



UAWC

Union of Agricultural Work Committees

Life in Palestine
Background on the Israeli Occupation of Palestine

March 2010

Table of Contents

- A. UAWC – General Background
- B. Introduction
- C. Importance of Agriculture in Palestine
- D. Destruction of Palestinian homes and agricultural land
- E. Water Crisis
- F. Israeli Apartheid Wall
- G. Life & Liberty
- H. Closures and Movement Restrictions
- I. Settlements
- J. Nuclear Activity
- K. Human Rights Violations
- L. Constraints of the Agricultural Sector
 - a) Occupation-related Actions
 - b) Poor Natural Resource Base
 - c) Technical and Institutional Constraints
 - d) Socio Economical Constraints
 - e) Environmental Constraints
 - f) Financial Constraints
- M. Conclusion

A. UAWC General Background

The Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) is a non-governmental, non-profit, developmental Palestinian organization. UAWC has no religious or political affiliations of any kind. UAWC was established in 1986 in Jerusalem and encompasses several branches in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. UAWC is an independent entity in accordance with the Law of Palestinian NGOs and Charitable Organizations. It aims at improving farmers' income from agricultural products, as well as improving and enhancing the quantity and quality of agricultural products.

Since Palestinian lands have been, and still are, targeted by Israeli and Zionist occupation plans, UAWC considers the development and improvement of the agricultural sector as major means of defense and protection for the lands from Israeli confiscations and occupation.

UAWC is endlessly striving to establish an agricultural developmental policy which is able to improve and develop the agricultural sector, and which is able to provide an acceptable level of food security, and is able to eliminate poverty in rural areas, especially in the case of small-scale farmers.

UAWC believes that the combined efforts of NGOs and governmental institutions involved in the agricultural sector will dramatically increase the contribution of this sector in the Gross National Product. UAWC feels that functioning as a NGO is the most suitable form for it in order to reach its developmental goals in partnership and cooperation with other developmental organizations.

UAWC seeks to accomplish many aims of its own. These aims consist of preserving Palestinian lands and protecting them from Israeli confiscations by land reclamation and land cultivation, as well as encouraging farmers to invest in their lands and improving the farmers' performance through raising their awareness, and through providing guidance, training, and extension visits. In addition, UAWC aims to assist farmers in marketing their products in national and international markets, as well as attempting to limit the poverty ratio in the

Palestinian rural areas by providing job opportunities. UAWC is also involved in enabling and empowering rural women through developing the participatory role of Palestinian women in the developmental process. Furthermore, UAWC perceives as one of its major aims is to protect and preserve the integrity of the agricultural environment and to develop water sources for agricultural use.

UAWC is a member of; the Palestinian NGO network, the Palestinian Oil Council, the Palestinian Grape Council, the Palestinian Environmental Organizations Network, the Palestinian Fair Trade Network, The National Council for Resisting Genetically Modified Organisms, the National Campaign for Resisting the Apartheid Wall, agricultural coordination committees in the Palestinian governorates, and is a member of different and several other committees involved in agricultural development. UAWC also has excellent relations and partnerships with several international organizations which support the Palestinian nation, and it has strong ties with the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture.

UAWC Programs:

- Agricultural Services Program
- Farmers' Rights Program- Advocacy and lobbying
- Emergency Response Program, especially in cases concerning unemployment and poverty elimination, and raising the level of food security.
- Enabling and Empowering Rural Women Program
- Improving UAWC Organizational Capacities and Financial Resources

UAWC Vision

To maintain a food secure agricultural society, that is firmly connected to its land in a free Palestinian independent state, while contributing effectively in social, political, and economic life without discrimination.

UAWC Mission

To improve the living conditions of the Palestinian agricultural society, within a comprehensive framework of sustainable rural development in a manner that would enhance self-reliance and activate the role of local agricultural committees and the concept of voluntary and team work.

UAWC Objectives

- 1- To improve agricultural revenues of the rural society.
- 2- To protect farmers' rights, lands, and water supplies from all marginalizing policies and natural disasters.
- 3- To respond to emergencies, especially those related to poverty, unemployment, and the level of food security.
- 4- To contribute to support and empower rural women.
- 5- To improve the Union's efficiency towards achieving its vision.

