

CORNERSTONE

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION BY SABEEL ECUMENICAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY CENTER



“All Things Bright and Beautiful...”

by: *Naim Ateek*

There are two ways to approach the questions of ecology and the environment. There is a purely humanist way in which many people see the world simply as our home and that entails a responsibility for it. This view takes into consideration the scientific studies that have been done on the environment and the ramifications resulting from human neglect and abuse of it. To a great extent, we all share in the above approach. Some people, however, add another important dimension. This involves a position of faith. It begins with a concept of God as the loving creator who created a good and beautiful world as the hymn says:

“ All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all. ”

The nature of love is to be creative. Creation is the expression of a loving God. Genuine and true love produces splendor and beauty. From this perspective, our world, nature, and the environment are all gifts of a loving God for us human beings who are also created by God, and an expression of God’s love to enjoy, to care for, and to use responsibly. The world is like a garden of many beautiful flowers that God has placed us in. We can enjoy and delight in it; but we have a responsibility to maintain it and preserve its beauty for us and for our children. When one begins with such a premise of faith, it becomes easy for humans to look after and care for the environment. They see themselves as stewards that have been given the responsibility by God and are accountable to God the owner.

Anytime we abuse or destroy nature we betray the trust which God has placed in us. When we look at the state of deterioration and devastation that has affected the environment globally, it has surpassed the level of betrayal and has become a crime against God the architect and owner. Scientists tell us that Global

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warming, pollution, ozone depletion, different types of waste, de-forestation and numerous other crimes are committed every day against the environment.

Our position of faith goes even further. We believe that any crime against God is a crime against our fellow human beings. The commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves involves the welfare and well being of the neighbor not only our contemporaries but those of future generations including our own children and especially the poor and disadvantaged. Any abuse of the environment is a form of robbery that robs the future of its beauty and goodness.

At the foundation of all the above is the question of justice. We have been guilty of injustice against humanity and nature. One of the worst effects on the environment is warfare. The frequent wars in the Middle East alone have been comprehensively devastating to human beings, their environment and the whole ecosystem. War must be outlawed. It is a crime that must be condemned.

This issue of Cornerstone gives the reader a glimpse of the extent of the crime that the Israeli occupation is committing against the Palestinians, their land, and the environment. People need to know the facts, expose the crimes, and cry out against such insanity.

Although the destruction and devastation of the Palestinian environment through what Israel has done is tragically evident, we also hold the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people including teachers and educators responsible for not doing more on the local level. Many of us believe that in spite of the destructive forces of the occupation, all of us are guilty. I hope therefore, that this issue of Cornerstone will increase people's awareness and inspire us to think of creative projects that can help us save our environment and regain our sense of stewardship.

The Rev Dr. Naim Ateek is the Director of Sabeel

Israeli Violations against the Palestinian Environment

By: Jad Isaac

The numerous Israeli violations against the Palestinian environment begin with the land confiscation policy and its illegal use of the West Bank territories, the building of illegal settlements and military bases, the destruction of infrastructure and vast areas of agricultural land, and end with the segregation wall which has created further land fragmentation and ecosystem destruction. All the facts indicate that the Palestinian environmental rights have been violated by the Israelis even during the so-called "peace process".

The fragile Palestinian environment has been exposed to pressures ensuing from the practices of the Palestinian population and from the practices of the Israeli settlements. Israeli colonization policies have added to population pressure as settlements continue to grow in the Occupied West Bank. Currently, more than 207 Israeli settlements are scattered all over the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. These settlements accommodate more than 480,000 Israeli settlers. Israeli settlements are reported to release



Figure 1: Wastewater Stream Flowing from Ariel Settlement to Palestinian Agricultural Lands in the Salfit area

large quantities of domestic, industrial and medical wastewater and solid waste into the surrounding Palestinian environment without any restrictions. This represents a severe threat to the Palestinian environment, it is a violation of the Oslo agreements, and it is illegal under international law. More than 90% of the untreated domestic wastewater generated by the Israeli settlers living in the West Bank is discharged directly into nearby wadis and Palestinian lands (Figure 1). Moreover, further Israeli settlement expansion is underway in the Occupied West Bank, without dealing with the additional sewage generation.

With respect to solid waste, around 80% of the solid waste generated by settlers living in the West Bank is dumped in sites throughout the Occupied West Bank (ARIJ, 2005). This figure does not include the significant quantity of solid waste, much of it hazardous, produced in Israeli industrial areas inside the West Bank. These pollution sources are causing visual distortion of the landscape and decreasing the aesthetic value of the natural environment as well as causing health problems.



