



Press Release by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Environment Quality Authority on World Environment Day, 2024/06/05

"The Israeli occupation aggression made Gaza Strip an inviable environment"

Since 1973, the world celebrates annually, on June 5th, the World Environment Day (WED). WED is the United Nations' principal tool for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment.

WED theme for 2024 will highlight the land restoration, desertification and drought resilience.

While the world celebrates World Environment Day this year, Palestine faces a depletion of its human and natural capabilities due to the ongoing Israeli aggression for more than seven decades. The repercussions of this arrogance were evident in the recent barbaric aggression since October 7th, 2023, where the excessive indiscriminate destruction of the Palestinians and their resources, as well as the use of types of weapons and explosives that destroy not only human life and property, but also all components of the environment. Dumping thousands of tons of explosive and toxic materials causes significant pollution of soil, water and air, which negatively affects ecosystems and public health, and exposes them to threats. In addition, the destruction of environmental facilities such as wastewater treatment plants and desalination plants impedes the community's ability to withstand and manage water resources, which exacerbates the risk of drought and the shortage of clean and potable water.

Moreover, the burning of agricultural lands, the flow of wastewater coming from the Israeli settlements, and the smuggling of hazardous waste into the Palestinian territories cause massive damage, pollution, and destruction to the agricultural sector, hinder agricultural production, and make it difficult to secure food and basic agricultural resources.

Palestine suffers from constant pressure on available water sources

Palestine depends mainly on water extracted from groundwater and surface sources, amounting to 75.7% of the total available water. The main reason for the poor use of surface water is due to the control of the Israeli occupation over the water of the Jordan River.

The total water currently available in Gaza Strip is estimated at about 10-20% of the total water available before the Israeli aggression. This quantity is not fixed and is subject to the availability of fuel.

350 km out of 700 km (i.e. 50%) of water networks were destroyed, and 9 water tanks out of 10 main tanks were damagedⁱ, leaving the population unable to obtain clean water. Two out of three desalination plants operates at a capacity not exceeding 20% of their operational capacity, which exacerbates the seriousness of the situation. In addition to that, about 83% of groundwater wells in Gaza Strip are currently out of work.

Increasing pressure on available water sources inevitably leads to their depletion and thus suffering from drought.

Destruction and fuel scarcity... Put all wastewater treatment plants and systems in Gaza Strip out of operation

Since October 7th, the extensive destruction of infrastructure in Gaza Strip and the scarcity of fuel have led to the disruption of all wastewater treatment plants and systems, including six plants, and the stoppage of approximately 65 sewage pumps. About 70 km of sewage networks were destroyed. Thus, wastewater estimated at approximately 130,000 cubic meters per day, where it is disposed of without treatment, either into the sea or in Gaza Valley, while a large portion of it leaks into the streets and roads, and sometimes into homes due to the destruction and blockage of sewage pipesⁱⁱ. Pools also formed in the yards of the displaced persons tents, providing a fertile environment for the spread of epidemics and diseases.



Mountains of tons of waste and rubble in the streets of Gaza and shelter centers... threatening health and causing environmental disasters.

Since the Israeli aggression, quantities of solid waste have been accumulating day after day due to the depletion of fuel and the occupation's prevention of municipal crews from reaching the main dumps in Gaza Strip. Also waste collection vehicles and their containers were damaged, and the destruction of streets have stopped transportation, which has made dealing with these huge quantities complicated. About 100 vehicles and machines for collecting and burying waste were destroyed.

The United Nations Development Program estimates that at least 270,000 tons of waste (170,000 tons in south and 100,000 tons in northⁱⁱⁱ) have accumulated in temporary landfill sites recently that established by municipalities in close proximity to residential areas due to the lack of viable options. However, these wastes have no way to sanitary landfills, except by burning or accumulation.

The rate of waste collection in Gaza Strip before the Israeli aggression was estimated at about 98%, which was sent to waste landfills, (two sanitary landfills in Gaza Strip: the Juhur Al-Dik landfill, which serves the governorates of Gaza and the northern Gaza Strip, while Al-Fukhari landfill serves the south and middle of Gaza Strip). Nowadays, these solid wastes have no way to sanitary landfills, except by burning, accumulating, or sending part of them to random dumps.

