural sector, which have been consistently overlooked in previous structural plans. The plan fails to regulate the use of manors established in agrarian areas; a practice deeply rooted in Golan's residents' culture before the occupation.

- The objection focused on the fact that the policies pursued by the occupying authority, through planning institutions based on ethnic discrimination (Jewish-Arab), seek to cram the Arab population into small urban areas. This exacerbates the housing crisis in the remaining five Syrian villages in the occupied Golan and increases the number of unlicensed random buildings.



Majdal Shams - Occupied Golan (2009)- Source: Wikimedia.org