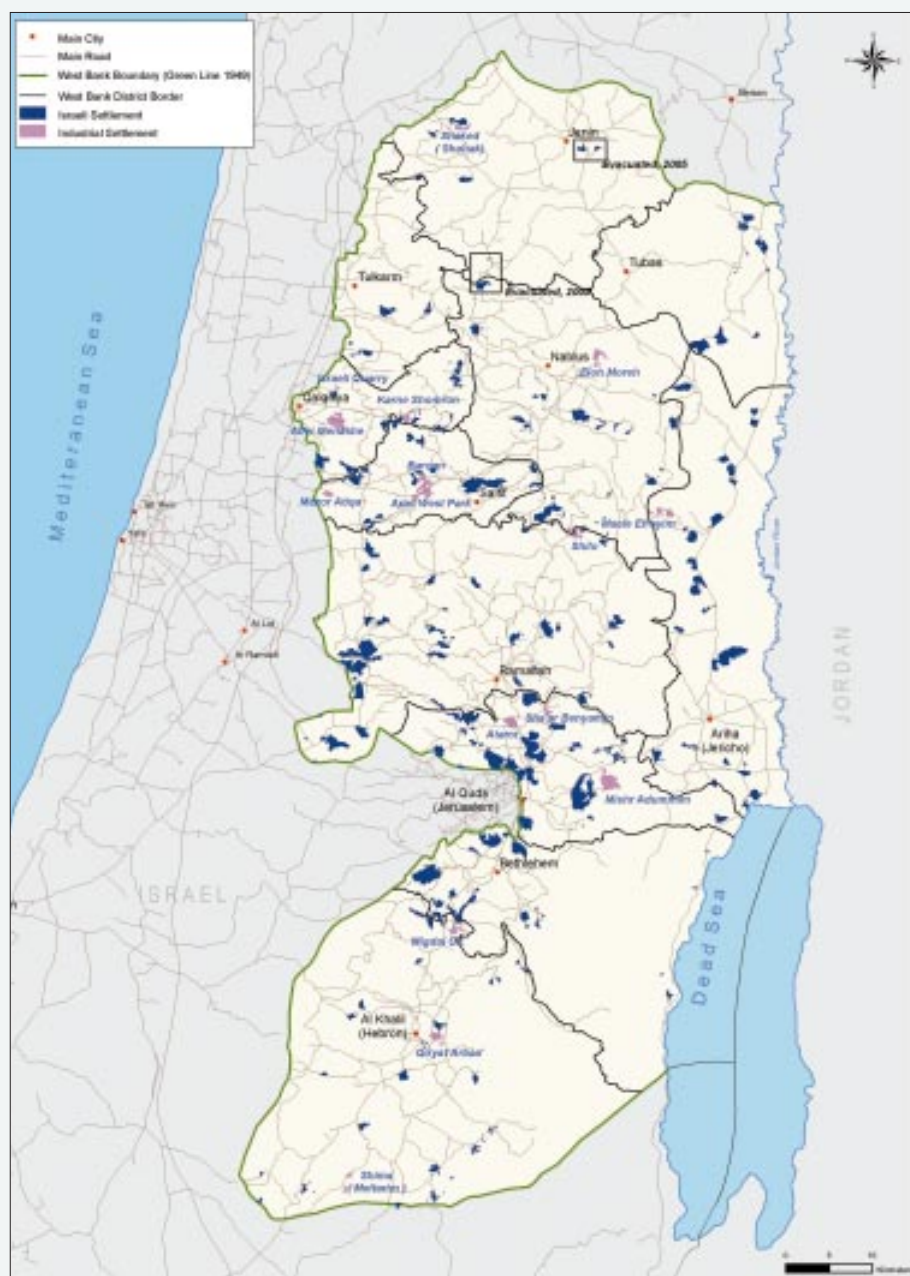
Map 1: Recharge Areas of the West Bank Aquifer System

The Israeli occupying authorities have badly neglected the management of waste in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). The geographical discontinuity from lands under Palestinian control through the implementation of the Israeli

segregation plans and the construction of the segregation wall, has hindered the implementation of several centralized projects related to waste management. In 2005, the number of the uncontrolled solid waste dumping sites increased from

89 to 161 in the West Bank, none of which were subject to monitoring or control by the Palestinian Ministry of Health or other authorities. They have also exacerbated the land deterioration problem. The prolonged years of the Israeli Occupation have converted large areas in the OPT to deserts. Indicators of desertification appear clearly in the Eastern Slopes. The closure of 85% of these zones by the Israeli Occupying Authorities for military purposes, has led to severe overgrazing of the remaining area accessible to the Palestinian livestock herders. Overgrazing has resulted in the loss of the vegetation cover, soil erosion, and intensive desertification.

Throughout the Israeli Occupation since 1967, Israeli policies have clearly ignored Palestinian environmental interests. Israel continues to damage the Palestinian environment with the construction of many “industrial zone” settlements, of which there are at least 13, occupying an area of approximately 980 hectares in the West Bank (ARIJ, GIS database 2007). These industrial zone settlements are located in Jenin, Salfit, Jericho, Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya, Jerusalem and Hebron. Alarming consequences can be seen in three Palestinian villages: Sarta, Kafr Ed Deik and Barqan, located in the Nablus governorate, which are subjected to industrial wastewater from the Barqan industrial zone. The discharged industrial wastewater



Map 2: Israeli Industrial Settlements in the Occupied West Bank

passes through their agricultural land, damaging planted fields. It also affects water resources, accumulating in lagoons which spread different diseases and cause health and environmental hazards.