With the advent of summer and high temperatures, this exacerbates the impact of waste accumulation, as insects and rodents spread, which increases the suffering of the displaced people in Gaza Strip, represented by increased risks of diseases and health threats. The decomposition of the wastes releases harmful gases, such as methane and carbon dioxide, which pollute the air and cause unpleasant odors. It also causes the spread of infectious diseases to thousands of citizens, especially hepatitis and skin diseases, in addition to the pollution it causes to agricultural lands and the aquifer where they leak pollutants to the soil.

This Israeli aggression also resulted in large quantities of rubble, as the total rubble that has accumulated so far in Gaza was estimated at 37 million tons (due to the complete or partial destruction of 89 thousand buildings so far), and this number is rising daily.

About 51% of agricultural land is damaged in Khan Yunis Governorate

Desertification is one of the most serious problems facing the Palestinian environment, and one of the most important reasons that lead to an increase in the rate of desertification in Palestine is the criminal practices carried out by the Israeli occupation against land and water, represented by burning, bulldozing and confiscating agricultural lands.

The results of previous reports on desertification submitted to the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification also showed that Palestine suffers from land degradation at a rate of 14.9% and 25.9% in the years 2018 and 2022, respectively, while the percentage of lands affected by drought was 35.2% for the years 2016-2019.

Based on the aerial photographs, through which an assessment was made of the agricultural damage resulting from the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip, which was conducted by UNISTAT, represented by the leveling of lands and the activity of heavy vehicles, in addition to the continuous bombing until the date of 23/04/2024, data indicated that 46% of the agricultural areas in Gaza Strip were damaged, and the direct and greatest damage was in Khan Yunis Governorate, where the damage affected 51% of the agricultural areas there, while the damage reached about 48% of the agricultural lands in North Gaza Governorate.



Percentage of agricultural lands damaged by the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip by governorate until 21/04/2024

Governorate	% of affected agricultural lands
North Gaza	47.7
Gaza	40.8
Dier Al-Balah	40.4
Khan yunis	51.2
Rafah	43.0
Gaza Strip	45.5

Israeli settlements and Palestinian environment

Israeli settlements in Palestine affect various aspects of life, including the environment. Since 1967, Israel has worked to confiscate Palestinian lands, build settlements and the apartheid wall, which led to a systematic destruction and distortion of the Palestinian environment.

The most prominent manifestations of environmental destruction resulting from settlements included the seizure of agricultural lands and the destruction of water resources, as Israel controls water sources in the West Bank, which leads to depriving Palestinians of accessing the water necessary for drinking and irrigating their lands. In addition to that, Israeli settlements emit toxins from their factories on Palestinian citizens, the volume of emissions issued by the Israeli settlements in the West Bank was estimated at 6.040 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, and this number exceeds what Palestine emits, which was estimated at about 5.260 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent^{iv} annually during 2021.

Furthermore, the quantities of wastewater resulting from these Israeli settlements, which are disposed of on Palestinian agricultural lands and valleys, were estimated at about 35 million from 50 Israeli settlements^v during 2021 that lead to the pollution of agricultural lands and groundwater sources.

Destruction of biodiversity components

The ongoing Israeli aggression has also destroyed the components of biodiversity in Gaza Strip through the comprehensive destruction of the natural environment and components of biodiversity, including plant and animal diversity

on land and in the open sea adjacent to Gaza Strip, destroying wild animal habitats, leveling land, polluting water, soil, and air, and turning lands into mountains of waste.

In the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, we are witnessing the deliberate destruction of natural and environmental resources, the leveling of lands, the deliberate fires of forests and agricultural lands, the dumping of waste and industrial waste, the pollution of water, soil and air, and the establishment of Israeli settlements, the apartheid wall,.

Ongoing efforts to green Palestine

Many activities were implemented by Ministry of Agriculture during the period 2019-2024, where 34 community gardens and 24 pastoral reserves were established. About two million seedlings were distributed to farmers and one greenhouse was established during the same period.

The area of land that was reclaimed during the period 2019-2024 through projects implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture amounted to 10,378 dunums, while 14,821 dunums of land were rehabilitated.

As for the agricultural road sector, the length of the roads that were built during the same period amounted to 1,047 km, while the length of the roads that were rehabilitated amounted to 361 km.



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^{iv} EQA, 2023. Environment Status Report in Palestine, 2023.
^v A study carried out by an organization Premiere Urgence