

Towards a Green New Deal in Palestine



By Shaddad Attli

As the world fails to curb rising temperatures, the consequences of global warming pose a serious threat, particularly in regions that suffer from water and food scarcity, political conflict, instability and insecurity, and financial inability, such as Palestine, among many others. Not all countries contribute equally to greenhouse gas (GHG)ⁱ emissions or are equally vulnerable to climate change, and the responsibilities and duties to mitigate the situation vary from one country to another. The achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their 169 targets is becoming increasingly difficult. Responsibility lies mainly with the industrialized countries, including the United States, China, India, Europe (mainly Germany and France), and the Gulf petroleum countries as the heavy users and producers of fossil fuel.

Efforts to reduce GHG emissions have led to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its extensions: the Kyoto Protocol of the 1990s, superseded by the Paris Agreement that entered into force in 2016. As of 2020, the UNFCCC has 197 signatory parties, and the Conference of Parties (COP) meets annually to assess progress in dealing with climate change. In 2020, despite countries' engagement in efforts to address climate change and a slowdown in industrial activities due to COVID-19, CO₂ showed the highest concentration in the past 800,000 years.

The United Nations Global Green New Deal (GGND), announced in 2008, comprises various sets of policies that aim to make systemic change to reduce GHG emissions. Measures include transitioning away from fossil fuels, introducing higher energy standards, and undertaking massive industrial projects to scale up green technology. The GGND calls on governments to allocate a significant share of funding to

green sectors and sets out three objectives: economic recovery, poverty eradication, and reduced carbon emissions and ecosystem degradation.

In 2009, following the announcement of the GGND, the World Bankⁱⁱ and Amnesty Internationalⁱⁱⁱ published two reports that highlight how Palestinians are denied access to water and sanitation and face Israeli restrictions on the development of their water sector. As the State of Palestine is considered among the least developed countries that must bear the consequences of climate

From Kyoto to the Paris Protocol, the world has faced a dilemma that has lasted half a century.

apartheid, as reported by the French National Assembly,^v enclaved by hundreds of Israeli settlements and outposts. Palestinian access to water and natural resources is restricted,



■ Flooding in Gaza. Photo by Sharif Sarhan.

change, there is a great need for adaptation and mitigation measures. Palestinians in Gaza have been living under siege for more than a decade, in conditions that a UN report has deemed unlivable.^{iv} In the occupied West Bank, Palestinians live under military control and face water

and Palestinians face movement and access restrictions in 60 percent of the West Bank territory where they are unable to build structures or implement development projects, and frequently must undergo a lengthy and complicated process to enter equipment in particular to

Gaza, where it may be refused under the pretext of dual use. Reports by the World Bank and United Nations have repeatedly affirmed that the occupation is the main obstacle that prevents the Palestinian state from attaining a viable economy that could lead to prosperity and self-reliance. Many international reports affirm that Israeli policies and practices undermine the resilience of Palestinians and increase their vulnerability to climate change.

Palestine has committed to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, but little has been achieved in terms of reaching these goals and targets. Many economic, financial, and social indicators show that the State of Palestine has been crippled in fulfilling its commitments and inspired objectives, showing high rates of poverty, food insecurity, and poor health conditions.

One example of how the occupation hinders development efforts is the denial of permits to develop clean energy projects in Area C. This prevents Palestine from advancing and implementing its strategy to diversify energy resources, causing the country to fail in its commitment to generate ten of its energy needs from renewable sources. The Palestinian Energy Authority announced in 2020 that the country currently relies on renewable energy for only 3 percent of its energy needs.

Israel's control of Area C hampers Palestine's plans for the diversification of energy resources.

The Palestine Water Authority has failed to facilitate the reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture due to the lack of permits for projects in Area C. Only 1 percent of treated wastewater has been reused in the West Bank. Palestinians are allowed to use only 15 percent of the groundwater in the West Bank aquifers and are given no access

issued Resolution 67/19 that considers Palestine a nonmember observer state in the assembly. This decision paved the way for the State of Palestine to accede to international conventions that strengthen Palestine's position in the international arena.