Israeli transgressions against legally binding environmental responsibilities can also be found in its burial of

hazardous solid waste on Palestinian lands. According to the Environment Quality Authority (EQA) report in March 2006, Israeli authorities are still smuggling solid waste and poisonous substances from industry inside Israel into the OPT, particularly into the southern part of the West Bank. The Israelis have also designated special waste disposal locations on Palestinian

land. In 2005 there was an attempt to designate the Abu Shusha brick-breaker factory as a waste disposal site. Furthermore, Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have used Palestinian lands for the burial of zinc, nickel, radioactive substances and industrial waste for many years. There are also fears that Israel buried nuclear materials to the east of Yatta village. Other nuclear radiation concerns include Israeli nuclear experiments at Al-Aqaba Gulf area and the use of depleted Uranium during the Al-Aqsa Intifada 2000 (EQA, 2006).

Settlers' violations against Palestinians environment of Wadi Foqin

Wadi Foqin village is located near Bethlehem, less than a kilometer from the Armistice Line (border between the OPT and Israel). Today, the village of Wadi Foqin has approximately 1343 residents (PCBS 2007), and is a blossoming place famous for its agricultural products. Such products play a crucial role in the economy of the village. The mountainous lands of Wadi Foqin also provide the villagers with good grazing areas and open spaces to utilize.

Wadi Foqin has suffered as a community since 1948, and when it lost much of its lands inside the 1949 Armistice Line. Today Wadi Foqin is surrounded by two illegal Israeli settlements: Hadar Betar to the east

and Betar Illit to the southeast. The two settlements were established on lands originally owned by Palestinians, and occupy about 12% of the village's total area (4.35 km²). Settlers living in Betar Illit and Hadar Betar often behave violently towards the people of Wadi Foqin and the nearby Palestinian villages. The Israeli settlers hinder villagers from utilizing their lands that are located in the vicinity of the settlements. Settlers have uprooted more than 575 trees (ARIJ Database, 2006), and destroyed the field crops by pumping wastewater from the settlements into the cultivated land of the village. Such attacks have caused tremendous economic loss and health problems to the inhabitants of Wadi Foqin.

Confiscation orders continued to be issued by the Israeli authorities. Recently, the IOF handed out 12 military orders stating the seizure of 885 dunums of agricultural lands. Additionally, the residents of Wadi Foqin were notified about military orders to demolish 7 water wells and walls, uproot several olive, almond, and vine trees. According to the Wadi Foqin Village Council, the military orders will confiscate land, 13 rain-water systems, one water well and six water springs. The well and the water springs are used for drinking, husbandry and irrigation purposes. Villagers of Wadi Foqin fear that if these military orders are implemented, they will no longer be able to access

their lands, water wells and springs. This would lead to agricultural and economic losses since the village depends on agriculture. Vegetables and crops will be affected because of water shortage and the unavailability of irrigation systems.

Israel continues construction of the segregation wall in and around Wadi Foqin. The construction of the segregation wall is having a major impact on the people living in the village and their environment. The segregation wall will destroy highly valuable irrigated agricultural land and uproot olive and other crop trees. The area of the Israeli segregation wall will also threaten the natural and biodiversity resources of the different ecological zones. The segregation wall has significant repercussions for wildlife movement by adding to the fragmentation of ecosystems and habitats and by cutting the natural ecological corridors. Such pressure on the integrity of ecosystem and stability of natural resources increases the risk of losing the Palestinian biodiversity.

Hot Spot – Barqan Industrial Zone

Israeli industrial activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories add further pressure on the environment. They do not apply Israeli environmental law and usually dispose of the generated industrial wastewater, untreated, in nearby Palestinian lands. The case of the Barqan Industrial Zone is a clear



Map 3: The Israeli Segregation Wall affecting Wadi Foqin

example of the potential threat to the West Bank Aquifer System.

The Israeli Industrial Zone of Barqan represents a “Hot Spot” of pollution overlying the Western Basin. In 1981, the Israeli Authorities established the Barqan residential settlement northwest of Salfit City on approximately 649 dunums of land confiscated from the Palestinian village of Haris. Now there are around 1262 Israeli settlers residing in this settlement (ARIJ database, 2007). In 1982 the Israelis established the Barqan Industrial Park that occupies an area of 1417 dunums and is considered one of the largest Israeli industrial parks in the West Bank.

The pollution from the uncontrolled disposal of toxic waste generated from the Barqan industrial zone results in

predictable and real dangers. This issue should be dealt with urgently if the aquifer is to be protected for future generations from serious pollution. Consequently, an assessment of the impact of the zone was carried out in a collaborative study called, “Environmental Protection of the Shared Israeli-Palestinian West Bank Aquifer” by

the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) and the Hebrew University-Jerusalem. The assessment revealed that the first trace of chloride from the Barqan zone would reach the water supply wells pumping from the lower layer after 35 years from the date of the case study (1999). Wells pumping from the upper aquifer are expected to experience the first trace of the pollutant from the Barqan source 40 years from the date of the study.

