



Palestine in 2014

A Black Environmental Harvest

By George Kurzom



During the winter of 2013–2014, Palestine suffered from an unprecedented case of extreme drought. There were more than 80 days with almost no rainfall between December 15 (2013) and March 9 of this year, and successive elevations in temperatures that exceeded the annual average (by 10 to 13 degrees). Daytime temperatures throughout the period frequently reached more than 23 to 28 degrees Celsius. And since the aggressive snowstorm that hit large areas of historic Palestine on December 12–15, 2013, which was also considered to be the most vigorous storm to hit Palestinian lands in the last 22 years, Palestine hasn't witnessed but a scanty and marginal amount

Israeli looting of the Jordan River Basin's waters.



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of rain; even the residents of areas rich with water sources and springs were unaffected by the aftermath of this vigorous storm.

Despite the past year's lack of rain and severe drought, we cannot determine the future climatic trends and changes from these last observations. These harsh waves of drought have sporadically dominated the Levant and Palestinian lands for hundreds of years, before any mention or awareness of the recent global warming phenomenon and specifically contemporary climatic changes.

In conjunction with the drought, the Israeli occupation authorities repeatedly allege that they "give" or "grant" the Palestinians a water supply that exceeds that which they had "stipulated" in interim agreements and continue to trumpet this allegation on every given occasion. Reality on the ground shows that the Israeli occupation authorities do not "grant" water to the Palestinians; on the contrary, they sell, at high cost, water that they loot from Palestinian land aquifers. And if the occupation were not absolutely dominating Palestinian natural resources and water supply, and didn't possess full actual and complete control over the usage, management, and distribution of Palestinian water resources, then Palestinians in the

West Bank and Gaza would not be forced to buy their looted water from Israel. In addition, the humiliating Oslo Accords, signed by the Palestinian Oslo group in the name of "legitimacy," dictated the amount of "allowed" water that the Palestinians could produce while granting the occupying authority power over "permission rights" to allow or prohibit the development and maintenance of Palestinian water infrastructure.

Israel enjoys an aqueous surplus

Interestingly, the well-known Israeli economic expert Yuval Elizur detected early this year (*Haaretz*, January 24, 2014) that Israel currently enjoys an abundance of water surplus for human and agricultural consumption, which could be largely attributed to the fact that Israel has set up new desalination facilities and developed natural gas fields to fuel those facilities at low cost. Despite these facts, however, and for clear political and economic reasons, Israeli governmental agencies are keen on keeping this unknown and continue to claim that "the country" (historical Palestine) suffers from a scarcity in

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Toxic and carcinogenic pollutants emitted from Israeli industrial facilities and factories in the northern, central, and, to some extent, southern areas of Palestine move towards the West Bank via the predominant western winds, therefore transferring the industrial pollutants to the West Bank.



Israeli oil refinery southeast of Al-Samu Village in Hebron district. The factory has destroyed the Palestinian lands surrounding it.

water resources, and thus needs to “conserve every water droplet.”

Since its establishment, Israel has considered the water resources to be a primary strategic security concern and has put great effort into consistently increasing quantities of looted water not only from Palestine but also from the surrounding Arab lands, specifically Lebanon and Syria. Thus the Israeli government solely and directly decides on every issue regarding water policies.

Dangerous Israeli pollutants in Palestinian air

The largest amounts of carcinogens are emitted into the air from the cities of Asdod, Al-Khadera, and Haifa in 1948-occupied Palestine. This is what the Israeli Ministry of Environment revealed in February 2014, for the first time, in its mapping study of gas emissions in the air. From this study, it was indicated that the Israeli electrical company's power plants, along with the phosphate and chemicals factories of “Chemikalim Le Israel” group and the oil refinery factories in Haifa, take the lead in the list of facilities and factories that release the largest amounts of industrial pollutants.

The study reported that the toxic and carcinogenic pollutants emitted from these Israeli industrial facilities and factories in northern, central, and to some extent southern Palestine, specifically from Haifa, Al-Khadera-Tel Aviv, Asdod-Askalan, directly affect the residents of the West Bank in the east and the Gaza Strip in the south, since these Israeli pollutants emitted towards the West Bank are one of the primary sources of Palestinian air pollution. These air pollutants move from Israel, especially from the Tel Aviv-Al-Khadera and Asdod-Askalan areas, to the West Bank via the predominant Western winds, therefore transferring the industrial pollutants to the West Bank.

