

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics “PCBS” Issues a Press Release on World Environment Day,05/06/2009

“The Palestinian Environment Is Victim of Colonization and Population Growth”

The occasion of World Environment Day is celebrated every year on the fifth of June since 1972, when the United Nations declared World Environment Day at the opening of the Stockholm conference on human environment. At the same time, the UN announced the establishment of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and gave it the responsibility of increasing world attention to the environment, and increasing the awareness of the public about their important role in the protection of the environment.

The depletion and destruction of environmental resources in the Palestinian Territory caused by a number of Israeli actions in the Palestinian Territory, most notably the establishment of settlements, has had a destructive impact on the Palestinian environment, in addition to the confiscation of land and preventing the entry of Palestinian citizens. There are many effects of the destruction of the Palestinian environment, most notably: the depletion of Palestinian water, polluted wastewater, solid waste, air pollution and noise, destruction of cultural heritage and agricultural sector. The bad management of these resources by the Palestinians at all levels and sectors play a pivotal role in the destruction and attrition of this environment.

Gaza Strip the most populated place in the world

The exploitation and misuse of natural resources besides population growth adversely affect the environment, and cause pressure on natural resources in terms of increasing the problems of sanitation, ensuring safe water for drinking, increasing industrial pollution and pollution caused by transport.

The Palestinian Territory suffer from a high population density and a lack of natural resources; the population density in the Palestinian Territory reached 645 persons/km², 427 persons/km² in the West Bank and 4,010 persons/km² in Gaza Strip in 2008, compared to 334 persons/km² in Israel. Despite the high population density, there are no renewable natural resources, which causes a deterioration of normal life and environment, deterioration of water quality and scarcity, and deterioration of agricultural land and forests.

More than 177 thousands persons in the Palestinian Territory not served by water services

Palestinian water sources vary between surface and groundwater sources. The most important sources are rain, runoff, groundwater, and springs. In order to provide optimal management of this sector, public water networks with high quality specifications should be available.

Data for the year 2008 indicated that 123 localities (22.9%) in the Palestinian Territory, all of them in the West Bank, with more than 177 thousand persons, have no public water network. Regarding the main source of water, data show that 116 localities were connected to public water networks in the Palestinian Territory in 2008, and these localities obtain their water through the Israeli (Mekorot) company with 454 thousand persons (12.1% of the total

population in the Palestinian Territory); 110 of these localities are in the West Bank and 6 localities are in Gaza Strip.

Concerning other sectors, data showed that the percentage of connection to public water network were 87.5% for the economic establishments, 87.8% in the educational sector and 94.0% in the health care centers in 2008.

142.7 million liters of water drained daily by settlers in the West Bank

Israeli settlements are one of the most prominent manifestations of Israeli destruction of the Palestinian environment in the West Bank. The process of horizontal expansion of the settlements is accompanied with destructive activities on the environment in the Palestinian Territory. Such activities include bulldozing and confiscation of agricultural land for construction of roads to provide protection for the settlers.

Israeli settlements control the Palestinian water in the West Bank. This is clear from the World Bank report, "ASSESSMENT OF RESTRICTIONS ON PALESTINIAN WATER SECTOR DEVELOPMENT," issued in April, 2009. The report showed that the amount of water consumed by one Israeli settler is four times the amount consumed by a Palestinian. The number of settlers in the West Bank was estimated to reach about half a million at the end of the year 2008. They consume more than 142.7 million liters per day from the total amount of water in the West Bank, which has led to a water deficit in the West Bank basins.

This deficit adversely affects the quality of water, and has led to water pollution especially in the Gaza Strip, which is exposed to a significant degree of pollution; the percentage of chloride is between 250 mm /L - 2000 mm /L in more than 90% of the Gaza Strip water although the allowable value internationally is 250 mm /L.

The expansion and annexation wall swallows about 23 wells and 51 Springs in the West Bank area

The establishment of the expansion and annexation wall led to a great loss of western basin water: Palestinians lost 23 wells and 51 springs which together produce about 7 million cubic meters of water.