The above time periods before the first trace of chloride reaches the water supply wells may appear long. However, this industrial park has been in operation since 1981, and the potential pollutants such as heavy metals, organic solvents and toxic substances are on their way to reach the groundwater causing damage that will be irreversible.

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Promoting Environmental Issues in Education

Mainstreaming environmental issues has been identified as a major goal of the Palestinian education system. In association with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education has incorporated issues such as biodiversity into the national curriculum, to raise awareness of the problems facing the environment and to highlight solutions.

Traveling through the hilly West Bank terrain or along Gaza's Mediterranean coastline, it is hard to ignore the beauty of this unique environment. Yet, it remains under threat from a range of problems including pollution, environmental degradation, and rapidly decreasing water supplies. The Israeli occupation has also had an immensely detrimental effect on the environment, with the uprooting of native trees, the clearing of land for settlement expansion, for the construction of the West Bank barrier and accompanying infrastructure. Although attachment to the land is not in question, fully understanding the effect of issues such as pollution and excessive farming is vital for the future.

In an effort to combat these problems, the Palestinian Ministry of Education has incorporated an environmental perspective into the Palestinian national

curriculum. Before the launch of the national curriculum in the 2000/2001 academic year, teachers taught environmental studies from textbooks that used examples of foreign environmental issues. It was deemed fundamental for students to relate to the issues facing their indigenous environment and accordingly, an environment related course was developed and launched as part of the national curriculum in 2000.

“One of the main features of our new curricula was to introduce a new subject called ‘The Science of Health and the Environment’ as an elective in Years 7 to 10,” explained Dr. Saleh Yassin, Director General of the Curriculum Development Centre at the Ministry of Education. “We have so far produced four textbooks relating to the environment, which are taught to a total of around 450,000 students each year and currently 60% of students in Years 7 to 10 are enrolled in the course. This is having a wide-reaching impact not only on the children, but entire communities as well.”

In addition to class-time, schools also offer complementary activities including agro-biodiversity clubs and projects such as the upkeep of school gardens and school clean-ups. Other subjects also complement the core

environment curriculum, such as National Education, which specifically highlights national environmental issues with campaigns such as ‘keep Palestine green,’ and in Civic Education, students are encouraged to respect the environment and not to damage Palestinian natural heritage. Additionally, environmental summer camps are held annually. “The Palestinian national curriculum is one of the only in the Arab world that teaches environmental studies within the core curricula. It is not only in the core textbooks; we also cover all concepts related to the environment in the science subjects, from Years 1 to 12. We also encourage the children to keep our land clean and respect Palestine’s rich history and heritage. The Ministry of Education is very concerned with promoting environmental issues as a commitment for the future,” explained Dr. Yassin.

Through promoting these issues in schools, it is hoped that students will be encouraged to take the study to the tertiary level, providing the Occupied Palestinian Territory with much-needed human resources in the field. UNDP is working to help strengthen capacity within the Palestinian education system and to increase awareness of conservation and environmental issues that will have a lasting impact. It is hoped that long-term, these efforts will aid in the conservation of Palestine’s unique, beautiful landscape and environment.

See original article at: www.undp.ps

TRADITIONAL LANDSCAPES OF PALESTINE

By: Sami Backleh

There is a common assumption that human activities deplete natural resources all over the world. This is mainly attributed to the biodiversity loss connected with activities and practices related to industrial and urban development, construction of infrastructure, intensive agriculture and pastoralism, plantation forestry and massive tourism. Nevertheless, there are cases where the long-lasting human activities and their interaction with nature have created ecosystems with high conservation value for their fauna and flora. Such ecosystems are usually formed by traditional land use systems of low intensity, characterised by handwork with simple apparatus and animals, and are known as traditional (or cultural) landscapes.

Many of the ecosystems within these landscapes have evolved and continue to exist because of human intervention, and along with the presence of various semi-natural habitats support many animal and plant species. Some of these species, which are often considered rare or endangered, are strictly associated with these anthropogenic ecosystems.

According to its definition, traditional landscapes are those landscapes that have distinct and

Photo by: Karin Brown



recognisable structure, which reflect clear relations between the composing elements and have significance for natural, cultural and aesthetic values.

Elements of traditional landscapes around the Mediterranean basin are characterised by features of terraces and stone walls that are connected to the agricultural roots of most Mediterranean societies. These landscapes exist both as archaeological sites and as living landscapes, which continue to be used and maintained by the people who created them. Therefore, the construction of those terraces involved traditional building techniques in which a large amount of labour was used to build them by hand.

Throughout the central highlands in Palestine, mountainous terrain has, over the centuries, been shaped into landscapes of terraced fields for the cultivation of diverse types of crops: olive groves, vineyards, fruit trees and field crops. It has been said that approximately 60% of terraces today are still being used for agricultural purposes as they were in ancient times. These agricultural terraces cover about 57% of the mountain areas. Planted mostly with olive trees, terraces are also monuments to life itself. These landscapes celebrate the



Photo by: Karin Brown

traditional lifestyle of many Palestinians. They celebrate olives as an important staple and as the basis for many of their traditional practices, myths and beliefs. These landscapes constitute this particular regional culture's special imprint on and relationship with nature, manifested in significant aesthetic and harmonic values.