As for the West Bank itself, there exist 12 Israeli industrial zones that encompass hundreds of factories that the Israeli government directly encourages by issuing permits from the Israeli Ministry of Environment, despite the fact that these factories, like the settlements, have been established on lands stolen from their Palestinian owners. These areas are considered to be the free “Garden of Eden” for Israeli environmental pollution. The products of these factories are in competition with similar products in Israel itself

that are produced in factories that are obligated to invest in pollution-prevention measures, which is not the case with the Israeli factories in the West Bank. In addition, the Israeli government offers massive financial flexibility and tax reductions to its factories in the West Bank.

Despite the fact that Israeli laws and environmental systems in the last couple years have become similar to those of Western developed countries, the Israeli occupiers deal with the West Bank as though it were a humanly and environmentally forfeited area, where generally accepted environmental laws and standards do not apply. This has had a disastrous effect on the West Bank and its population, which is subjected to air pollution, the emission of toxic gases from Israeli factories, environmental destruction caused by sewage water that comes from settlements, military bases, and Israeli factories to contaminate Palestinian lands and wells, the burying of hazardous Israeli waste in Palestinian lands, and finally the spread of radioactive contamination, and other Israeli environmental sins committed against Palestinians living in the West Bank on a daily basis.

2014

Buildings in the Gaza Strip were bombed with steric (vacuum) and seismic bombs. Steric bombs are used in order to empty the targeted building of air, thus resulting in a big differentiation in the pressure levels of the building, eventually causing it to implode.

High probability of a destructive earthquake

During the year 2014, a chain of small to medium earthquakes hit Palestine; the biggest, detected on May 24, hit southern Palestine (Araba Valley) with a magnitude of 4.1 on the Richter scale, and was felt by many Palestinians in different cities. The Jordan Rift Valley, specifically the Dead Sea, was the epicentre of the earthquake. It is known to be a seismically active area that, in the past, experienced most of the strong earthquakes in Palestine. But remarkably until this last earthquake, the area has not witnessed a hit of this magnitude within recent years.

According to earthquakes experts, the epicentre of these earthquakes was in the vicinity of Lake Tiberias on the Syrian-African Rift; many Palestinian residents in those areas felt these earthquakes, especially the residents of Galilee and the Golan Heights, however, there were no human casualties or material losses.

Despite the successive earthquakes that have hit Palestine, and the high probability that Palestine will experience a devastating earthquake in the future, Palestinian institutions in the most vulnerable areas have not bothered



Devastation on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem due to the earthquake in 1927.

to take the necessary precautionary measures to help them cope with a future natural disaster. There have been no practical guidelines or instructions issued to citizens in general or to the citizens of the Jordan Valley in particular, on what to do during a strong earthquake, especially at night.

A criminal war against humanity and environment in the Gaza Strip

According to the Israeli army command, an estimated 20,000 tons of explosives fell on the Gaza Strip between July 7 and August 21, 2014 (46 days). In other words, over 55 tons of explosives

were dropped per square kilometre in the Gaza Strip (its area is 360 square kilometres), or about 1.2 tons of explosives daily for every square kilometre. Between July 7 and August 8, 2014 (33 days) the Gaza Strip was bombarded with approximately 59,300 thousand shells and rockets that were fired from the air, sea, and ground; each square kilometre was hit with more than 164 rockets and shells during the same period, with an average of 5 shells per square kilometre daily. During a one-hour period, Al-Shijaiya neighbourhood (in Gaza City) and the city of Rafah were bombarded with 600 shells and more than 1,000 shells, respectively.

As in the Israeli assaults in 2008–2009 and 2012, also during the last savage assault, facts indicate that some targets in the Gaza Strip were exposed to air and ground bombardments with cluster bombs, which are internationally

classified as Weapons of Mass Destruction. In this latest offensive Israel used – with greater density – the upgraded version of the American-made bombs known as DIME. Military experts, and some medical sources in Gaza, confirm that Israeli forces bombarded the villages, cities, refugee camps, and agricultural lands in the Gaza Strip with DIME bombs. It is known that the United States is Israel's primary provider of internationally banned weapons and ammunition.

Moreover, a lot of remnants from the Israeli bombardment as well as mines and suspicious objects continue to explode in the Palestinian environment in Gaza, near populated residential areas. Components that are thought to be radioactive remnants of Israeli warplanes are also to be found throughout Palestinian lands and communities in Gaza.

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A view of what remained of the Shijaiya neighborhood following the July-August Israeli aggression on Gaza.