There is a fundamental political benefit to Palestine joining



■ Clean water is a rare resource in Gaza. Photo courtesy of UNDP/PAPP by Shareef Sarhan.

to the waters of the Jordan River or the Dead Sea. Gaza under siege is hampered in efforts to treat wastewater by a severe lack of energy, yet it manages to reuse 9 percent amidst a severe shortage of fresh water. Access to water and a solution to Israel's control over the Jordan River and the shared groundwater aquifer remain issues pending permanent status negotiations.

On November 29, 2012, the United Nations General Assembly

international legal frameworks to which Israel, the occupying power, is a member. These agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Basel and Paris protocols, set a new environmental reality in the region, especially regarding the relation between Palestine and Israel. When both states are members in the same environmental agreement, it can be understood that they

The Palestine Green New Deal initiative strives to mitigate climate-change-related damages in the absence of a peace agreement with Israel and despite the ongoing occupation and denial of Palestinian rights.

have agreed on sets of rules, principles, and obligations that aim to address the threats and challenges associated with pollution, climate change, and environmental protection. In the region's political reality, many consider water and environmental issues as less political in nature, allowing Israel and Palestine to reach a form of understanding and advance towards shared efforts to tackle issues related to climate change. Despite the ongoing political conflict, the two countries could work together, sign a memorandum of understanding, and develop environmental protocols. No one, despite the political conflict, would disagree that we all share in the pain. Why not share in the benefit of working toward minimizing the risks and threats of climate change?

A recent initiative published by EcoPeace Middle East has called upon Israel in a proposed Green Blue Deal for the Middle East^{vi} to resolve the issue of water rights, restore Palestinian water rights, enable access to shared resources, cooperate in addressing climate-change-related challenges, and advance cooperation over the nexus of water, food, and energy.

This initiative falls in line with a recent debate, facilitated by the Palestinian Center for Policy Research and Strategic Studies MASARAT, in which Palestinian water experts discussed and debated water rights and proposed not to delink water from the conflict but rather to adopt a phased approach in resolving the conflict under the motto “Water Comes First.” This approach would help all, provide an example of goodwill, and constitute a step that could encourage further engagement in issues of conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, in collaboration with the Palestinian NGO Damour for Community Development and in cooperation with Oxford Martin School of Oxford University, is advancing a Track II Dialogue for the environment in the Middle East and the region. This endeavor has received assistance from large, internationally well-known figures and actors and aims to advance the agenda of addressing climate change resilience in the vulnerable Middle East region, with water and energy at the top of its agenda.

All stakeholders behind these initiatives wish to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the two-state solution and international law; they agree that pollution and climate change know no borders (with the COVID-19 pandemic serving as “proof of the concept”: the region and its populations are not safe until all are safe, as the pandemic knows no borders).



■ After rain in Gaza. Photo by Sharif Sarhan.

Cooperation in such issues is a must and should not in any way prejudice the outcome of political dispute, in particular the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence and to a viable and sovereign state. All parties have made efforts to bring about a just solution, even if they are acting against the political will of many others.

Israel, like many other countries, including the United States, the European Commission, and other European countries, has appointed an ambassador for climate change. Palestine should do the same to participate in and lead internal and international debates and orientation efforts to implement projects that foster the development of a green and circular economy. Such ambassadors of climate change must push the regional agenda towards a

comprehensive action plan, solicit and facilitate project implementation and financing, and enhance local and regional connections and cooperation.

Taking the Basel Convention as an example, signed by Israel and Palestine, the parties to the convention can reach arrangements regarding the transboundary movement of waste, provided that these do not dilute the convention's requirements or stipulate provisions that are less strict.

To align with the signed international environmental agreements, Palestine has to receive full political and financial support – and dedicated development assistance – in implementing and administering a system that enables it to fulfill its commitments. Palestine must also harmonize its local laws and regulations, provide training and capacity building, and secure the tools necessary to implement, monitor, and follow up on projects and the enforcement of environmental laws.

With Palestine joining the 1992 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, it has acceded to a comprehensive regime of laws that is applicable to the world's oceans and seas and establishes rules that govern the use of their resources, the delimitation of state boundaries, environmental control, economic and commercial activities, and the settlement of disputes between states. Palestine can use the convention to defend its rights in the coastal waters of the Gaza Strip.

A specific legal right provided by the Law of the Sea gives coastal states sovereign rights in a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone over natural resources and regarding

Among the international agreements and protocols to which the State of Palestine has acceded following its recognition as a nonmember observer state at the United Nations are several important water and environmental conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, and many others.



