

Environmental Rule of Law in Palestine



By Yara Dahdal

Law No. 7 of the year 1999, which was approved by the Palestinian Legislative Council, is Palestine's governing environmental law. The law aims to safeguard the environment against all forms

of pollution, protect public health and social welfare, maintain biological diversity, protect designated areas, and finally encourage public awareness of environmental issues. Moreover, in order to comply with international environmental efforts and support national legislation, Palestine has ratified a total of 17 international environmental agreements, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Basel Convention, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. The bodies responsible for enforcing the environmental law are the Environmental Quality Authority, various public health and safety committees, the Environmental Police, customs offices, and the Economic and Environmental Crimes Prosecution.

Despite environmental stakeholder efforts to enforce the environmental law, the Israeli occupation (which limits access to more than 60 percent of the West Bank), the siege over the Gaza Strip, and the absence of an updated Palestinian environmental law serve to hinder these efforts. Among the most pressing environmental crimes that international environmental law should address are unregulated Israeli factories in the West Bank, water and nature reserve exploitation, the smuggling of hazardous waste into the West Bank, and the use of Palestinian territories as a massive dumping site.

Last year, as I was preparing to apply for a grant, I conducted a modest baseline survey of 20 Palestinian youth from the environmental sector. These inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were new graduates or individuals who had recently embarked on their careers. The results of this survey were shocking:

40 percent of the youth admitted that they knew nothing at all about the environmental law in Palestine, while 15 percent said that they only knew information relevant to their work; 40 percent believed that they were aware of some aspects of the law; and only one person claimed to be an expert in this area. Moreover, 80 percent of the surveyed participants were not aware of any environmental cases that had reached the court, and 65 percent of them knew nothing about the legal status of nature reserves. In addition, 80 percent acknowledged that they were lacking in legal information concerning air pollution in Palestine. Although observers may argue that the sample size is too small to be conclusive, nevertheless, the general trend indicates that the level of awareness concerning the environmental law is insufficient.

The survey results convinced the Palestinian Affairs Unit at the American embassy to support a Nature Palestine Society (NPS) project that aims to improve the

skills of young environmentalists in Palestine in the domain of the environmental law and green entrepreneurship. During the course of the training, NPS hosted distinguished environmental law experts who shared their knowledge and experiences regarding the environmental law in general, the international environmental conventions and treaties, and most importantly, the challenges that impede their enforcement. Discussion also took place regarding the national, regional, and international environmental legislation that governs air pollution, electronic waste, legal status of gas reserves on the Gaza Mediterranean coast, and the legal status of nature reserves and key biodiversity areas. Young Palestinian environmentalists were eager to learn more about this vital component of environmental protection.

In 2021, the Environmental Quality Authority inspectors, alongside the Environmental Police, handed over to the NPS 29 different animals

■ A pile of electronic waste leans against the border wall that separates Israel from the West Bank. Photo by Christina Bullata, courtesy of Undark.



(mammals and birds) that had been illegally captured or nest-poached in the West Bank. Some animals had been injured and needed extensive periods of medical treatment and therapy before release, while others were fledging or immature and needed special care and rehabilitation

legislation; more public awareness campaigns and capacity building programs must be implemented, and most importantly, environmental legislation should be updated to ensure that no further harm is caused to the Palestinian environment and its exceptional ecosystem.



■ A common kestrel spreads its wings wide open to embrace freedom after a long treatment and rehabilitation process at Tamoun Nature Reserve. The injured bird was handed over to NPS by the Environmental Police and the Environmental Quality Authority's office in Jenin. Photo by Islam Daghlas.

to survive in the wild. Among the captured animals were five Palestine mountain gazelles, a critically endangered species on the global level. Sadly, less than 400 of them currently inhabit the West Bank. Fourteen different raptors were also handed over by the authorities. Raptors are an important pest-biological control; unfortunately, their population is decreasing. The long-legged buzzard, for example, is threatened on the national level.

We are blessed to live in a rich, diverse, and unique natural environment; therefore, enforcing the environmental rule of law is key to passing on this legacy to the next generations. To achieve this objective, all stakeholders in the environmental sector must work hand in hand to impose environmentally friendly

Dr. Yara Dahdal holds a PhD in water desalination and wastewater treatment. She has two postdocs, the first in water contamination and the second in science diplomacy. Yara is currently the projects manager at Nature Palestine Society. She is an active member of the scientific basis task force at the East-Mediterranean and Middle East Climate and Atmosphere Research Center led by the Cyprus Institute. She can be reached at yara@naturepalestine.org.

A Short-toed snake eagle was handed in as a chick by the Environmental Police and the Environmental Quality Authority's office in Ramallah. The bird was released at Wadi Al-Qufi Nature Reserve after rehabilitation. Photo by Islam Daghlas.