In addition to being sites associated with anthropogenic activities within the Mediterranean ecosystem, terraced landscapes are said to be an important habitat for various flora and fauna species, of which some are reported to be of high conservation values. However, the sustainability of these species' populations is related to the continuation of the traditional agricultural and grazing regimes practised in these areas.

The central highlands in the West Bank area are, like other mountainous areas around the Mediterranean, subjected to sudden and drastic environmental, as well as socio-economic changes. These changes have led to the partial and/or complete abandonment of large terrace areas in the region. This problem is compounded by the lack of laws and legislation within the Palestinian Authority, which – in most cases – makes it harder to recognise these landscapes both on national and international levels, and subsequently protecting them. On a substantial level, the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the pervasive presence of illegal settlements, in addition to the construction of the separation wall, determines a heavy transformation of the landscape and a significant reduction of the land available for agricultural production.

Therefore, the preservation of these old terraces is essential, not only to protect the ecosystem - including wild living organisms (biodiversity) and their specific habitats – and to prevent land degradation, but also to protect the people's roots, history, landscaping, and cultural way of life by preserving the remnants of their history within these old terraces.

Occupied Water... Thirsty People

Violations of International Law in the Palestinian Territory

By: Fadia Daibes-Murad

“Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life”

Genesis 1:20

“We know the value of water when the well runs dry”

Benjamin Franklin

The water situation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories represents the most complex setting for solving water conflicts as it combines a water-scarce situation with political instability and inequality in power structures between two nations sharing the same fixed amounts of waters. The hostilities and conflicts arising over the utilization and development of the surface and groundwater shared between Israel and Palestine and used mostly by Israel is one of the most contentious in the Middle East region.

After four decades of occupation, and a long process of peace which lost peace on the way, the people of Palestine continue to live in deprivation. As of 1967, the Palestinian utilization of shared water has been governed by Israeli

legislation and military orders. Palestinian access to the only major international surface watercourse—the Jordan River—has been denied since 1967. Accordingly, groundwater in Palestine, most of which is shared and utilized by Israel, constitutes the



major source of supply for all uses. In 1995, the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, entered into an interim agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Both Parties showed a desire to put an end to the conflict and reaffirmed their recognition of mutual legitimate and political rights. However, the water issue was among the contentious issues that were deferred to the final status negotiations which never started. The signed agreements offered temporary solutions for the water crises in Palestine within the interim period. After the assassination of Itzhak Rabin, former Prime Minister of Israel, the successive governments of Israel have even denied the validity of the signed agreement and therefore Israel failed to fulfil its obligations and commitments.



During 2003, Israel commenced the construction of a 'separation fence' designed to obstruct the access of people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This fence, which follows the 1967 Green Line, cuts into Palestinian land by up to 6 kilometres in places, and restricts access by land-owners to their land. On completion it will completely encircle the West Bank. The West Bank and Gaza will then be unable to form a viable sovereign state.

Today, Israel still relies on the water which originates and lies under the West Bank mountains. Their utilization of this water comprises approximately 40% of Israel's water supply. The Palestinians on the other hand have constantly been denied access to their legitimate entitlements of the shared water. The massive imbalance in terms of current water-

use rights translates today into a huge imbalance in terms of water consumption. The Palestinian domestic consumption per person per day is a minimum of 35 litres which is far below the standard of 100 litres established by the World Health Organization. On the other hand the Israeli per capita consumption exceeds 300 liters per day.

The question that arises in the unique case of the Palestinian Territory is: what are the rules and principles of international law that govern the utilization and development of shared water resources. To answer that question, one should investigate the laws of belligerent occupation, customary international law and public international law. Firstly, in times of war it is agreed that the codified customary laws of war have been concerned with environmental

protection in the sense of prohibiting destruction of natural forests, water infrastructure, and in poisoning wells springs and rivers. It is also agreed that in situations not covered within the scope of these laws the rules and principles of public international law apply. Under "belligerent occupation," international law continues to apply and the sovereignty of the *Occupied People* over their natural resources does not extinguish.

Secondly in customary international law which is binding to all States the two core rules of international law that govern the utilization of shared water resources are the *equitable and reasonable utilization* and the *no harm rules*. The former principle rules that each State sharing the water resource is entitled to an equitable and reasonable amount of water. This amount can be quantified based on

Photo by: Krista Johnson



socio-economic and natural/physical factors. The no harm rule is subordinate to the equitable and reasonable utilization principle and ensures that any State after acquiring its equitable and reasonable utilization must ensure that it does not act in a way that might cause harm to other states. If and when harm occurs the state causing the harm is obliged to minimize the effects of this harm or pay compensation that is equivalent to the harm made.