UAWC Values and Principles

Values	Principles
<p>Credibility: The Union considers itself fully responsible for offering efficient agricultural services to farmers and to develop their lands in a way that enables them to make the most possible use they can out of it. This could be achieved through the effective and wise usage of the received funds from donors for agricultural services. Thus, the Union holds this responsibility before both the farmers and the donors.</p>	<p>Projects management: In spite of the fact that the Union is a non-profit organization with a socially oriented vision, it administers its projects as if they were profit oriented. This is actually considered the main managerial basis, as far as projects are concerned, which is reflected on all other principles of the Union.</p>
<p>Commitment: The Union is committed to providing as much support as possible to farmers, as well as improving their agriculture and realizing as many of their and the Union's needs as objectives as possible.</p>	<p>Sustainability and Self-Reliance: The Union aims at providing sustainable agricultural services; consequently, methodological and procedural decisions of the Union are dependent on farmers' needs and how much those decisions contribute to their self-reliance.</p>
<p>Team-work: The Union seeks to obtain outcomes at all levels in terms of cooperation with international partners and donors working in agriculture, and with the local farmers. This is done through the Union's staff and groups of agricultural committees.</p>	<p>Independence: The Union receives funds from donors but works towards self dependence. Furthermore, its main goal is basing its services on farmers' needs rather than according to donors' preferences. Therefore, board members were selected to be professionals working in the private sector.</p>
<p>Excellence: The Union excels with its high level vision, strategies, programs, staff, team-work, cooperation, administrative regulations and response to farmers' needs.</p>	<p>Responsibility in dealing with farmers: The Union believes that there is no bad farmer, but there are bad projects in the sense that the institution does not blame the farmer in case of having agricultural problems. However farmers present great responsibility in following up and dealing with the different projects.</p>
<p>Innovation: the Union always seeks to achieve forms of guarantees, plans and regulations which reflect the best global ideas about farmers' services.</p>	<p>Pillar of Services: The Union is an agricultural society that provides its services to farmers in all agricultural fields.</p>
<p>Trust: The Union seeks to create trust in its relationship with farmers through communication and connection.</p>	<p>Wide Dispersal: The Union believes that in order to achieve positive impact on farmers' life in Palestine, it is important to reach thousands of farmers who own small lands, and provide them with agricultural services.</p> <p>Emphasis on women: The Union believes that women have a major role in the revival of the Palestinian society. Therefore, we believe in spreading and enhancing environmental, agricultural, economic and social awareness among Palestinian women, especially rural women.</p>

B. Introduction

In 1948, in the same year that Apartheid laws were being implemented in South Africa, Zionist invaders waged war against the land and people of Palestine. They killed over 13,000 Palestinians, and displaced over 750,000 inhabitants, turning them into refugees. Over 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed, and over half of the land of Palestine was stolen by foreign invaders. These invaders declared a state on this stolen land and this is how Israel was born.

In 1967, Israel invaded more lands, this time taking over Gaza, the Sinai, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Another 200,000 Palestinians were displaced, and the number of Palestinian refugees today is over 6 million. Israel eventually withdrew from Egyptian Sinai in 1979, but it illegally annexed the Syrian Golan Heights in 1982. And in Palestine, Israel continues to occupy the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and continues to militarily control Gaza to this day.

Even though refugees have a legal and basic human right to return to their land and homes, Israel prevents the Palestinian refugees from returning, whether they originally came from areas inside the "Green Line" now known as Israel, or from the land inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Israel has in place many laws and regulations that deny Palestinians basic human rights. The illegal blockade on Gaza and closed borders prevents Palestinians there from entering or exiting. Palestinians in the West Bank cannot visit relatives in Gaza or vice versa. Palestinians without a Jerusalem ID card have to obtain special permission from the Israelis to enter Jerusalem, the cultural and spiritual capital of Palestine, and this permission is often denied. Israeli military checkpoints and barriers make travel even within the West Bank difficult.

Israel best displays its intention to take over all of Palestine through its illegal settlement policy. There are over 150 Israeli-only settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These settlements are illegal under international law, which states that an occupying power cannot transfer its population into occupied territory. Israel has built an extensive network of highways, on Palestinian land, connecting the settlements, and Palestinians are not allowed to use these roads. Israel continues to confiscate more and more Palestinian land for settlement expansion. The settlements are guarded by Israeli military. The settlers themselves are often armed, and are known for terrorizing Palestinians, uprooting olive trees, and setting fire to agricultural fields, often under the watchful eye of the IDF.

Although settlements are illegal, the international community has done nothing to stop them, and the Israeli prime minister has boldly declared Israel's intention to continue expanding them.

In 2002, Israel began illegal construction of the Apartheid wall. This wall cuts through the West Bank, and with it, Israel confiscates even more land, separating many farmers from their fields, and further restricting travel.

Israel denies Palestinians the basic human right to express themselves and to organize and oppose the illegal occupation. Many of Palestine's natural leaders, from across the political spectrum, have been detained. Today there are over 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails. Israel uses this as a means of suppressing dissent and to discourage Palestinians from demanding their basic human rights. A shocking 20% of all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have been detained at some point in their lives.

In addition to the past and continuing theft of Palestinian land, Israel also controls and severely limits the availability of one of the most basic human rights and needs: water. Israel controls and diverts much of the water supply in the West Bank to the settlements and even to Israelis inside the "Green Line". This has a significant impact on agriculture.

