



CLIMATE JUSTICE IN PALESTINE IS A HUMAN RIGHT



INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted for the first time a resolution (Resolution 7/231) that explicitly



recognized the implications of climate change for the fulfillment of human rights. While this recognition is an important step, it has not yet brought about the change demanded by global social and environmental movements that have for decades called for climate justice to ensure equality, human rights, and collective rights in the face of climate change.

The MENA region is among the most impacted by climate change. It is already experiencing extreme heat waves and weather conditions, flash floods, wild fires and intermittent rainfall and drought that is threatening water and food security.

The vulnerability to climate change in Palestine is exacerbated by the policies of the Israeli occupation, which illegally appropriates and exploits Palestinian lands and natural resources. This puts Palestinians at a greater risk to climate change and prevents them from implementing adaptation measures. Furthermore, it leaves Palestinians no option but to carry out maladaptation to climate change through unsustainable practices. The occupation's policies are resulting in climate injustice that is threatening Palestinians' health, environment, land and resources, livelihoods and well-being.

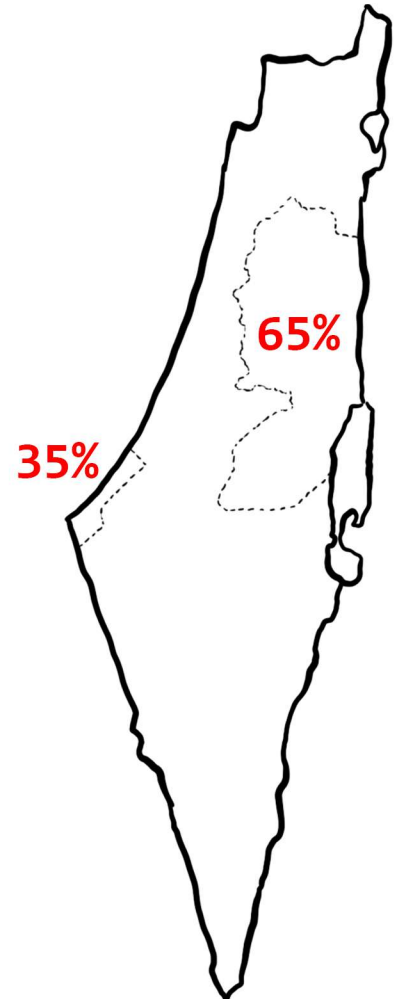
HOW IS CLIMATE INJUSTICE PRACTICED BY THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION?

LAND GRABBING

Israel's occupation has been based on the illegal expropriation and exploitation of Palestinian lands and natural resources.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinians are prevented from accessing, utilizing, and benefitting from these resources. **The Israeli occupation ILLEGALLY controls over 65% of the West Bank and restricts agricultural practices in 35% of the Gaza Strip's agricultural land (Access Restricted Areas (ARA)),** all of which prevents Palestinians from coping with climate change.

In the past twenty years, the Israeli occupation's army and settlers have uprooted more than HALF A MILLION fruitful trees in the West Bank, the vast majority of which were olive trees.¹



2008



In 2022, **113,435 dunums²** of land were confiscated by the Israeli occupation.

More than **950 cisterns, pools, wells and springs** were demolished or confiscated in the period between 2008 and 2022. These water resources used to irrigate more than 17,215 dunums.

2022

In 2022, **18,900 trees** were uprooted or burnt, most of which were olive trees.

¹ Israeli Violations Against Palestinian Rights to Land & Housing in the oPt, Land Research center, 2020.
² One dunum is an area units equivalent to 1,000 square meters (m²) or 10,763.9 square foot (ft²).

Israel continues its 56-year effort to legalize **the seizure of more and more Palestinian land** in the West Bank, under various pretexts, among which is the designation of areas as “Nature Reserves”.

In these areas, **Palestinian communities are prevented from herding, grazing and other traditional agricultural activities** that they have practiced sustainably for centuries. Consequently, their livelihoods are threatened and their resilience to climatic changes is weakened. This directly threatens their steadfastness and ability to remain in their lands.

Currently, there are **45** such “Israeli nature reserves” that take up **350.7 km²** or **6.2%** of the West Bank, the majority of which are in Area C.³ The concentration of these “reserves” in Area C reveals that they are merely a greenwashing tactic to further Israel’s agenda of land seizure. They serve to maintain Israeli control, prevent Palestinian presence or development, and eventually facilitate Israeli settlement expansion and annexation of large segments of land such as the announced plan to annex the Jordan Valley.