To date, Israel continues to resist the acceptance that rules of international law apply in the case of the Palestinian Territory. In order to justify their excessive utilization of Palestinian water, Israel relies on the doctrine of “Prior Use” or “Historical Rights” which implies that *the first in use is the first in right*. Moreover, they have persistently referred to all “existing uses” as non-negotiable and

constantly raised the issue of the availability of “alternatives of comparable value” (desalination, wastewater reuse, and the importation of water from neighbouring countries) as a means to supply Palestinian needs. What this means is that Israel’s official position in terms of its water dispute with its Palestinian neighbours is based on its objection to the spirit of customary international rule that calls for sharing the available water resources in a reasonable and equitable manner, as has been revealed time and time again in the Israeli style of negotiating over the past years. In short, although Israel is prepared to discuss the need to meet some of the immediate Palestinian needs, it nevertheless does not appear to consider the water issue as one

requiring a permanent solution.

The question regarding what Israel accepts and what it resists is a determining factor in the continuation of the conflict. Unless Israel is politically willing to accept the rules of international law as binding to them, the achievement of any solution concerning shared water continues to be impossible. The confrontation of this question is inevitable, and raises the need for third party intervention, particularly to address the issue of power inequity. This task cannot be successfully accomplished unless there is a genuine intention at the level of States like the USA to end the conflict between the Parties peacefully and amicably.

Fadia Daibes-Murad holds a Master’s of Science degree in water resources with specialization in ground water. In addition, she holds a PhD on the ‘Application of International Water Law on Trans-boundary Groundwater’ from the International Water Law Institute at Dundee University (UK).

SAVE THE DATES

SABEEL SPRING WITNESS VISIT

February 28 - March 7, 2008
More info: world@sabeel.org

INTERNATIONAL SABEEL YOUNG ADULT CONFERENCE

July 24 - August 3, 2008
More info: youth@sabeel.org

SABEEL SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

November 12 - 19, 2008
More info: sabeel@sabeel.org



Photo by: Karin Brown

The Art of Observation

By: Jill Dampier-Need

The art of observation, being aware of our surroundings on many levels, is a lost art. Our personal and communal survival does not depend on it anymore. Industrial and technological advancements allow us to assert control over the natural environment and to create our own personal environments. Because our personal safety and survival do not depend on it, we do not need to be aware of our surroundings on a constant basis. Thus, our relationship with the physical expression of God in creation has changed.

The creation story in Genesis 1 tells us God created light and darkness, sea and earth, animals, birds, plants and, finally, man and woman. Man and woman were given dominion over all created and assurance that there would be enough plant sources for them as well as all other creatures. In other words, God's creation continues to function well as long as men and women show respect for the gift through responsible management.

The stories of the Israelites throughout the Old Testament are full of imagery directly related to their understanding of the environment as a reflection of God. For the Israelites, the Promised Land, as described in Deut. 8:11-16, was owned by

Yahweh. God would continue to bless the Israelites through creation if they were good stewards of the land and each other. They sensed God's presence in their everyday life because they were dependent on the land and their understanding of natural processes for their personal and communal survival. The Book of Leviticus holds many laws that are designed to maintain the longevity and fruitfulness of the land as well as to remember the poor.

Jesus used imagery and metaphor centering on natural processes in His parables. This language expresses the cultural understanding of the interdependency of human life with the earth and that both were expressions of God's goodness (Luke 9:58, Matt. 7:24 – 27, Mark 4:31 – 32, Matt. 13:3 – 9). Sometimes these images and metaphors are hard for us to grasp today because we do not share the same creation-centered perspective that was so prevalent then. We do not need to rely on our powers of observation to perpetuate a beneficial relationship with the earth or to guarantee our survival. Our understanding of natural processes are no longer experienced but learned; consequently, our respect for the earth and each other has diminished. Our own creations have separated us from the creation and the Creator. As a result, we struggle

to realize God in the everyday things and sometimes do not treat the earth with as much respect as we should.

To observe is to be actively participating in the present - to feel, smell, see, taste and hear the moment and to be aware of how this moment is different than previous ones. We observe so much on an unconscious level; only a fraction rises to the conscious level. The familiar sounds of our surroundings rarely evoke a response, but the smell of smoke, cry of a baby or a touch of a hand can shake us into conscious observation as we try to discover its origin. Choosing to be more aware of what our senses are telling us is the art of observation that leads directly to God.

“Our own creations have separated us from the creation and the Creator.”

I invite you to take a few moments to observe your environment at this moment in time. Look around you. Look up and down, right and left. Try to scan your surroundings and not settle on an object for more than a second. What do you see? Now, close your eyes. What sounds do you

hear? What do you smell? Do you feel anything? What taste do you have in your mouth? Are you aware of your breathing and/or other body sensations? Stay with this awareness. Again, try not to focus on just one thing. Instead, let your observations just float by.

After a few minutes, open your eyes and think about what you observed about your environment. Did you see things differently? Did what you heard, smelled, or felt enhance your understanding of your environment? Were there some surprises?

Taking a few minutes a day to observe your environment will enable you to become more aware of God's presence in your life and to bring to a conscious level your connection to His creation.