Agriculture is a very important component of Palestinian life and the Palestinian economy, providing food and employment. The typical challenges faced by any agricultural community, such as climate change and drought, are compounded by the unique Palestinian reality of being one brutalized and exploited by a foreign military occupation.

C. Importance of Agriculture in Palestine

Agriculture has traditionally played a vital role in Palestinian society and to its economy.

Israeli propaganda claims that Israelis brought agricultural life to the land, but Palestinians have a rich history of farming and producing. Palestine is known for many agricultural products, including olives, oranges, lemons and many other fruits and vegetables. The rich history of Palestinian farming undermines the Israeli settlers' ridiculous claims that their presence in Palestine is necessary to protect the environment and offer employment to Palestinians. Palestinians have been "making the desert bloom" for centuries before the arrival of the occupiers.

Local agricultural production in Palestine achieves self-sufficiency in most vegetables, olives, poultry and eggs. By contrast, local production only meets the 75% of needs for red meat, while 85-90% of wheat has to be imported, depending on annual rainfall.

Historically, agriculture has been the main employer in Palestine, as most Palestinians depended on agriculture as a secondary source of income. The employment proportion within the agricultural sector increased from 11.5% in 1996 to 14.2% in 2008, and its contribution to GDP increased from 6.4% in 1997 to 8.2% in 2008. After the second intifada, most Palestinians who lost their jobs in Israel became engaged in agriculture. Likewise, when public sector salaries were cut during the period 2006-2007, a sizeable portion of PNA employees reverted to agriculture. In addition to that the agriculture sector is a major provider for formal and informal job creation especially for women.

D. Destruction of Palestinian homes and agricultural land

In its ongoing effort to expand its control and to take over all of Palestine, Israel destroys lands and demolishes homes.

Palestinians are required to obtain permission from Israel for construction on their own land. However, Israel has consistently denied building permits to Palestinians in more than 60 per cent of the West Bank (known as "Area C"), claiming the areas are zoned as green land and not for urban development. While denying permits to Palestinians, Israel has at the same built tens of thousands of houses and other infrastructure for the exclusive use of Israeli settlers on Palestinian land zoned as green land.

When Palestinians build without a permit, rather than simply imposing fines, or issuing the permits, the Israeli occupation has destroys the building, whether it be a home or a business. In fact, Israel has demolished thousands of Palestinian homes and other structures in the Occupied Territories for "lack of building permit" or for "military necessity". Israel uses the claim of "military necessity" when it wants to confiscate more land, including for buffer zones around settlements and settler-only highways.

Between 1967 and the beginning of 2009, Israel has demolished over 24,100 Palestinian-owned homes and other structures in occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, resulting in the internal displacement of more than 128,700 Palestinians within the OPT since 1967. More than 3,000 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank have pending demolition orders, which can be immediately executed without forewarning resulting in new waves of displacement.

Israel also violates international law by destroying the homes of family members of Palestinians involved in involved in resistance activity against the Israeli occupation. Although Israel claims to have discontinued "punitive" home demolitions, instances of such

demolitions still occur. The practice violates both international humanitarian and human rights law, and is discriminatory as well as unlawful. House demolition has been routinely used against Palestinians and Israeli Arabs, while it is virtually never used against Israeli Jews.

Forced evictions and home demolition of Palestinian-owned structure has been a continuous pattern by the Israeli Occupying forces to illegally assert control over the maximum amount of land with a minimum number of Palestinians and implanting Jewish-only settlements.

In addition, there are military demolitions where Palestinian structures are demolished for clearing the area for unspecified military role. The same pattern applies to the destruction of large areas of agricultural land and orchards which has deprived some of the most vulnerable Palestinian communities of their main source of livelihood.

In Gaza, farmers have been unable to recover from continuous Israeli assaults. Following Operation Cast Lead, an ongoing blockade, restricted access to vital agricultural areas, prolonged water stress and deterioration of water quality, the agriculture community in the Gaza Strip remains on the brink of collapse. In one year alone, the number of people employed in agriculture fell by 60 percent. Coupled with an estimated USD \$180 million in direct damages to agricultural assets, agriculture-dependent families have exhausted options for maintaining their livelihoods.

The Palestinian citizens of Israel have also been subject to policies aimed at dispossession and displacement since the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. The first waves of forced internal displacement that were carried out by Israel in the 1948 war and its immediate aftermath, have resulted in approximately 335,000 internally displaced Palestinian citizens of Israel and their descendants. To date, the State of Israel continues to block these Palestinian communities from returning and repossessing their property.

While all Palestinian communities within Israel are vulnerable to forced displacement on the ground of their nationality, the Palestinian Bedouin (the herding communities) and Palestinians in the "mixed population-cities" are particularly at risk of forced displacement. Between 2000 and 2007, over 3000 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished, with the majority of those being owned by Bedouin living in the unrecognized villages in the Naqab (Negev).