Furthermore, the wall contributes to the fragmentation of ecosystems and is the biggest threat to the natural environment in the Palestinian Territory. The zones of separation, whether in the form of a concrete wall, barbed wire or closed areas, lead to the creation of physical separation which prevents geographical continuity of the land, and creates new climatic and environmental status, such as rainwater gathered behind the wall, which will contribute to soil erosion and vegetation. In addition, digging operations and the destruction of trees during the building of the wall, barbed wire and methods of separation, affect the plant covers.

About 54% of the Palestinian households not connected to wastewater network

The wastewater flowing through the valleys and the Palestinian agricultural land destroy the Palestinian environment and pollute reservoir ground water by increasing the concentration of nitrates and salt, in addition to causing significant environmental damage, which increases the salinity of soil, reduction of vegetation, increase in desertification, deterioration of biodiversity, unpleasant odors and the spread of annoying pests and insects.

Wastewater is considered a secondary problem that faces the Palestinian water sector after

water scarcity. Wastewater is one of the biggest pollutants of Palestinian water. Israel directly and indirectly pollutes the Palestinian water; the Israeli settlements spread throughout the Palestinian Territory pump millions of cubic meters of wastewater in the valleys and in the Palestinian agricultural land. The amount of wastewater produced by Israeli settlements in the West Bank is about 40 million cubic meters. This amount is greater than the amount produced by the Palestinians (33 million cubic meters), beside the fact that 90% of the wastewater generated by Israeli settlements is untreated and discharged to the Palestinian valleys and agricultural lands.

Israel has also played an indirect role in contaminating Palestinian water by wastewater through neglecting wastewater management and refusing the expansion of new wastewater networks to meet the growing population, to the point where more than 54% of the Palestinian households are not connected to a wastewater network.

The average production by Palestinians in the West Bank of the solid wastes is estimated at 700 grams per capita per day

The problem of solid waste management in the Palestinian Territory is complex and difficult to control for many reasons, most notably due to the increasing population, weak technical expertise for the management of solid waste, and lack of financial resources necessary for attention to this aspect, in addition to the long years of occupation that have left their mark on this aspect.

The problem of solid waste is considered as a top priority in Palestine, because of the difficulty of its disposal. The current waste disposal methods concentrate on burning which result in many environmental problems, such as the spread of insects and rodents, in addition to the spread of toxic gases, and besides the pollution of surface and ground water as a result of unsuitable management of these wastes, knowing that the volume of wastes from settlements in the Palestinian Territory is estimated at 250 thousand tons annually.

It is noted that there is one health dump site in the West Bank covering the localities in the north of the West Bank. The average per capita daily production of household waste is estimated to be 0.7 kg, while the quantity of solid waste produced daily estimated more than 2,861 (ton) in the Palestinian Territory in 2008.

Israel pollutes the Palestinian environment by depleted uranium, white phosphorus and hazardous waste

Israel uses the Palestinian Territory as a dumping site for the disposal of its hazardous waste (more than 50 locations), which expose the Palestinian Territory to the dangers of these wastes. The Palestinian Territory is exposed to toxic gases emitted from factories near the Israeli borders; many cases of smuggling and leakage of hazardous waste to the Palestinian Territory were recorded. Such hazardous waste buried in the Palestinian Territory could be associated with the growth of a number of mysterious diseases and cancers, which have increased significantly more than what is found in neighboring countries.

Israel develops its weapons and ammunition using uranium; ammunition containing depleted uranium is tested on Palestinian citizens. Some international organizations such as the International Action Center and the Organization of Lakes Foundation have revealed Israel's use of ammunition and tanks shells containing uranium against Palestinian citizens, which affect public health and cause different kinds of cancers and chronic diseases.

During the recent war in Gaza Strip, Israel used white phosphorus against the Palestinian citizens, (the inhalation of 50 mg of white phosphorus leads to death). White phosphorus causes animal death if inhaled or contaminated grass is ingested. Bombing with white phosphorus also leads to groundwater, marine environment and agricultural pollution and to destruction of wastewater treatment plants.