We are guaranteed God's presence in our lives, but we must realize that the present is where He is found. In learning to observe more fully, our understanding of ourselves, our personal relationships and most importantly, our awareness of God in everything will then be enhanced. Ultimately, we may also better understand how to be good stewards of God's creation.

Jill Dampier-Need is a retired California State Park Ranger presently living in Jerusalem with her husband, St. Georges College Dean Stephen Need.



Let's Create a Peace Tapestry

By: Marijke Egelie-Smulders

This is a project for the Seventh International Conference that we hope will include participation from members of Sabeel and Friends of Sabeel around the world.

This tapestry will be created with handmade squares of 30 by 30 centimeters or 12 by 12 inches sent from different people around the world which have a single theme: peace

for all peoples in the Middle East and especially those who live in Palestine and Israel.

Why a peace tapestry?

As a symbolic start to the Seventh International Conference organised by Sabeel in Jerusalem in November 2008, the tapestry will be unfolded and presented during the opening

service held at the beginning of the conference in order to express both our duty and our concern for peace. We as people of the global church have a special message to share – to let the people in the Middle East know our desire for real peace. This vision will be relayed in this peace tapestry about 1.10m or 44in wide, three 'squares' in a row, creating a new "path of peace."

How do you make your square?

1. Use a solid piece of cotton as background material, 30 by 30cm or 12 by 12 inch.
2. Then you can embroider something, sew something with small pieces of coloured stuff by hand or by machine. You can also knit something, paint something, draw something, write something on it—use your imagination!

You can work with any type of material, sewing scraps or other handicraft works. Use your creativity and put 'your' peace thoughts on this square of 30 by 30cm or 12 by 12inch.

3. It would be nice if you put your name on it. Each vision will have a maker: man, woman, or child.

How long will this tapestry become?

It will become as long as all of you choose – with each contribution of peace squares we collect in the coming year and a half, the tapestry will grow. We dream of the strength of 1000 artistic handmade visions of peace!

We will sew all these squares together in Jerusalem! Send the Peace Squares to Sabeel PO Box 49084 Jerusalem 91491

Mahatma Gandhi once said: 'There is no path to peace, peace is the path'. Let us make that true in the next year and a half and keep hope alive.



“ There is no path to peace,
peace is the path ”