E. Water Crisis

Since the beginning of the 1967 occupation, the demand for water by Palestinians has increased significantly due to population growth. However, Israel's strict control of the water sector in the Occupied Territories has prevented development to meet the increasing demand for water, causing a water shortage and water quality crisis.

The illegal Israeli settlements control over 40% of the Occupied Territories (including most of its fertile lands and aquifers) and divert scarce water resources from the Palestinians to settlement and development projects destined for Israelis only. Three million West Bank Palestinians use only 250 million cubic metres per year while the 500,000 Israeli settlers are allocated 1,450 cubic meters of water per person per year.

Some settlements actually sell the same water they are stealing to the surrounding Palestinian villages. Mr. Katz-Oz, Israel's negotiator on water issues, made Israel's discriminatory policy plain when he stated: "There is no reason for Palestinians to claim that just because they sit on lands, they have the rights to that water."

Israeli companies like Carmel Agrexco make enormous profits from settler production of fruit and vegetables which require intensive irrigation, causing degradation to the environment and poverty for Palestinian farmers deprived of their water supply. Settlers also commonly pollute Palestinian water resources by dumping sewage. This is part of a deliberate attempt to encourage Palestinians to leave.

Discriminatory and insufficient supply of water

Since the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, Israel has instituted an unequal division of the shared surface and ground water. Water in the occupied Palestinian Territories has been fully incorporated into the Israeli water-management system to the general benefit of Israel and detriment of Palestinians.

About 70% of groundwater on which Israel is dependent and 40% of its annual fresh water supply originates in Occupied Palestinian territories. Of the water available from West Bank aquifers, Israel uses an astounding 73%, the illegal Jewish settlements use another 10%, and West Bank Palestinians are limited to a mere 17% of the water that originates from their own territory.

This deliberate Israeli policy of limiting water to Palestinians results in an average per capita daily water consumption by West Bank Palestinians being only two-thirds of the amount recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). Israeli settlers in the West Bank are allowed five times as much water as Palestinians.

Inside Israel, Israeli water consumption is 350 liters per person per day compared to 60 liters per person per day for Palestinians in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem.

Due to the water shortage, many Palestinians have to buy water from tankers at three to six times higher than regular prices, forcing poor families to spend up to one-fifth of their income on water, compared to average-income Israeli families spending only just over 1% of their income on water.

Israel is in control of all water development in the West Bank, and can veto any Palestinian requests to drill wells or collect surface water from their own land. And in practice, it is difficult if not impossible for Palestinians in occupied territories to get permission to drill a new water well or even repair one that is close to an Israeli well.

In several places where illegal settlements and Palestinian communities are connected to the same well, the Israeli water provider, Mekorot, reduces or temporarily cuts off the supply to Palestinian customers. Some Palestinian communities have their water cut for three months in the summer.

Lack of water distribution systems in occupied Palestinian territory

Although the Israeli occupation of Palestine itself is illegal, as an occupying power Israel has legal obligations to provide for the inhabitants of the lands that it occupies. Instead, Israel actively denies even the most basic of human needs to Palestinians.

Israeli has neglected construction of infrastructure to connect the Palestinian rural population to a running-water network, and proper maintenance of existing networks to prevent water loss. Among those particularly suffering from the water shortage are residents of villages and refugee camps in the Occupied Territories not connected to a running-water network.

In 2008, 227,500 Palestinians, in 220 towns and villages were not connected to a water network. Another 190,000 Palestinians live in towns and villages in which a water network covered only part of the community.

The aging infrastructure results in the loss of two-thirds of the water running through the network. Additionally, the lack of regular treatment of most Palestinian sewage in the West Bank prevents purification and water use for agricultural irrigation needs.

Due to water shortages caused by Israel, during the summer some West Bank municipalities are able to distribute water only a few hours a day. Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jenin implement such rationing plans.

In the West Bank, around 50 groundwater wells and over 200 cisterns have been destroyed or cut off from their owners because of Israel's construction of the Apartheid Wall. This was water used for domestic and agricultural needs by over 122,000 people.

In 2003, the losses incurred by Palestinian farmers due to the Wall diverting water resources was 2,200 tons of olive oil, 50,000 tons of fruit, and 100,000 tons of vegetables. The construction and expansion of the wall continues to this day, cutting off more and more owners from their land and water supplies.

Poor water quality

The sole local water source in Gaza is the Gaza Aquifer, which provides 96% of overall water consumption in the Gaza Strip. Since the 1950s this aquifer has become polluted and salinated, and this has worsened with the increased consumption.

The main reasons for the pollution and salinization of the aquifer are over-extraction, penetration of untreated sewage, and penetration of pesticides, fertilizers, and salts from irrigated agriculture.