■ Solar panels.

certain economic activities.

Palestine's economic future and the corresponding well-being of its people could immensely benefit from the exploration and development of natural gas offshore the Gaza Strip, as all Palestinians have the immediate need for access to additional sources for power supply. Access to our natural gas would greatly improve the power supply conditions in Gaza, which suffers from a lack of energy, as Gazans must cope daily with the most severe shortages. Moreover, gas is less polluting compared to other fossil fuels. Responding to Gaza's energy requirements will also ensure the functioning of the various sewage treatment plants that are currently paralyzed due to a lack of power. Many have remained out of order for many years, contributing to the polluting of the aquifer whose waters have become unfit for human consumption as well as to the pollution of the Mediterranean Sea along Gaza's shores. As Israel forced the desalination facility to stop twice in 2018, ensuring the functioning of Gaza's wastewater treatment facilities will contribute to fulfilling

our responsibility to environmentally protect the Mediterranean. The development of our gas field will also secure the energy requirements for the future desalination facility for the Gaza Strip. The West Bank will benefit from swapping energy with neighboring countries such as Jordan and Egypt or Israel.

Importantly, Palestine also has become a signatory to the Law of the Sea Convention and the 1997 draft UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (UN Watercourse Convention) that is based on the principle of equitable and reasonable utilization of transboundary water while also promoting environmental protection of international watercourses, thereby encouraging regional integration and sustainable development around the world. The State of Palestine cannot be viable without access to an "equitable and reasonable" share of its freshwater resources.

In conclusion, the Palestine Green New Deal joins the world effort of going green^{vii} by delinking the environment, particularly

climate change, from the political conflict; striving to reach a bilateral understanding between Israel and Palestine that aligns with both states' commitment to signed international agreements; working to reach a mutual understanding regarding the SDG targets related to climate change by enabling projects of resilience, adaptation, and mitigation; enabling Palestine to fulfill its obligations as well as benefit from being a member to key environmental treaties and conventions; enabling access to financial environmental instruments and encouraging a circular economy and clean energy in various sectors; pressuring Israel to enable projects that address clean energy, treated wastewater reuse, sustainable consumption, and fair allocation and joint management of shared water resources; making Palestine's voice heard through assigning a climate change ambassador to ensure internal and inter-sector discussion and external outreach that addresses climate change at local and regional

levels; and securing financing in different sectors to facilitate a clean circular economy.

Dr. Shaddad Attili is an adviser-ranking minister at the Negotiation Department. He is a former deputy secretary-general to the Union for the Mediterranean and a former water minister in Palestine. The views expressed in this article represent only those of the author.

ⁱ A greenhouse gas (GHG) is a gas that absorbs and emits radiant energy within the thermal infrared range, causing the greenhouse effect responsible for global warming. GHGs come from many sources, including carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and fluorinated gases (HFCs, PFCs, and SF₆). CO₂ makes the largest contribution to global GHG emissions.

ⁱⁱ *Assessment of Restrictions on Palestinian Water Sector Development*, The World Bank, April 2009, available at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/775491468139782240/pdf/476570SR0P115111nsReport18Apr2009111.pdf>; see also *Toward Water Security for Palestinians*, World Bank Group, 2018, available at <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/684341535731512591/pdf/Toward-Water-Security-for-Palestinians.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Troubled Waters – Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water*, Amnesty International, 2009, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/48000/mde150272009en.pdf>.

^{iv} *Gaza in 2020: A livable place?* UN Country Team in the occupied Palestinian territories, 2012, available at <https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/publications/gaza/Gaza%20in%202020.pdf>.

^v Lionell Luca, Jean Glavany, "La géopolitique de l'eau" (The Geopolitics of Water), French National Assembly, October 5, 2010, available at <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/pdf/rap-info/i4070.pdf>.

^{vi} Gidon Bromberg, Nada Majdalani, and Yana Abu Taleb, *Green Blue Deal for the Middle East*, EcoPeace Middle East, December 18, 2020, available at <https://old.ecopeaceme.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-Green-Blue-Deal-for-the-Middle-East.pdf>.

^{vii} Such as the US Green New Deal and the European Green Deal that comprise sets of policy initiatives with the overarching aim of making these countries climate neutral by 2050.