

Al-Marsad condemns increased Israeli military occupation of the Golan

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Al-Marsad- Arab Human Rights Center in Golan Heights

Immediately after the overthrow of Bashar Al-Assad's rule on December 8, the Israeli occupation forces further invaded Syrian territory located along the ceasefire line from the east. They penetrated 20 kilometres southwest of Damascus while the Israeli Air Force continued intense bombing operations in Syria. They announced the destruction of the capabilities of the Syrian army in the most significant air operation in the history of Israel, targeting aircraft and strategic installations.

This aggression, as reported by Israeli media, led to the occupation of nine areas east of the ceasefire line, including the city of Quneitra. This city was evacuated by the Israeli occupation forces following the disengagement agreement between Syria and Israel, a significant event that took place on May 31, 1974, in Geneva. The newly occupied areas also include the highest peak of Mount Hermon, a majestic mountain that stands at an impressive 2814 meters above sea level. The mountain is home to several Syrian villages scattered on its eastern slopes – now under Israeli military occupation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, during a tour with Security Minister Israel Katz in the occupied Golan on December 8, announced his orders for the occupation forces to control the buffer zone administered by the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Israel has informed the UN Security Council that this invasion is a “limited and temporary measure” aimed at protecting its security and confronting potential threats, particularly those to Israeli settlers in the Golan. These Israelis are living in illegal Israeli settlements built on top of Syrian villages destroyed by the Israeli military following its 1967 occupation of the Golan.

A spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Stephane Dujarric, announced that the recent invasion of the buffer zone in the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan by Israeli forces constitutes a “violation” of the disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria, which was signed in 1974. The United Nations Force Monitoring the Disengagement (UNDOF) has informed its Israeli counterparts that these actions violate the Disengagement Agreement. The spokesman stressed that 'there should be no forces or military activities in the separation zone, and that Israel and Syria must continue to implement the terms of the agreement and maintain the stability of the Golan.'

It is not yet clear what the final plans are behind Israel's invasion and occupation of additional Syrian land. To understand this, it is essential to look at the historical context of the Israeli occupation of Golan, which resulted in the forced displacement of close to 140,000 Syrians from their homes and the destruction of 341 Syrian villages following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Today, approximately 29,000 Israeli settlers are living in 35 illegal settlements who control over 95% of the land and profit from the Occupied Syrian Golan's abundant natural resources.

Statements by officials and media outlets in Israel indicate that Israel intends to form a safe zone and remain there for an indefinite period. Some media also reported that the Israeli occupation army was exercising threats and pressure on the residents of four Syrian villages in the separation zone to force them to leave their villages, which raises many fears and doubts about the occurrence of limited sieges and displacement, contrary to what Israel claims of “limited and temporary measures”. Some media outlets reported a recording showing the Israeli army's call to the residents of Al-Hurriya village, giving them until three o'clock in the afternoon to leave the town, in flagrant violation of the rules of international humanitarian law that prohibits the forcible transfer of residents of the

occupied territories, whether inside or outside the occupied territory. This would be a repeat of what the Israeli military did in the Golan following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, ordering Syrian villagers to leave their homes and resulting in the forcible displacement of 95% of the Syrian population from the Golan.

The recent Israeli aggression is a blatant violation of the principles of international law that prohibit the use of force or the threat of force to occupy and annex the territories of others. It also disregards the Disengagement Agreement, which mandates respect for the land, sea, and air ceasefire. This Agreement is further reinforced by the United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 338, issued on October 22, 1973, which the Israeli actions also violate.

The international community, with the United Nations at its helm, must compel Israeli forces to withdraw immediately from the areas they recently occupied. This action will enable the UN disengagement forces to carry out their work and exercise their duties freely. This will help create the conditions for Israel to withdraw from the remainder of the occupied Golan up to the internationally recognised June 4, 1967 borders. Ultimately, this will lead to the cessation of hostilities and achieving sustainable stability in the entire region.