

Israel’s bombardment of Gaza has now become a climate crisis. We call for a ceasefire now.

Op-Ed by Climate Action Network Southeast Asia (CANSEA)

The pre-existing human rights crisis in Gaza, stemming from decades of land occupation, has already left the Palestinian people grappling with restricted access to necessities. The impact of the blockade on poverty and development has been severe, setting the stage for a dire situation. Yet, beyond the immediate human suffering, Israel’s assault on Gaza is now extending its reach to the very land and environment that sustains life.

“It is imperative to recognise that addressing environmental issues cannot be separated from acknowledging people’s right to national sovereignty in their own land,” [Rasha Abu Dayyeh and Abeer Butmeh, two members of PENGON/@foepalestine, said](#). “Our liberation struggle is interconnected with global movements advocating for Indigenous rights, land rights, the fight against the fossil fuel industry, and green colonialism. This is part and parcel of the collective struggle for a world where everyone has the right to live with dignity, free from oppression.”

“In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinians are prevented from accessing, utilising, and benefiting from natural resources,” they said further. “The Israeli occupation illegally controls over 65% of the West Bank and restricts agricultural practices in 35% of the Gaza Strip’s agricultural land (Access Restricted Areas), all of which prevent Palestinians from coping with climate change. Without an end to the occupation and [blockade](#), adaptive strategies will have a limited impact.”

Climate Action Network (CAN) takes a strong stance on what is happening in Gaza

Tasneem Essop, the executive director of Climate Action Network (CAN), spoke [at COP28](#) about this catastrophe: “There can be no peace without justice. And there can be no climate justice without human rights.”

She expressed her disgust at the failure of wealthy countries to phase out fossil fuels and instead choose to channel billions – not *millions* but *billions* – to the war in Gaza. She ended her speech by calling for the end of the Israeli occupation and for a ceasefire to be put in place.

[This sentiment was echoed by Asad Rahman](#), the director of War on Want and the spokesperson for the Climate Justice Coalition, who pointed out the stark contradiction: "In the [Loss and Damage Fund](#), which is meant to help frontline communities and countries overwhelmed by climate crises, the US put in a paltry 17 million dollars, but the very next day announced billions of dollars in military aid to Israel. Some lives are deemed worthy, and others are not, and that is, ultimately, the same lens as settler colonialism."

[The Legal Information Institute](#) defines settler colonialism as "a system of oppression based on [genocide](#) and [colonialism](#), that aims to displace a population of a nation (oftentimes [indigenous](#) people) and replace it with a new settler population. Settler colonialism finds its foundations in a system of power perpetuated by settlers that represses indigenous people's rights and cultures by erasing it and replacing it with their own."

The landscape of war in Gaza

According to Gaza's Health Ministry, as of December 23, 2023, there have been [20,057 documented deaths and over 50,000 people wounded](#). The bombardment has not only claimed human lives but has also wreaked havoc on Gaza's land and environment.

Acres of agricultural land have been flattened and transformed into barren fields. Precious olive trees, citrus fruits, and other plants have been destroyed in scores, depriving the people of livelihoods and erasing symbols of cultural heritage.

The continuous bombardment has left behind hazardous materials that contaminate the soil and groundwater, posing a significant threat to the ecosystem. Additionally, Israel periodically sprays highly toxic chemical pesticides in areas near the perimeter fence – [even long before this](#) – further exacerbating environmental damage.

Gaza's water supply, already dwindling, has been further compromised. Israel's cutoff of water pipelines has rendered desalination plants unable to run, leading to a host of sanitation problems. [Diarrhoea, jaundice, and hepatitis have become common public health issues in Gaza.](#)

Furthermore, the limited infrastructure and lack of development mean that Gaza is ill-prepared for climate-related disasters. The ongoing assault is not just an attack on the people; it is an assault on the very foundation that supports life in the region.

Militaries, including the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), are not only causing direct harm but are also significant contributors to environmental degradation. [Militaries are responsible for](#)

[5.5% of all greenhouse gas emissions](#), according to the Conflict and Environment Observatory and Scientists for Global Responsibility.

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment David R. Boyd [stated in November](#), "Air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, toxic contamination, and large volumes of greenhouse gas emissions are caused by military conflict."

The interconnected web of human rights violations and environmental devastation in Gaza

The Palestinian people, who have endured the tragedy of the Nakba – “catastrophe” in Arabic, referring to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war – find themselves not only facing the immediate threat of violence but also witnessing the gradual degradation of their homeland.

The bombardment of Gaza, in its relentless pursuit, has further entrenched the cycle of suffering. Beyond the visible destruction lies a more insidious form of harm – the contamination of soil and water, the depletion of natural resources, and the introduction of toxic elements into the delicate balance of Gaza's ecosystem. This environmental assault, coupled with the pre-existing human rights crisis, compounds the misery of the Palestinian people.

The lack of infrastructure and development in Gaza leaves the region vulnerable to the escalating threats of climate change. The absence of proper preparedness for climate-related disasters heightens the risk of further suffering for the Palestinian people. The international community must recognize that the environmental degradation in Gaza is not an isolated issue but an integral part of the broader human rights crisis. The indiscriminate actions of war, when coupled with environmental recklessness, further push Gaza towards a precipice of irreversible damage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is crucial to link Israel’s bombardment of Gaza and settler colonialism to the wider context of environmental destruction and the urgent need for climate justice.

At this critical moment, our call for peace, safety, the rule of law, and human rights for all is more pressing than ever. The tragedy unfolding in Gaza is a powerful reminder of our shared responsibility. As we reflect on historical and current realities, we recognize the importance of addressing ongoing injustices without repeating the traumas of the past.



In the words of South African climate campaigner Katherine Robinson, whose own country was once ravaged by apartheid: “The Palestinian struggle is a struggle for self-determination, and climate justice is a struggle for self-determination. There is no climate justice in occupied territories. There’s no climate justice during the war, and there’s no climate justice during apartheid.”

Ceasefire now.