DENIAL OF PALESTINIAN WATER RIGHTS

More than **85%** of groundwater resources, the **primary source of fresh water in the oPt,** are controlled by the Israeli occupation.

Palestinian water resources have been placed in the hands of Israel’s national water company **“Mekorot”**, which has ensured the inequitable distribution of these resources.

Palestinians have been forced to rely on the purchase of their own water from Mekerot at elevated prices, yet are refused increasing quantities with the rising demand of population growth. The result is that **Palestinians have on average nearly 86 liters per person daily, which falls below the internationally recommended minimum of 100 liters.** Meanwhile, **Israelis enjoy at least 3-folds as much water as Palestinians.** Even more shocking, illegal Israeli settlers in the West Bank are allocated seven times more than Palestinians, on a daily per capita rate.⁴



³ A “de facto annexation” of the West Bank’s Nature Reserves – POICA. (n.d.).

<http://poica.org/2023/06/a-de-facto-annexation-of-the-west-banks-nature-reserves/>

⁴ PCBS | PCBS&PWA: The World Water Day; on March 22nd, 2023. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=4468>

Many communities in Area C of the West Bank are prevented from developing any water and sanitation infrastructure, including the most basic facilities such as bathrooms and water cisterns for rainwater harvesting, thus the per capita water availability falls to quarter of the international standard. This prevents communities not only from implementing adaptation measures to climatic changes, but their mere survival on these areas is threatened.

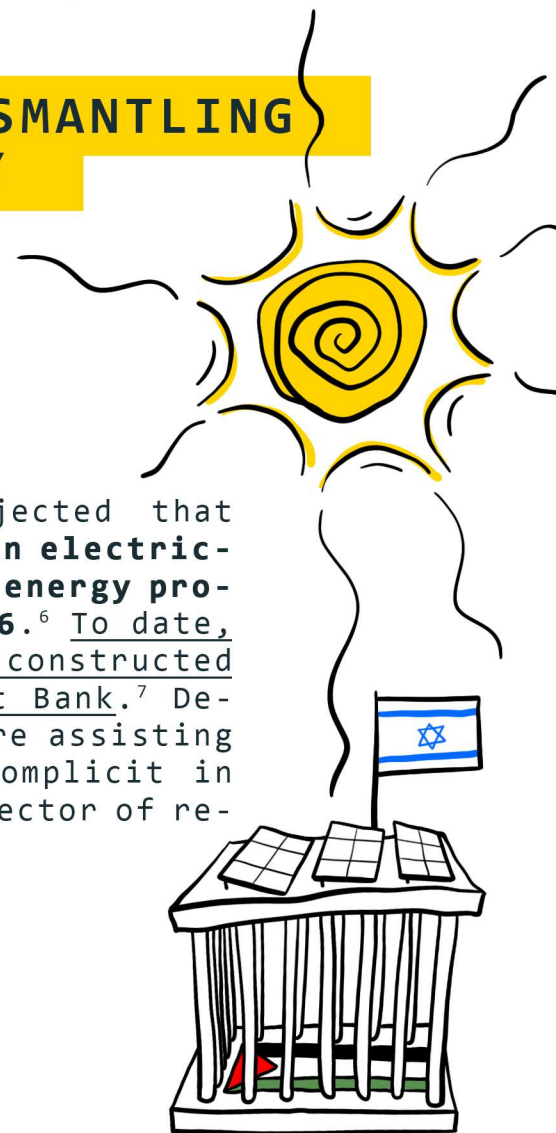
In the Gaza Strip, the situation is even more dire, as nearly 97% of the available water is unfit for human consumption. The Coastal Aquifer, the primary source of water in Gaza, has been environmentally damaged and its quality of water deteriorated due to over-abstraction and pollution, both of which either directly or indirectly resulting from the 16-year long **siege** and blockade by the Israeli occupation. The civilian population in Gaza has had to alternative to expensive desalinated water, much of which is provided by poorly regulated private desalination plants and vendors.⁵ Existing climatic vulnerabilities in Gaza may not be overcome as long as limited adaptive capacity persist in many sectors, to which the availability of fresh water resources is central.

ISRAEL'S DISCRIMINATORY DISMANTLING OF PALESTINE'S SOLAR ENERGY

Israel denies Palestinians in Area C of the West Bank the ability to take advantage of solar energy. It violates their rights through the targeting and destruction of solar energy panels. Meanwhile, Israel profits enormously from renewable resource itself.