The brackish Gaza water can have levels of chlorides that are five times over the 250 milligrams per liter maximum level recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). In fact, only 7% of the water in the Gaza Strip meets the WHO standards.

F. Israeli Apartheid Wall

In 2002, Israel began construction of the Apartheid wall. It has become known as this, because "apartheid" means "separation," and the effect of the wall has been to separate Palestinians from their land as well as each other. The fence/wall being built by Israel in the West Bank further restricts the rights of the Palestinians to freedom of movement, to work and to an adequate standard of living.

Israel has described the wall it as a defensive barrier to provide security for Israel. However, it does not adhere to the 315 kilometers long "Green Line" and more than 80 per cent of it is being built on Palestinian land in the West Bank. It encompasses some 80 Israeli settlements and vast areas of the most fertile and water-rich Palestinian lands, effectively annexing them to Israel. When complete, the wall will be some 720 kilometers long and 35,000 Palestinians will be confined to enclaves, needing permits to remain on their own land.

Several villages have lost most of their farming land and villagers who are without access to their land have lost their livelihood. Gates to pass through the wall, guarded by the Israelis, are often closed and the Israeli army increasingly denies farmers permits to cross.

Most petitions lodged by Palestinians in the Israeli High Court against the route of the fence/wall were rejected but even in the few instances when the High Court ordered that the route be changed, the rulings have not been implemented by the Israeli authorities.

In 2004, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague, ruled that the "construction of the wall and its associated regime are contrary to international law." The ruling cited that with the wall, Israel violates the Right to Self Determination, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, relevant human rights and humanitarian law, as well as the Rights to Freedom of Movement, Work, Education, Health, Food and Water, Religion and the Right of the Child.

Israel was ordered to immediately cease construction of the Wall in all areas, dismantle parts already build, repeal any legislation or regulation relating to the Wall make reparations for damages caused by construction of the Wall. As with other international rulings and laws, Israel has fully refused to comply with the ICJ's ruling.

The Environmental Impact of the Apartheid Wall

With the construction of the Apartheid Wall, all the environmental problems in Palestine have and will continue to increase significantly in many aspects, such as resources, wildlife and agriculture. Here are some of the different elements, these aspects include:

a. Water

One of the main reasons for the wiggly route of the Wall is for Israel to annex the most fertile land, including further control of water.

After occupying the West Bank in 1967, the Israeli military issued orders that prohibited all water drilling and development in the West Bank unless a permit was approved from the Israeli military. To this day, not a single permit has been issued, meaning that most of the wells that are used by Palestinians were drilled prior to the occupation in 1967. Palestinians have been forced to sustain themselves with that water. While there is a water shortage in the West Bank and difficulty for agriculture, a couple of meters below there are perfectly fine and pure water ready for usage, but Israel denies Palestinians the basic human right to water and will not allow access to it.

The wall has had a further detrimental effect on the Palestinian water supply. According to the Palestinian Hydrology group, the number of water wells affected by the first phase of the wall's construction is 50. Israel has destroyed and confiscated land not only for the space of the wall, but also for a 30 - 100 meter "buffer zone." Of the 50 wells affected, 14 are located in the Wall's "buffer zone" while the remaining 36 have completely been isolated from the West Bank.

b. Waste Management

Waste management and drainage systems in Palestine are a serious problem, especially in the small villages, where there is hardly any drainage system at all, and this is worsened by the Apartheid wall.

During the years of occupation Israel has also neglected the management or disposal of solid wastes within the West Bank, and in 2008 12% of Palestinian households had no solid waste collection service. Consequently, many lands are now considered unfit for agricultural and domestic use, due to contamination. Israel has also prevented municipalities within the West Bank from transporting the solid wastes outside the city. So for many Palestinian villages and cities, there has been no choice but to dump the waste in urban areas. In 2008 there were 119 dumping sites in the West Bank. In some places, air pollution has become a problem due to burning garbage.

A report done in 2006 found that the disposal of solid waste in the West Bank has resulted in the abnormally high presence of toxic substances in the groundwater, including chloride, arsenic, cadmium and mercury.

Israeli settlers annually discharge 224,000 tons of waste into the West Bank, polluting springs, streams and farms. According to PENGON (The Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network) untreated and contaminated water is directly being pumped into Palestinian agricultural areas and Valleys. Studies in 2008 have shown that 73% of southern West Bank families live in areas contaminated with waste water.

Israel has also several times been charged and accused of dumping toxic materials within the West Bank (on the Palestinian side of the wall). In an exclusive interview with PRESS TV, Deputy Director of the Palestinian environmental authority, Jamil Mtoor, confirmed that Israel cuts disposal costs by dumping on Palestinian territories. According to Mtoor; "Israeli companies have been dumping solid and hazardous wastes in different West Bank villages. They have been using the Palestinian land in a village called Shoukba near Ramallah to dump x-ray films, releasing carcinogens into the environment, and this has left many people with asthma-related illnesses."

