

Environmental Crisis in the Gaza Strip (Palestine)



Declaration of the International Symposium on the Environmental Crisis, World Environment Day, 5 June 2012, Gaza, Palestine

Living conditions are disastrous for the majority of people in the Gaza Strip largely due to environmental conditions threatening a humanitarian and public health crisis. Symposium participants testified also that the Gaza Strip has remained a big prison, deepening the collective deprivation of its inhabitants. Nonetheless, the participants and the participating international delegation bore witness to positive civic, public and international efforts to improve environmental conditions and pose attainable solutions to the destruction, pollution and squandering of environmental resources caused by Israel's military occupation.

Quite apart from any divergent political currents, the participants in the International Symposium commemorating World Environment Day 2012 on the environmental crisis in occupied Palestine debated the environmental issues from a common perspective of the scientific findings within the framework of internationally codified rights and responsibilities. These include international humanitarian law (IHL), foremost being the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949), as well as the International Bill of Human Rights, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These sources and standards form indispensable normative tools for civilians, officials and those aiding civilians from the civil defense and medical service cadres. They guide all in the Gaza Strip working to attain and sustain a safe and clean environment, despite all the consequences of the Israeli occupation.

During the program, many of the 250+ participants assumed responsibilities for environmental improvements in Gaza. Symposium participants agreed to:

- Respect the international organizations' governance principles related to agriculture and food security and food sovereignty;
- Cooperate with the FAO Committee on Food Security in monitoring the environment with its new Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests as applied to peoples under conflict, occupation and war;
- Demand an immediate stop to all practices of collective punishment imposed on the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, especially the siege imposed on Gaza, which constitutes a humanitarian catastrophe;
- Renew the call to ensure freedom of movement of persons and goods to and from the Gaza Strip, and respect Palestinian territorial integrity, including Gazans' use of their territorial sea;
- Remind the international community that the norms protecting civilians must be respected in all interventions, armed and unarmed, and that blockade and environmental degradation amounting to collective punishment are prohibited;
- Call the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (1949), jointly and severally, to assume their legal and ethical obligations, and to hold a conference for the purpose of implementing common Article 1 and Article 147 of the Convention and its Additional Protocol relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I).
- Continue seeking technical assistance in accordance with international law so that the international community ensure reparations for the losses, costs and damages caused by pollution, environment degradation and loss of water resources under the occupation of Palestine;
- Pursue the responsible Israeli parties for the pollution, degradation of the environment and loss of water resources due to the occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory;

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- Cooperate with the UN Human Rights Council to address the occupation of Palestine, especially as it relates to the human rights to adequate housing, water, environment and land;
- Encourage the Special Rapporteurs (SRs) on the right to water and sanitation, the SR on adequate housing and the new SR on human rights and the environment to focus on Gaza as a part of historic Palestine and visit the country;
- Select an ad hoc committee of independent and specialised experts on the right to a safe environment to monitor and advocate environmental rights and responsibilities in Palestine.
- Invite the ad hoc committee of international and specialised experts on the right to a safe environment to monitor and advocate environmental rights and responsibilities in Palestine;
- Convene an international meeting in context of the Human Rights Council's 21st session in September 2012 on the violations of human rights related to environment and water under occupation;
- Advocate for a Human Rights Council resolution focusing on the crisis of environmental pollution and water under the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

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