The Israeli Electricity Authority had projected that nearly **1.6 billion NIS (nearly \$430 Million) in electricity revenue was generated from Israel's solar energy projects operating in Israel and the oPt in 2016.**⁶ To date, four Israeli commercial solar fields have been constructed in illegal industrial settlements in the West Bank.⁷ Despite the fact that investors and businesses are assisting Israel's unlawful activities and therefore complicit in its illegal acts, Israeli development in this sector of renewable energy continues to accelerate.

It is important to mention that Israel's ecological footprint far exceeds the biocapacity of the land, ranking third in the world for its biocapacity deficit. Approximately **96.4% of Israel's electricity production comes from fossil fuels, including natural gas extracted from stolen Palestinian land.**⁸



⁵ Al Mezan Center for Human Rights. (2022). Fact Sheet: Gaza Water Desalination Plants Health and Environmental Impact. Retrieved September 01, 2023, from <https://www.mezan.org/en/post/33643/Gaza-Water-Desalination-Plants>

⁶ Who Profits. Greenwashing the Occupation, page 12, footnote 6. Retrieved from <https://www.whoprofits.org/publications/report/66>

⁷ Six-Month Report on Demolitions and Confiscations of EU funded structures in Area C September 2016 - February 2017 | EEAS. (n.d.). www.eeas.europa.eu. Retrieved from https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/24279_en

⁸ Israel - Countries & Regions. (n.d.). IEA. Retrieved from <https://www.iea.org/countries/israel>

WHAT DOES ENACTING CLIMATE JUSTICE AS A HUMAN RIGHT INVOLVE?

Solidarity and Social Responsibility

Palestinians under occupation suffer from the climate impacts more severely. **Climate vulnerability should be understood in the context of over seven decades of Palestinian displacement, dispossession, oppression, and poor governance.**⁹ This makes it even more crucial for the international community to emphasize their obligations to ensure development and to provide essential support for Palestinians to mitigate the effects of climate change internationally and as well as nationally.

Human rights habitat, not war

Of all the big polluters contributing to the climate crisis, the military is perhaps one of the most emission producers. The Israeli occupation's military war on Palestine is a looming climate disaster, and puts Gaza on the frontlines of climate disaster. How?

- 1** | The repeated attacks against of the civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, whereby the Israeli army used many types of bombs and missiles, including prohibited weapons.
- 2** | Israel's military-industrial complex is a major contributor to global pollution. Arms manufacturing and trade, a major pillar of Israel's economy, is one of the world's most polluting industries. **Israel is the tenth largest weapons exporter in the world, contributing significantly to global air pollution and widespread ecological damage.**¹⁰
- 3** | The Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip severely limits the entry of materials and supplies. For many years, the Israeli military has targeted the civilian infrastructure and resulted in the destruction of pipelines and sanitation facilities, making it impossible for people to access adequate water and wastewater services. As a result, tens of thousands of cubic meters of wastewater are poured into the sea every day, seeping into the groundwater and contaminating agricultural production and marine life.

⁹ Agha, Z. (n.d.). Climate Change, the Occupation, and a Vulnerable Palestine. Al-Shabaka. Retrieved from <https://al-shabaka.org/summaries/climate-change-the-occupation-and-a-vulnerable-palestine/>

¹⁰ Wezeman, P. D., Kuimova, A., & Wezeman, S. T. (2022, March 1). Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021. SIPRI. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2022/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2021>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Climate change for Palestinians is not merely the phenomenon itself, but it compounded by political and economic realities. The effects of climate change in Palestine are influenced by the illegal appropriation of natural resources and so adaptation to climate change, especially related to the water and agricultural sectors, will not be possible for Palestinians without the **genuine realization of the collective right to self-determination and permanent sovereignty over their natural resources.** Palestinians' struggle against climate change's impacts on human rights is fundamentally linked to Israel's oppression of Palestinians and violations to their human rights. Israel's laws, policies and practices in the oPt, including those directly related to climate change mitigation and adaptation, are all aimed at facilitating territorial annexation, expanding illegal Israeli settlements, entrenching control over Palestinian lands and natural resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** | Local and international climate change activists should focus on addressing climate injustices in Palestine in order to hold Israel accountable for its theft of Palestinian natural resources.
- 2** | There should be global pressure to hold the Israeli occupation, as well as other institutions and companies that are complicit in the destruction of the Palestinian environment, accountable for violating Palestinian rights and profiting from their resources.
- 3** | Fighting climate change requires a global and comprehensive vision on the right to self-determination, which includes the right of people to access their natural resources, which is particularly the case in Palestine.