

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 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).



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

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.

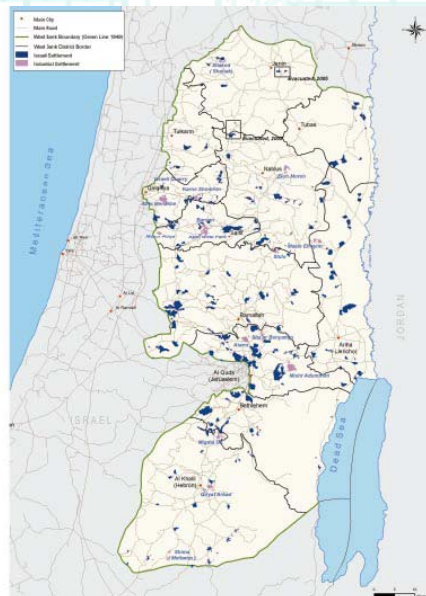


Map 1: Recharge Areas of the West Bank Aquifer System

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 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.



Map 2: Israeli Industrial Settlements in the Occupied West Bank



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.

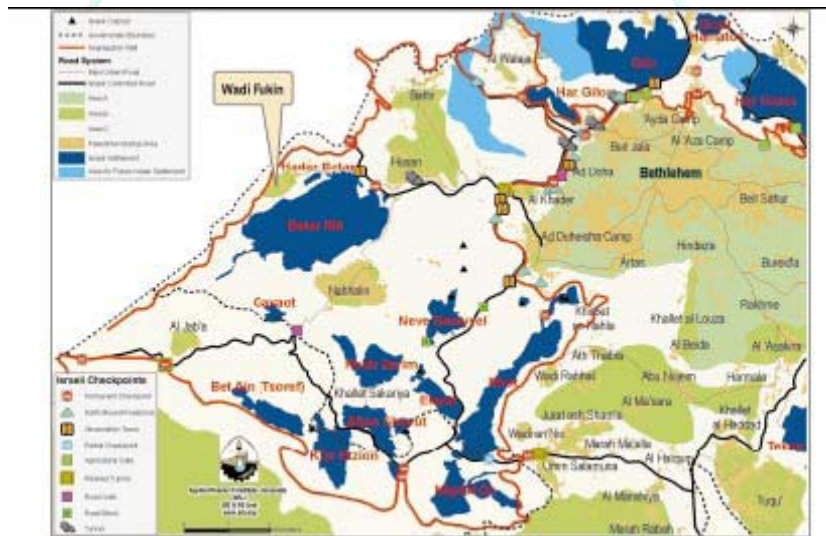
Recently, the IOF handed out 12 military orders stating the seizure of 885 dunums of agricultural lands.

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



Map 3: The Israeli Segregation Wall affecting Wadi Foqin

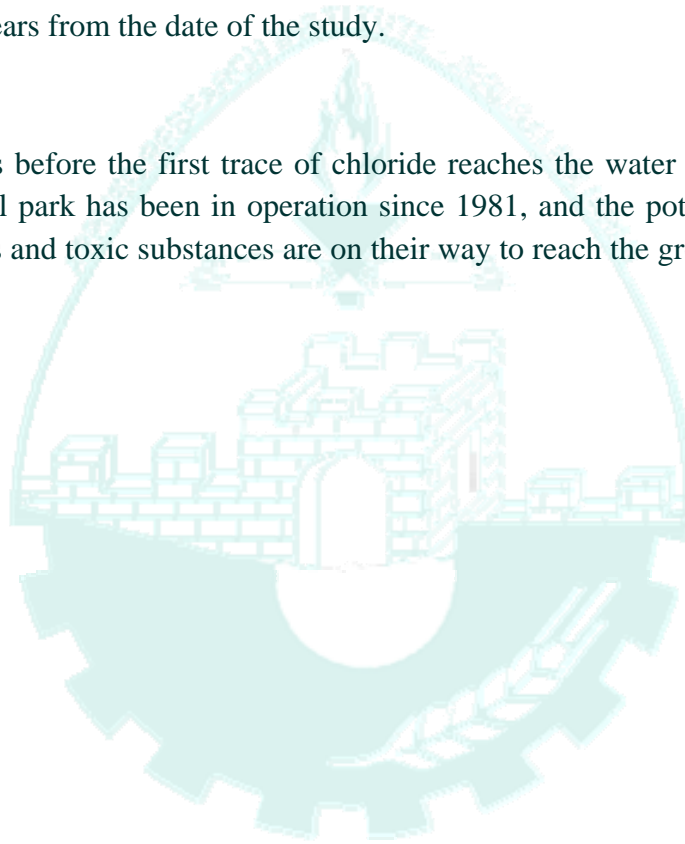
The Israeli Industrial Zone of Barqan represents a “Hot Spot” of pollution overlying the Western Basin. In 1981, the Israeli Authorities established the Barqan residential settlement northwest of Salfit City on approximately 649 dunums of land confiscated from the Palestinian village of Haris. Now there 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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