

The Wind Turbines Project in the Occupied Syrian Golan Poses and Existential Threat to the Indigenous Syrian Population!

16 April 2020

Press release

On 9 September 2019, Israel's National Infrastructure Committee (NIC) approved wind energy project, which is planned to be built by an Israeli company 'Energix Renewable Energies' (Energix) on agricultural lands owned by the Syrian residents of the remaining villages in the occupied Golan, and which mainly produce Apples and Cherries. The project expected to occupy about 4300 Dunam (about 1100 Acre), which is almost a quarter of the agricultural land that Syrians still control in the occupied Syrian Golan (Golan). This project was approved by Israel's Cabinet on January 12, 2020, and it has consequently become a government decision since the 30th of the same month. The project will be one of the largest wind energy plants in territory under Israel's control with a total of 32 wind turbines. These turbines, which are permitted to reach a height of 220 meters, are the largest turbines used worldwide on land so far.

Israeli state, as occupying authority approved this project ignoring hundreds of objections submitted by Syrian agriculture cooperatives and individuals, including a comprehensive objection to the project submitted by Al-Marsad - The Arab Human rights Centre in Golan Heights in collaboration with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and Planners for Planning Rights (BIMKOM). The objections were filed on behalf of 11 Syrian agricultural cooperatives, civil society groups, which represent thousands of native Syrians. However, the Committee rejected all these objections, which demonstrate strong opposition among the vast majority of the Syrian population to this dangerous project.

The Energix's project, if implemented, will have serious consequences on the health and safety of Syrian communities as a result of dangerous exposure to infrasound and flickering. Thus, Syrian farmers and civilians who spend much of their time in the agricultural fields on which the project will be built, and where hundreds of small houses are spread, will be vulnerable to these health impacts, and will be forced to abandon their agricultural lands. According to experts on the fields of agriculture, renewable energy, environment and physics, the project will also lead to the destruction of their traditional agriculture economy of Apples and Cherries, while irreparably damaging agriculture.

Furthermore, the project will heavily restrict the expansion of three of five remaining Syrian villages in the Golan after 1967 (Majdal Shams, Buq'ata and Masada). This will exacerbate the suffocating housing crisis in the Syrian villages, distort the natural landscape, and also threatens wildlife in the region. Additionally, the project's location has shifted numerous times, including being moved away from Israeli settlements and closer to Syrian villages and inside their farmlands. The merits of the project indicate that it involves discrimination against the Syrian the indigenous Syrian communities of the occupied Golan.

This massive project coincides with the ongoing armed conflict in Syria, while the Israeli government has been since 2011 taking advantage of the tragic conflict to cement its illegal occupation and claim sovereignty over the Golan. Consequently, President Trump signed on 25 March 2019, an executive order recognising Israel's claim to sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan, which was followed by unprecedented accelerating settlement expansion in the area.

We, the signatory organizations, condemn Energix's project because of its serious repercussions on all aspects of Syrians' lives in the Golan, and aims to cement the economic occupation of the Golan. The project also violates numerous principles embedded in international humanitarian law, including those enshrined on Article 55 of the 1907 (IV) Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of war on Land on the prohibition of pillage and the permanent alteration of occupied land as well as the obligation to administer occupied land as "usufructuary", Therefore, We call:

Israeli state, as Occupying Power,

- To fulfill its obligations according to international law by stopping this project, the policy of settlement expansion, and refrain from making any changes in the occupied Golan, except in cases when the security and well-being of the Syrian population require such changes.
- To respect the right to self-determination and permanent sovereignty over natural resources, customary under international, for the Syrian population in the occupied Syrian Golan.
- To cease to issue licenses for the exploitation of natural resources in the occupied Syrian Golan and to regulate the activities of Israeli and multinational business enterprises therein in order to ensure respect of international and human rights standards and the genuine consent of the Syrian population before engaging in any projects that extract their natural resources.
- To stop using the Corona pandemic to pass this project and impose it on the ground.

The international community,

- Is exerting pressure on the Israeli state to stop implementing the wind turbine project, and fulfill its obligations arising from international human rights agreements and conventions and compelling it to respect the rights of the Syrian population in the occupied Golan.

Accordingly, we sign:

1. Al-Haq
2. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SN4HR)
3. FIDH | International Federation for Human Rights
4. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
5. Impunity Watch
6. Urnammu
7. Syria legal network in the Netherlands
8. Shaml, Syrian CSOs Coalition
9. The Day After (TDA)
10. badael
11. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
12. Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies (RCHRS)
13. Access Center for Human Rights
14. Musawa
15. Kesh Malek Organization
16. Start Point