Palestinians have also observed Israeli companies burying the carcasses of thousands of chickens infected with the avian flu virus in the district of Nablus.

Regarding the Apartheid Wall, drainage damage has occurred in some areas, especially in Qalqiliya, where the Wall has acted as a dam, trapping the rain water on the inside of the Wall, preventing it from flowing westwards. There it has mixed with pollutants and overflowed into houses, fields and greenhouses. Around 700 dunums of agricultural lands were completely destroyed, as well as factories, shops and a bridge. Israeli authorities have refused to open the hatches in the wall to allow the water from flowing down the valleys. The Palestinian authorities estimated the damages to be 1.4 million US dollars.

c. Impact on Plants and Animals

As the wall is being under construction it has a devastating effect on the wildlife living in those areas. The Apartheid Wall is an enormous structure that takes up much space, harming the environment and bringing the ecosystems (communities of living things) there out of balance.

Trees play a major role in preserving the environment and the ecosystems; they improve air quality and water quality as well as stabilizing the soil. In the early stages of the wall's construction in 2002 and 2003 when the path for the wall was being cleared, Israel uprooted over 100,000 trees.

The construction activity of the wall and its presence will have a harming effect on the natural animals and plants living there as well. Many of their natural habitats will get destroyed and due to the habitat loss, it becomes easier for Pathogens, harmful microorganisms, and exotic weeds to invade the area. This will increase the disease rates for the animals and plants remaining.

Also, animals respond to noise pollution caused by the construction. Their stress level increases and this brings their body out of balance. Their communication with each other is also affected by the noise as well as their reproduction.

In short, animal populations will significantly decrease, due to constant disturbance of their ecological relations. Some species may disappear completely.

G. Life and Liberty

Since September 2000, the Israeli army has killed more than 6,500 men, women and children in the Occupied Territories (the West Bank and Gaza), by means of bombing, house demolitions and targeted assassinations. Gaza is currently under siege with extremely limited movement in and out. In addition, many Palestinians have died because they have been denied access to medical treatment. In the West Bank, over the last few years, more than 60 Palestinian women have been forced to give birth at checkpoints; more than half the babies and some of the mothers have died.

Currently, over 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners are being held in Israeli jails, including over 300 children, many under the system of 'administrative detention'. — I.e. without charge or trial. The crisis of political imprisonment of Palestinians by the Israeli occupiers is so significant that the PNA has an entire Ministry devoted to addressing it.

These prisoners are not criminals, but rather are Palestinians who are accused of resisting the illegal occupation, often even in non-violent ways. In some case, Israel detains Palestinians merely belonging to certain Palestinian political organizations.

The conditions in the prisons are abhorrent. The prisons are overcrowded. Palestinian political prisoners are often denied proper medical care. They are responsible for buying their own food, and the prisoner families, already haven their primary income earner taken from them, have to find a way to get this money to them.

Additionally, Israel engages in torture. The Palestinian Prisoners' Society estimated in July 2003 that 90% of all Palestinian prisoners are subjected to torture at some point during their detention. Nearly 200 prisoners have died in detention as a result of torture or medical negligence since 1967.

H. Closures and Movement Restrictions

The regime of Israeli military closures, checkpoints, and other barriers, including the Apartheid wall, violates the right to freedom of movement of Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Such restrictions have paralyzed the Palestinian economy and are depriving Palestinians of the rights to work, to health, to an adequate standard of living, to education, and to family life. These measures violate Israel's obligations as an occupying power under international human rights and humanitarian law.

Israeli forces routinely deny passage to Palestinians, including patients whose lives are in danger, through military checkpoints within the West Bank, in violation of Israel's obligation under international human rights and humanitarian law to ensure the right to health of the population without discrimination.

The network of Israeli settlements and roads for settlers has fragmented the West Bank. Movement for Palestinians is severely hampered by a system of more than 550 checkpoints, roadblocks, barriers, earth mounds and trenches. Israel contends that such restrictions are needed to protect Israelis from attacks; however the vast majority of them are located to block Palestinian travel between towns and villages within the OPT, in particular to keep Palestinians away from Israeli settlements and settlers' roads, not to prevent Palestinians from entering Israel.

Although not internationally recognized as legitimate, Israel illegally annexed East Jerusalem and continuously expands its settlement activities there, displacing more and more Palestinians from their homes. Palestinians without a Jerusalem ID card are commonly denied access to Jerusalem. Israel frequently denies Palestinians from entering the Al-Aqsa compound, the third holiest site in Islam. Israeli settlers often provoke confrontation here. The Israelis have also been excavating underneath the compound, threatening the very foundation.

