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REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

FOLLOW-UP ACTION ON THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE COMMISSION
ADOPTED AT ITS SIXTEENTH SESSION: RESOLUTION 185 (XVI)
ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE SYRIAN PEOPLE
UNDER ISRAELI OCCUPATION IN THE OCCUPIED SYRIAN GOLAN



1. At its sixteenth session, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) adopted resolution 185 (XVI) of 2 September 1992, in which the Executive Secretary of ESCWA was requested to submit to the Commission at its seventeenth session a comprehensive study on the economic and social conditions of Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan including an account of the economic and social conditions since the Israeli occupation in 1967 and an analysis of the impact of arbitrary Israeli policies and practices on the economic, social, demographic and living conditions. Accordingly, the ESCWA secretariat engaged a consultant to prepare a study on Israeli policies and practices in the occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, and their impact on the economic and social conditions in those areas. The secretariat will review the study prepared by the consultant with the competent authorities before publishing it. The present brief report on Israeli practices in the occupied Syrian Golan is a preliminary report.

2. The Golan area occupies the south-western part of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is delimited by the Yarmouk river on the south, the Jordan River on the west, and the Raqqad wadi on the east. The Jebel Esh-Sheikh massif lies in the northern part of the area and Lake Tiberias in the south-western part.

3. The total area of the Golan is about 1,750 square kilometres, of which 1,250 square kilometres fell under Israeli occupation in June 1967. The Golan area has by virtue of its location a special importance, as it is considered the principal source of the water that flows into Lake Tiberias and of the water that flows into the upstream tributaries of the Jordan River and the lower course of the Yarmouk river. The Golan Heights also constitute the source of most of the water in the Galilee area in northern Palestine owing to the abundant precipitation there (the average annual rainfall is about 919 millimetres).

4. The total population of the occupied Syrian Golan before 1967 was estimated at about 130,000 residents who lived in 130 towns and villages and some 60 farms. Agriculture was the main economic activity of those inhabitants, and the cultivated area before the 1967 war was about 410,000 dunums. The abundance of water resources favoured the development of agriculture in the Golan.

5. Water resources in the Golan area include rainwater, which is the main source of water, as well as the water of springs, wadis, rivers and lakes, and underground water. The Golan area constitutes an important source of water for the surrounding areas, as the main tributaries of both the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers originate there, and as the area feeds numerous springs at the foot of the Jebel Esh-Sheikh massif and along the east bank of the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias, and the lower part of the Yarmouk river. Moreover, about 67 per cent of the water in the Jordan basin and 33 per cent of the water presently consumed in Israel comes from the Golan.

6. The total volume of rain which falls in the Golan is estimated at about 1.6 billion cubic metres (m³) per year. When rainwater from the northern and north-western parts of Jebel Esh-Sheikh is added to it, total rainwater volume then exceeds 3.5 billion m³.

7. Annual discharge from the Jordan River and its three tributaries into Lake Tiberias is estimated at about 800 million m³, of which 500 million m³ is pumped through the Israeli National Water Carrier. The total volume of evaporated water is about 270 million m³ annually.

8. Annual average recharge of underground water in the Golan is about 160 million m³, but underground water is not being fully exploited at present for technical, economic and political reasons.

9. Spring water in the Golan plays a major role in providing inhabitants with water for drinking, irrigation and livestock. The main springs play an important role in ensuring the continued flow of the Jordan River tributaries. There are in the Golan Heights more than 100 springs, the total annual discharge of which ranges between 110 million m³ and 130 million m³, in addition to the major springs which feed the tributaries of the Jordan River (Banias, Al-Dan and Hasbani).

10. Mas'adah lake is the only lake which is situated in its entirety in the Quneitra governorate in the Golan. It consists of a pool which is fed by small springs, with most of its water from rain and melting snow from the nearby areas; its level is subject to large seasonal variations. Before the 1967 war, Mas'adah lake used to meet most of the water requirements in the Quneitra area; the annual output of the lake is estimated at around 3 million m³.

11. After occupying the Golan, Israel built at Mas'adah lake a pumping station and a canal network to distribute water to Israeli settlements. Afterwards, it allocated a limited amount of the lake water to the Arab inhabitants. The Israeli Mikrout Corporation, which has monopolized the development, distribution and management of water sources in the Golan since 1967, drilled six wells to provide Israeli settlements with water: Arab residents, however, are forbidden to drill wells.

12. The inhabitants of the Golan are the victims of discriminatory water policies. According to 1975 estimates, the per capita water share for Israeli settlers was about 17 times higher than for the Arab population. This limited share of water has a serious negative effect on the economic and social life of Syrians in the Golan.

13. Since the decision was taken to annex the Golan to Israel, the application of the Israeli law on water (1959) put all water resources, including Mas'adah lake, under the control of the State of Israel. Arab inhabitants were then subjected to the unfair conditions imposed by the Israeli Mikrout Corporation for obtaining water, whether for drinking or agricultural purposes.

