

Syrian Activists from the Occupied Golan Heights Condemn “Suspicious Visits” by “Racist” Israeli Politician

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Naftali Bennett has insisted that the Golan Heights will remain under Israeli control. ([The Israel Project](#))

A group of Syrian activists from the occupied [Golan Heights](#) has issued a statement condemning the “suspicious visits” to the region recently by rightwing Israeli political leaders.

Along with Palestinian and Egyptian lands, the Golan Heights was occupied by the Israeli military during the 1967 war. Most of its inhabitants were ethnically cleansed and dozens of villages were razed, but an estimated 20,000 indigenous Syrian Druze continue to live in the six villages still standing.

In violation of international law, dozens of [Jewish-only colonies](#) have been built across the territory and provide residence to some 21,000 Israeli settlers.

Jointly written by a group of seven activists known as Loading Consription (a reference to Israel’s militarization of the region), the letter points to the “racism” and “barbaric hatred” of Israeli political leaders such as [Ayelet Shaked](#), who “called for the annihilation of all the Palestinian people” [in a Facebook post](#) in July.

According to Shaked’s Facebook page, she visited a family in Majdal Shams, the largest Syrian village in the Golan, on 5 October.

Shaked is a lawmaker in Israel’s parliament, [the Knesset](#), and a member of the [Jewish Home](#) (Habeyit Hayehudi) party, part of the ruling coalition. She designated “the entire Palestinian people” as “the enemy,” including “its elderly and its women, its cities and its villages, its property and its infrastructure.”

As The Electronic Intifada’s Ali Abunimah [reported at the time](#), that post received thousands of Facebook “likes” and “shares” from supporters.

“Ayelet Shaked is known for clearly racist statements and anti-Arab rhetoric, especially during the last war on Gaza,” Aamer Ibrahim, one of the letter’s authors, told The Electronic Intifada by telephone. “It’s clear that she — and Israel in general — is looking for opportunities to colonize the Golan even more.”

Why welcome the occupier?

The statement goes on to decry visits by several other Israeli political leaders known for their virulently anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab incitement, and derided the local Syrians who received them.

When Harel Locker, director-general for the office of Israel's prime minister, visited the Golan in June 2013, local Syrian websites and Facebook pages "played a central role" by "attempting to strip [the visit] of its political dimensions."

"Local beneficiaries," the letter continues, welcomed and congratulated Locker's visit "as if the Golan was a barbaric village that no human being has set foot on before and these political figures are going to open our eyes to the world."

It goes on point out that Israeli occupation authorities have systemically denied the indigenous Syrian population the treatment and standard of living they should be afforded as an occupied people according to international law.

The letter calls on local Syrians not to "treat our rights as if they are generously given to us by the occupying state."

Shortly after, in February 2014, Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) visited the Golan. A local council for Syrian residents hosted Netanyahu, taking him to a welcoming gathering on the bank of al-Ram pond, a Syrian water source, from which the occupation constantly steals water in violation of international law.

Pointing out that local protesters expelled [Shimon Peres](#) when the prominent politician visited in the 1980s, the letter says "it became a reality that we host and celebrate the arrival of our occupier and oppressor into our homes and villages."

"Numbing a society"

With visits by at least seven Israeli politicians thus far in 2014, the activists took particular offense at a trip made [Naftali Bennett](#), Israel's economy minister. After his visit on 25 March, he declared on his official Facebook page: "A message to the Druze of the Golan: the Golan Heights will remain under Israeli control forever, and now you will join us."

Bennett is known for advocating the annexation of large swaths of the occupied West Bank and expelling most of their Palestinian inhabitants. He also sparked outrage in July 2013 [when he bragged](#) in an Israeli cabinet meeting, "I killed a lot of Arabs in my life, and there's no problem with that."

"This phenomenon of [normalization](#) promotes and markets the occupation as if it were natural," the letter states.

Calling on locals to reject Israeli political visits, it concludes:

We believe that the repercussions of these public visits are by all means disastrous. This is not only because they promote the idea of the occupation and the logic of surrendering to it, but also because they lead to numbing an entire society and robbing it of what it has left of the concept of freedom and liberation. These [visits] make the society devoted to the concept of servitude

and submission to the occupier.

Increased colonization

With world attention focused on the ongoing violence in Syria, Israel has expedited its theft and appropriation of local resources at the expense of the indigenous Syrian population. A government-funded Zionist organization deceptively attempted to recruit Syrians into a civil service program, as The Electronic Intifada [exposed in August](#).

Earlier in the summer, an Israeli academic college in Katzrin, an illegal Israeli settlement in the Golan, [announced extensive scholarships](#) to encourage Israeli students to enroll. In addition to the scholarships, the program will “encourage local tourism through 19 million shekels [around \$5.5 million] worth of financial investments in museums and parks,” as well as several Jewish religious centers.

In December 2013, Israel’s ministry for energy and water granted the American-Israeli company Genie Energy “exclusive license to explore for oil and gas in a 153-square-mile radius in the southern part of the Golan,” [according](#) the local human rights group Al-Marsad. Former US Vice-President Dick Cheney, one of the architects of the disastrous 2003 invasion of Iraq, was appointed to serve as an adviser to the exploration project.

“It’s certainly no coincidence that these politicians have been visiting more frequently at the same time that Israel is trying to take more natural resources and increase the number of settlers in the Golan,” activist Aamer Ibrahim said. “The occupation and colonization are nothing new here, but the [politicians’] overt discourse and the process of colonization have become much more public in the last two years.”

With thanks to Hanan Darawsha for translation.

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