Mahatma Gandhi



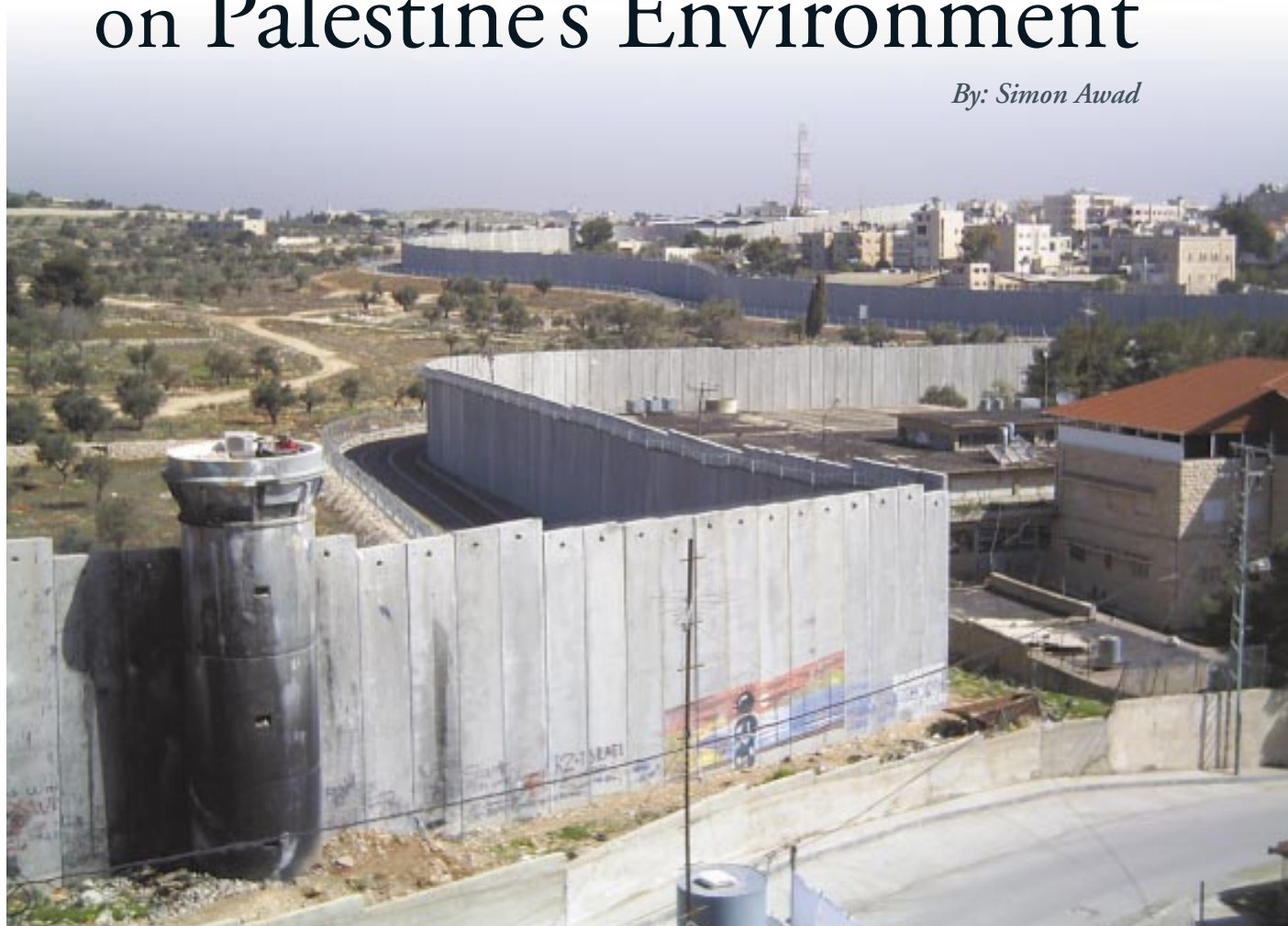
More information

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The Impact of the Israeli Occupation on Palestine's Environment

By: Simon Awad



As a result of Israel's continuous illegal occupation, there are many obstacles facing the Palestinians that are directly challenging their ability to protect their natural and cultural heritage. This is because the importance of protecting the environment and natural resources has unfortunately taken a back-seat to the

victims of Israel's 40-year occupation.

Israel's apartheid tactics are clearly damaging the Environment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. There are infinite eye-witness accounts verifying this from Palestinians, who constantly live in a state of harassment and threat regarding their personal safety and the

security of their land. Common counter-productive environmental campaigns of the Israeli Occupational Forces (IOF) includes the uprooting of trees, land annexation, building new settlements on illegally confiscated land, restricting the freedom of movement, garbage dumping, and the construction of the

Apartheid Wall. All of these actions not only affect the daily-life of the average Palestinian, but also the physical environment in which they reside.

In addition, it is unfortunate but accurate to say that this damage cannot be easily reversed and requires hard work and dedication to restore. For example the Apartheid Wall was ruled as illegal by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This issue alone needs hundreds of pages to document, analyze, and explain the social, economic, and health-deteriorating consequences that have resulted from the project. However, I would like to focus on its impact on the environment.

The path of this wall has been thoroughly studied and prepared by Israeli cartographers, who aim to confiscate Palestinian land with the most abundant water resources and retract these areas into their side. This means that the Palestinians will be left with less water and poorer water quality. The wall is also capturing the most fertile agricultural areas and lush forests in the generally arid landscape; therefore, destroying the Palestinian agricultural sector while creating greater opportunities for Israelis. With the continuation of such actions, any future Palestinian state would be physically composed of nothing more

than infertile, dry land, with little water and heavily polluted by Israeli waste.

The wall has also had a drastic negative-impact on wildlife. As a result of the barrier, the terrestrial movement of animals has become greatly restricted, and in some cases prohibited. Construction activities and the long-term presence of an extremely-long, 25-foot-high impervious barrier has caused a decline in the populations of animals and plants and continues to cause habitat loss. By affecting the wildlife populations, the natural balance will be shifted accordingly; more weeds, pests and pathogens will easily invade biomass in the disturbed areas. Animal populations will be fragmented and distribution patterns will be altered. The remaining small populations would then be vulnerable to all of the problems associated with rarity: genetic deterioration from inbreeding, random drift in gene frequencies and difficulty recovering from environmental catastrophes. Some species may even vanish completely.

There are many other environmental ramifications as a result of the Apartheid Wall. As for plants, thousands of trees have been

uprooted, such as grapevine, olive, palm, almond, orange, fig and banana trees. Fruit-bearing trees are usually targeted in an effort to damage the agricultural productivity and economic prosperity of Palestinians living in the 1967 Occupied Territories. Furthermore, the wall has destroyed many archaeological sites located in many villages surrounding East Jerusalem, Jenin, Nablus, Qalqiliya and many others. Hundreds of archaeological sites and historical artifacts were included within the encapsulated areas. It is important to note that this is all during the first phase of the building of the wall within the West Bank.

The sustainability of the environmental resources available to Palestinian society in the Occupied Territories is largely marginal as a result of the actions of the Israeli occupation. As these factors are beyond the control of the Palestinian population, it is essential to educate and mobilize the people to implement the appropriate actions in order to preserve our natural heritage. However, this solution is dependent on the realization of human rights with the support of the international community.

Simon Awad is the Executive Director of the Environmental Education Center ELCJHL. For more information visit www.eecp.org.

Purpose Statement of Sabeel

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity among them, and lead them to act for justice and love. *Sabeel* strives to develop a spirituality based on justice, peace, non-violence, liberation, and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word 'Sabeel' is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

For more information on *Friends of Sabeel* groups in your area please contact our International representatives or the Sabeel Center in Jerusalem.



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