



Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK

المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا

Israel's Destruction of Palestinian Environment





Date: 5 /4/ 2015

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Introduction

Israeli human right abuses of Palestinians and their property have grown exponentially. Killings, physical assaults, arrests, home demolitions, and land seizures are just examples of the kinds of abuses Palestinians are subjected to on daily basis, most of which have risen to the level of war crimes.

The Palestinian environment has been radically polluted and transformed by the Israeli occupation of Palestine. These environmental crimes, which began following the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, have gone largely ignored and unpunished by the international community despite the huge threat they pose to the lives and health of Palestinians and the ecological balance of the areas under occupation.

The term 'Palestinian environment' refers to environmental components such as water, air, soil, fauna and flora which have been damaged and polluted by the Israeli occupation over the last few decades.



1 The Destruction and Uprooting of Trees

Israel has uprooted more than one million trees since the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, in addition to razing around a million dunums of Palestinian farmlands to make room for settlements, military bases, roads and the Apartheid Wall resulting in the destruction of huge expanses of Palestinian green areas.¹

Oddly enough, Israeli bulldozers show up to uproot trees accompanied by representatives from the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel which bestows legitimacy on the acts of uprooting

1- Report: Israeli occupation government uproots one million trees and razes a million dunums. Insanonline website, 5 June 2006. http://insanonline.net/news_details.php?id=1156



and razing in clear contradiction with its perceived role of protecting nature regardless of who the transgressors are.

Although Israel has destroyed many varieties of trees-including forest trees (pine and cypress), and lemon, orange, almond and fig trees- olive trees remain the most targeted by the army and settlers. Trees are usually bulldozed, set on fire, cut down or destroyed with chemicals to ensure they are not replanted somewhere else. Several cases were documented of settlers stealing trees and planting them again in Israeli-controlled areas to harvest their fruits or as evidence that Israelis had lived in these lands for a long time.

It is worth noting that most Palestinian lands which had been seized over the past few decade, especially those close to settlements and military bases, were first razed and had their trees uprooted as part of a gradual process which also aimed at gauging Palestinian and international reactions to the act of seizing the lands.

The year 2014 witnessed the uprooting, razing and the burning of more than 10,600 Palestinian trees and saplings by settlers and Israeli occupation forces in addition to 3000 trees uprooted since the beginning of 2015. On 18 March 2015, Israel destroyed 150 olive trees in n Hebron, south of the West Bank, and 300 olive trees in Majdal Bani Fadl in Nablus, north of the West Bank. One day later, settlers uprooted 60 olive trees near a settlement cluster on the Nablus-Ramallah Road in the West Bank.²

Occupation authorities often uproot trees on the pretext they have been planted in Area C, or for military and security reasons on the

2 - Occupation forces uproot 60 trees in Nablus, Al-Quds Press agency, 19 March 2015, <http://www.qudspress.com/?p=166442&cat=20>



pretext they block the army view of Palestinian lands. Conversely, Israel decided recently to plant thousands of trees along the Gaza borders to prevent Palestinians from monitoring the movements of the Occupation army.

The destruction of Palestinian trees has had a huge impact on the lives of Palestinians. Millions of dollars in revenues have been annually lost to families whose whole livelihood depends on these trees, especially in villages and the Jordan Valley, not to mention the devastating psychological effect of seeing ancient trees being destroyed. Some olive trees in Palestine are more than a thousand years old. Trees are also essential for the preservation of soil, maintaining the quality of the air and the protection of animals.

Israeli Rabbi Naseem Mual issued an edict inciting Israelis to uproot Palestinian trees and poison their water wells. The edict is the latest in a long series of other forms of incitement against Palestinians, the latest of which was an edict by a number of Rabbis claiming that Palestinians should not be allowed to drive. The director of the military religious institute Rabbi Sholmo Riskin encouraged soldiers during a lecture to loot Palestinian olive harvests and poison their wells.³

3 - <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2015/02/14/662026.htm>



2 Settlement Waste Water

Palestinian villages and towns located near Israeli settlements have long suffered from raw sewage flooding into their farmlands and drinking water wells.