I. Settlements

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the transfer of the population of the occupying power into occupied territory. However, Israel has settled more than 450,000 Israelis in the occupied West Bank, including some 200,000 in East Jerusalem. Some 140 settlements have been established for Israelis on confiscated Palestinian land as part of a discriminatory government policy. Settlers receive generous housing allowances and tax incentives from the government and protection by the Israeli army.

Settlements represent one of the largest obstacles to any potential peace deal. These settlements are for Jewish Israelis only. They are guarded by military towers and typically are on the most fertile and militarily advantageous land that has been confiscated from Palestinians. They are closed to Palestinians (except through work permits).

The appropriation by Israel of Palestinian land and natural resources for the expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure, notably roads for the settlers, has caused serious violations of the human rights of the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories – including restrictions on movement, and destruction of homes and lands.

Settlers themselves are often armed, and frequently commit acts of terror against Palestinians, through harassment, burning of fields, physical assaults on Palestinians and

even killings. On many occasions, settlers are allowed to victimize Palestinians right under the watchful eye of Israeli soldiers who do nothing to protect the Palestinians being attacked.

J. Nuclear Activity

Despite international pressure on many countries to abandon their nuclear ambitions, and the claim that Iraq was seeking to build a nuclear weapon being used as one of the pretexts for the U.S. invading that country, Israel has long possessed nuclear weapons and serves as a threat in the region.

Israel's nuclear activity began in the 1950's though it has not been officially declared by the state of Israel.

Israel has disposed of its nuclear waste in Occupied Palestinian Territories. The inhabitants of a number of small Palestinian villages have found areas in the soil, sealed with cement. According to several studies, the radioactivity level in these areas turned out to be very high.

According to Dr. Mahmoud Sa'ada, a Palestinian general practitioner and head of the Middle East division at International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Israel has buried the waste from Dimona nuclear reactor is buried near Dahriyya, a small West Bank Palestinian village just north of Hebron and 12 miles from the reactor. The radiation from this buried waste reaches the people and causes cancer. According to Dr. Sa'ada, the nuclear radiation has reached places as far as Tulkarm (a Palestinian city in the northern West Bank located at over 160 km from the Dimona reactor). It has been revealed that radiation from Dimona also causes an increase in cancer among Palestinians in the West Bank.

K. Human rights violations

The Israeli authorities routinely fail to ensure independent, impartial and thorough investigations into allegations of human rights violations against Palestinians. While the Israeli authorities impose heavy punishment, including collective punishment in violation of international law, on Palestinians convicted of attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians, they rarely carry out proper investigations into unlawful killings and assaults on Palestinians. Even when such investigations are carried out, punishment of the perpetrator is extremely rare and compensation is hardly ever paid to the victim. The resulting atmosphere of impunity has encouraged further violations.

Israeli settlers who have assaulted Palestinians and international peace activists have also consistently benefited from impunity. The Israeli army frequently fails to intervene to protect Palestinians attacked by settlers and in most cases the Israeli police fail to carry out proper investigations into such attacks. Over 90 percent of police investigations into such attacks committed by Israeli settlers end without indictments.

L. Constraints facing the Agricultural Sector:

Agriculture is the sector that has suffered most from Israeli occupation, resulting in inefficiencies and weak competitiveness in local and foreign markets. Listed below are some of the major distortions resulting and their hugely negative impact on agricultural sustainability, productivity and profitability:

a) Occupation related topics

Although Israel claims that the confiscation of land and water resources is for 'security' purposes, the reality is Israel seeks to expand its control and to drive Palestinians from their land. Through this policy, Israel continues to uproot orchards and damage other infrastructure.

Israel requires Palestinians to obtain permits for water rights and water infrastructure projects, but it intentionally withhold authorization of these permits. This prevents rehabilitation of water wells, cisterns and transmission networks, and agricultural infrastructure such as animal shelters and greenhouses.

Due to import restriction, Palestinian farmers depend on Israel for vaccines, but Israel will not provide an adequate amount. This leads to shortages resulting in poor animal disease control and prevention, having a negative impact on the livestock as a whole.

Israeli restrictions on free trading - the movement of commodities, services and individuals through the border crossings, with punitive taxes, tariffs and delays imposed on movement of imports into, and exports from OPT contribute to perishable agricultural goods spoiling, harming the reliability and punctuality of trading agreements

Israel restricts and at times even prohibits movement of shepherds and fishermen, farmers and traders.

The occupation creates difficulties related to ownership, accessibility and usage of natural resources including land and water in different zones.

Closures imposed on rangeland and pasture deprive herders of access to these very important grazing areas, and hence cause overgrazing problems in the accessible zones and force herders to rely more and more on imported feeds, which has made them more vulnerable to drought conditions and soaring feed and inputs prices.

