

Environmental Nakba:

How the Zionist occupation and palestinian climate suffering go hand in hand

Palestinians endure the double burden of both the climate crisis and the capitalist strategies, mostly due to their subjugation and exploitation under occupation. The roots of the climate crisis lie in the global dynamics of politics and economics, characterized by exploitation, dispossession, and relentless pursuit of growth. This reality manifests in Palestinians being deprived of resources, bearing the burden of adverse environmental impacts, despite contributing significantly less to carbon emissions compared to Israelis.

The Zionist occupation, in collaboration with global (including German) capitalist interests, enables the seizure of resources in the West Bank and Gaza, such as quarries, farmlands (particularly olive groves), water sources, and natural gas. German corporation Heidelberg Materials operates in an illegal quarry in the West Bank for cement production, which heavily pollutes the environment. This activity is made possible by Israel's ongoing illegal confiscation of land, designated as state property and allocated for the company's use.

Another devastating aspect of this dispossession is the deliberate targeting of olive trees, which hold not only economic value but also deep cultural significance in Palestinian society. Between 1967 and 2017, Israeli authorities uprooted over 800,000 olive trees, stripping Palestinian farmers of their livelihoods under the guise of security and development. Additionally, Israel demolishes Palestinian water infrastructure, including cisterns, reservoirs, and springs crucial for water storage and irrigation, significantly affecting agricultural output and access to clean water in dry regions like Palestine.

The Israeli blockade and restrictions on water access exacerbate water scarcity and contamination in Palestinian territories, compounding the challenges faced by Palestinians.

Israel's economic and political advantages, stemming from high emissions, enable further exploitation of Palestinians. In recent years, Israel has emerged as a significant natural gas producer, supplying Egypt, Jordan, and even Europe after the conflict in Ukraine disrupted gas supplies from Russia. Analysts argue that Israel's geopolitical influence in Europe, driven by fossil fuel production, undermines pro-Palestinian movements there. Despite this, Israel granted excavation permits to several global companies during conflicts, demonstrating trust in its fossil fuel industry. However, it has prevented the Palestinian Authority from extracting gas off the coast of Gaza, fearing it would bolster Palestinian empowerment.

Palestinians endure hardships not only due to the impacts of the climate crisis and the fossil fuel-driven capitalist system but also because of climate mitigation policies. These policies, shaped by Paris Agreement and Rio Declaration, tend to prioritize capitalist economic growth models, which often marginalize vulnerable Palestinians.

More than 180 Palestinian villages destroyed in 1948 have been repurposed as Israeli recreational sites or national parks, with environmental rhetoric used to obscure the history of the Nakba. This narrative promotes the idea that Zionism is transforming barren land into fertile landscapes, yet many of these sites are not intended for public use or hiking; their primary function is to erase Palestinian historical truths. Israel replaces uprooted olive trees with non-native plants, which often demand excessive water and disrupt the fragile ecological balance of the region, worsening environmental degradation. These foreign plants are used to beautify illegal settlements, masking their environmental degradation. This not only fails to address the ecological harm caused by destroying native vegetation but also legitimizes and normalizes the existence of settlements deemed illegal under international law.

Israeli authorities face accusations of intentionally directing sewage flow towards Palestinian towns and villages, leading to widespread contamination of land and water sources. This not only poses serious health hazards to Palestinian communities but also contributes to environmental deterioration.

The concept of the "environmental Nakba" stems from the environmental damage caused by Israeli policies in Palestinian territories. The exploitation and dispossession of Palestinians support capitalist processes that reinforce both the climate crisis and the Zionist settler colonial project. The fight against climate change is inseparable from climate justice, which involves advocating for marginalized groups and preventing their further suffering from both the climate crisis and its endorsed capitalist "solutions".