Although most parts of the West Bank have had to endure waste water spillage into their lands, the situation is more acutely felt in areas such as Wadi Al-Nar near Jerusalem which receives 30,000 cubic metres of sewage every day, the north eastern region of Hebron -affected by waste water from settlement wineries, Wadi Qana - affected by waste water from the Ariel settlements and others in the region, Zawata in Nabulus, Jenin and Wadi al-Samn in Hebron are all affected by settlement waste water.



Waste water plays a major role in environmental contamination in Palestine by polluting aquifers or surface water. It increases the proportion of salts and nitrates in the water which makes it unfit for human consumption and even unsuitable for agricultural use, as is the case with the water in the River Jordan. In addition, when the waste water comes into contact with concentrations of sodium salts in agricultural land, it renders the soil unsuitable for agriculture. It also leads to unpleasant smells; the proliferation of harmful insects; the spread of epidemics; and the desertification of the Palestinian territories.



3 Hazardous Solid Waste

Domestic and industrial solid waste dumped by Israel in Palestinian lands have greatly damaged the environment and resulted in the spread of many diseases. Solid waste is usually dumped near residential areas. The City of Abu Dis, for example, has a huge rubbish dump which services a number of Israeli settlements and covers an estimated 3000 dunums. Another dump was built on an area of 12 dunums in Jayous, west of Qalqiya to service the settlements of Karni Shamron, Qadumim, Tasufim, and Maale Tashumaron.

Over decades of occupation, Israel has sought to dump all its solid waste in the West Bank including the villages of Ithna and Deir Samt, Hebron, village of Bateer in Bethlehm, the villages of Ni'lin, Shaqba, Qabia, Badras, Shabteen and Kafr Lakif in Qalqyia and



Ramallah, Shofa, Kafr Jamal and Flamia in Tulkarm, and Jama'een and Eina Bous in Nablus, in addition to dumps used by settlements such as Arabba in Jenin.⁴

Solid Waste take a very long time to dissolve and their negative impact is compounded by the act of burning or burying them. It also renders the soil barren. Solid Waste also poses a huge threat to groundwater.

4- "iThe dumping and burial of Israeli waste in Palestinian lands" news agency,
<http://www.wafainfo.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=2387>



4 Chemicals

Israeli factories have used the Palestinian Territories as dumping grounds for their hazardous waste. These include factories that manufacture chemical cleaners, pesticides, aluminum, rubbers, plastics, leather, glass wool. The hazardous waste usually includes poisonous metals such as chrome, lead, zinc, nickel, minerals and acids. Factories built near settlements also dump their hazardous waste in Palestinian lands. The Birqan Settlement near Salfit has over 80 factories which bury their waste in Palestinian agricultural lands, and Kiryat Adumim near Jerusalem. It has also long been

suspected that Israel has been burying hazardous waste in the town of Yatta, south east of Hebron, which could explain the high incidence of cancer among the Palestinians living in that area.⁵

Geshuri Advanced Technologies which produces fertilizer mixes, pesticides, asbestos, wool insulation and many other chemical products has a number of factories on the outskirts of Tulkarm and has been dumping its hazardous waste in Palestinian lands for close to three decades . The bad odors and poisonous gases have resulted in a very high incidence of cancer and respiratory ailments in the area. The factories were originally located in the Israeli cities of Kfar Saba and Natania but Israel was forced to relocate them to Tulkarm following demonstrations from Israelis.⁶



5- Ibid

6- Geshuri fumes: Tulkarm dying a slow death, 12 February 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.net>



5 Daimona Nuclear Reactor

The Israeli Daimona nuclear reactor, known officially as the Negev Nuclear Research Centre, was established in 1958. Radioactive dust from the reactor poses serious health risks to Palestinians. A recent study revealed that Palestinians living near the reactor are much more likely to get cancer. High-risk areas include Hebron where the towns of Yatta and Al-Tahiryia have much higher incidences of cancer compared with the national average. Health officials have also documented cases of children born with physical deformities. Michal Shabira, an Israeli doctor who works at Hadassah Hospital, revealed that cases of Leukemia in Hebron were much higher than the national average, especially in the town of Yatta. Bani Na'im dump is among the places where Israel has been dumping nuclear waste. Israel trucks are frequently spotted



dumping their load inside a huge cave whose entrance has been blocked with thick slabs of cement.