The illegal construction of the Apartheid Wall has affected more than 943,000 dunums of Palestinian land in the West Bank. The establishment of a "buffer zone" along Gaza, has made it no longer reachable by Palestinians. Additionally the construction of by-pass roads in the West Bank has deprived many Palestinians of accessing their lands.

b) Poor natural resources base

The crippling Israeli occupation results in high competition among Palestinian farmers over limited resources of land and water.

The shortage of available land and water lead many producers to over-use chemicals (leading to soil contamination and quality degradation), over-pump water (leading to salinization of agricultural water) and over-graze the limited available rangelands.

As in many regions in the world, agricultural lands must also compete with the urbanization and random expansion land use.

c) Technical and Institutional Constraints

The lack of Palestinian freedom and the control by Israel creates technical and institutional hurdles for the agricultural sector.

There is a lack of focused training and capacity building efforts within Palestinian society, especially in the field of planning, policy, investment programs as well as monitoring and evaluation. This includes insufficient involvement of the private sector in agricultural marketing, processing and finance services.

Farmers in Palestine do not enjoy the same government protection in place in many other regions. There is incomplete and not fully enforced legislation, but more protections are needed.

There is an absence of insurance programs and funds against natural and political risks and calamities. There are limited research and experimental facilities.

d) Socio-economical Constraints

Agricultural holdings are typically small and fragmented.

Farmers experience low returns and profitability in some agricultural sub sectors, particularly small ruminants and field crops (cereals and legumes).

The sustainability of the agricultural sector is also threatened by internal immigration of youth and abandonment of agriculture.

e) Environmental Constraints

As with any region, Palestinian farmers are subject to the negative impact of climate changes, mainly drought and frost.

The land confiscations and Israeli military closure of Palestinian lands near settlements result in Over-grazing on the limited rangeland.

There is a lack of agricultural waste management and recycling programs.

f) Financial Constraints

The PNA provides only a limited budget and financial support to the agricultural sector. Within the PNA, a limited budget has been allocated to agriculture over the last eight years, evidence of weak domestic support. For 2009, the MoA's budget was NIS 139.75 million which constitutes around 1.21% of the total PA budget. Of this, nearly 58% currently goes for salaries, wages and operational expenses, with less than 1% allocated for running costs purposes and 41% allocated for developmental costs.

M. Conclusion

The Zionists inflicted the Nakba, or "catastrophe" upon Palestinians in 1948, and have continued to brutalize and oppress Palestinians ever since. Palestinian refugees and their descendants all over the world long to return to Palestine. They have a legal right and a human right to return, but the racist policies of Israel do not allow them to do so. Palestinian citizens of Israel are faced with discriminatory laws denying them the same rights as Jewish Israeli citizens. And Palestinians inside the West Bank and Gaza face a multitude of horrors, from land confiscation, to detention, to travel restrictions, to being denied basic resources such as water.

Like other people around the world, Palestinians have the human right to plant and cultivate their land and to make it green once again as it has been throughout history. They are entitled to water that is not polluted and that has good quality. They should not be forced to drink from water sources that are intentionally polluted. And they should be allowed to draw from their own water supply that runs beneath them.

Due to land confiscation and oppressive Israeli policies, the land available to the Palestinian agricultural sector has been significantly reduced since the beginning of the Israeli occupation. But the reality is that if Palestinians were allowed access to their own water resources in groundwater basins, springs and agricultural wells, as well as to their share from

the Jordan River, there is potential to irrigate more land than even before the beginning of the occupation.

Israel must stop denying water and agricultural rights to Palestinians. The needs of Palestinians must be addressed so they can build an economy and enhance Palestinian food security, by quantity and quality, and move towards self-sufficiency in animal and plant agricultural products, while employing the maximum number of workers.

Palestinians have a right to their own state with Jerusalem as its capital. They have a right to freedom, dignity and self-determination. The crimes of Israel must not be allowed to continue, and Israel must be held accountable for its decades of oppression against Palestinians. The occupation must be ended, all political prisoners must be released, and the policy of settlements must cease.

References

SOURCES of Facts and More Information:

- Addameer, Prisoners Support and Human Rights Association: www.addameer.org
- AIC, Alternative Information Center: www.alternativenews.org
- Amnesty International, International Human Rights Protection: www.amnesty.org
- B'tselem, Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: www.btselem.org
- Electronic Intifada, Leading Palestinian Portal for News and Analysis: www.electronicintifada.net
- FMEP, Foundation for Middle East Peace: www.fmep.org
- HDIP, Health Development Information and Policy Institute: www.hdip.org
- ICAHD, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions: www.icahd.org
- Palestine Monitor, News from Palestinian Civil Society: www.palestinemonitor.org
- Stop the Wall, by PENGON (Palestinian Environmental NGO Network): www.stopthewall.org
- UN OCHA, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: www.reliefweb.int/hic-opt