14. Since the water share allocated by the Mikrout Corporation to the Arab inhabitants was insufficient, especially for irrigated agriculture, Arab farmers resorted to a successful method of collecting water by building roofless tanks near their farms to collect rainwater in order to use it to supplement irrigation water needs, especially for apple farms, which need a quantity of water that cannot always be supplied from the limited water shares

allocated by Mikrout. However, the Israeli authorities informed Arab farmers that those tanks, the number of which was about 650 in 1985, each with a storage capacity of 500-1,000 m³, prevented rainwater from reaching its normal destination and thus caused the water level of nearby lakes to drop. The Israeli authorities established a system which required the Arab inhabitants to obtain prior authorization for building tanks. For each authorization, a fee equivalent to US\$ 500 had to be paid. In addition, the Mikrout Corporation imposed the payment of a yearly subscription fee as well as the installation of meters and the payment of the price of every cubic metre of water consumed. These high fees, in addition to the building costs and the complicated proceedings for obtaining the necessary authorizations, have been hindering the licensing process even though the tanks had already been built. The Israeli authorities have rejected a number of applications for licensing storage tanks already constructed; without explaining the reasons, they ordered the destruction of the tanks and refused to issue new authorizations.

15. Out of fear of being accused of wasting water, Arab inhabitants modernized irrigation systems and adopted modern irrigation techniques at their own expense and without any support. In 1972 the inhabitants of Majdal Shams and nearby villages built a drinking water network, also at their own expense.

16. Since their occupation of the Syrian Golan and other Arab areas in Palestine in June 1967, the Israeli occupation authorities have pursued their policy aimed at seizing as much Arab land as possible and putting these lands under total military and economic control. Through the measures applied, the authorities have tried to tighten their grip on Arab population centres and surround them with Israeli settlements in a bid to turn the Arab population in the occupied Arab territories into a minority in their own country. To further their expansionist goals, seize Arab land and property, and settle Israelis thereon, the occupation authorities have enacted a series of laws, decrees and regulations which include the following:

(a) The law on land seizure for the public interest;

(b) The emergency and defence law by virtue of which the Israeli Government is entitled to seize any area of land and expel its inhabitants;

(c) The emergency law on the use of barren land;

(d) The law on the seizure of property and real estate by virtue of which the Israeli authorities are entitled to seize any property or real estate they believe to be of vital importance to Israeli national security;

(e) The law on the property of absentees which relates to the seizure of the property of absentees.

17. On the basis of these laws, the Israeli military occupation authorities managed to seize 80 per cent of the total area of the Syrian occupied Golan Heights, and built 43 settlements, in addition to numerous military and paramilitary settlements the construction of which was not disclosed.

18. Through these arbitrary policies and measures against the Arab inhabitants in the Golan, Israel induced a great number of them to emigrate, and relocated a number of Israeli settlers with a view to altering the demographic characteristics of the Syrian occupied Golan. Of the 130,000 Arab inhabitants who used to live in 139 towns and villages in the Golan area in 1967, only about 16,000 remained in 1993 whereas the Israelis now residing there number 15,000, living in 43 Israeli settlements.

19. The seizure by the Israeli authorities of more than 80 per cent of the Golan area has denied livestock-raisers grazing opportunities in most areas, which affects the animal resources that constitute a major source of income.

20. Agriculture also deteriorated because of the seizure of water resources and agricultural land (some of which was turned into minefields). Farmers in the Golan are compelled to sell their agricultural produce, mainly apples, through Israeli wholesale dealers, which puts them in a state of dependency and subordination.

21. As for industry, Israeli authorities have hindered investment in industry through a number of measures which include the imposition of heavy taxes on Arab inhabitants.

22. The policies pursued by Israel since the occupation of the Golan have led to the deterioration of economic and social conditions in the area. Arab workers whose main activity was agriculture were compelled, because of the deterioration of the agricultural sector, to work in Israel. In most cases they perform heavy manual labour and are discriminated against as they are deprived of social security benefits and their wages are less than their Israeli counterparts.

23. Education in the occupied Golan area is under Israeli control: Israeli syllabuses, based on information which contradict history and the facts, are imposed on students in an effort to strip them of their Arab identity. The area suffers from a lack of qualified teachers as many of them were arbitrarily fired. Arab students are not allowed to continue their studies in Arab universities and Israeli teachers are appointed to replace those fired. Consequently, the number of schools declined from 170 in 1967 to the current 9. Most of those schools are in appalling condition and lack adequate teaching facilities.

24. As far as health is concerned, the World Health Organization has already noted the serious deterioration of health conditions in the Golan because of the measures that the Israeli authorities have taken in that area, pointing out that there are only four clinics which are unable to provide the necessary health services to the Arab population.

25. As for human rights, Arab citizens are often subjected to arrest, long-term imprisonment, administrative detention, and house arrest for undertaking anti-occupation activities. Israel often imposes curfews on the villages of the Golan.