The impact of the reactor has been well documented by Israeli and western studies. An Israeli university study published in July 2004 confirmed the existence of high levels of radioactivity in Palestinian groundwater which also connects to Gaza groundwater. The serious threat posed by the Dimona reactor has forced the Israeli government to make the decision to distribute anti-radioactivity pills to Jewish residents living in the neighboring districts in anticipation of an emergency. This includes the residents of Yarmouk, Dimona and Yafna. Palestinians have not been given any pills to counteract the impact of radioactivity.



6 Israeli control over water resources

Israel has total control over Palestinian water resources and has adopted a drip-feed approach to providing the Palestinians with water instead of allowing them access to their own natural resources. It is worth noting here that future wars could easily revolve around water.

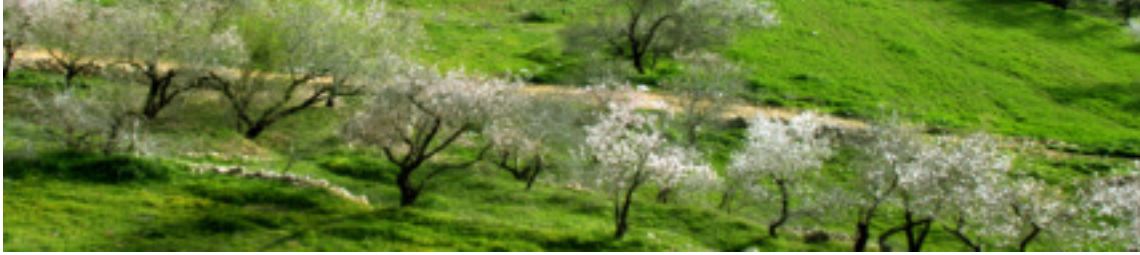
Palestinians rely a lot on water resources for the irrigation of their farmlands especially in the Jordan valley with its fertile soil. The scarcity of water resources and Israeli control has hindered the realisation of of the full potential of these lands. Farmers also need water to sustain their livestock, which is a major source of income for many Palestinians.

Israel has placed many restrictions on farmers wishing to drill wells and very often denies them permits to do so. In the rare cases it



does grant permits, wells are not allowed to exceed a certain depth which means they dry up within a very short period of time. Israeli authorities regularly closed water wells on the pretext they had been drilled without a permit. On 24 March 2015, for example, a water well in the village of Ta'nak in Jenin in the West Bank was destroyed by the Israeli authorities.

According to recent statistics, each Israeli citizen consumes as much water as 7 Palestinians every year. A report by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics pointed out that Palestinian share of water is approximately 70 liters per person every day compared with 500 liters per Israeli citizen because Israeli controls all groundwater and shallow water resources in the West Bank. The gap between the two sides is much higher when considering water allocated for irrigation and farming. A statement released by the Palestinian government revealed that Israel controls 90% of Palestinian water resources which have been used to provide Israeli citizens and settlers with all their water needs at the expense of Palestinians. The Gaza Strip has suffered the worst with 97% of its drinking water deemed not fit for human consumption. The drainage of groundwater by Israel has also led to seawater and waste water mixing with potable water in Gaza.



Conclusions and Recommendations:

Israel has systematically worked to destroy the Palestinian environment through a series of direct and indirect measures which began with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. Israel regards the Occupied Territories as reserve expanses of lands to be seized at will for the construction of settlements and the dumping of hazardous waste. Despite the gravity of Israeli violations, the international community has failed to take the steps necessary for protecting the Palestinian environment. It is recommended that the following steps be taken:

- 1- The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) is urged to send a fact-finding mission to assess the environmental situation in the Palestinian territories, especially those close to Israeli settlements, Daimona reactor and other industrial zones, and oblige Israel to comply with international laws relevant to the environment.



- 2- Establish a Palestinian commission to monitor and document Israeli environmental violations, especially those related to the burying of solid and hazardous waste in Palestinian territories.

- 3- Organize media campaigns to raise awareness about this issue and expose Israeli practices in relation to the Palestinian environment and their impact on the life and livelihood of Palestinians.