

Environmental activists say Israel is committing ecoside in Gaza



By Maryam Qarehgozlou

Tehran, July 23 (RHC)-- Israel's genocidal war against Gaza which has killed more than 39,000 Palestinians so far is a well-orchestrated campaign to deplete the territory of any signs of life, says an environmental activist.

Speaking to the Press TV website, Abbas Mohammadi, an environmental activist based in Tehran, said the Israeli regime “has crossed all redlines” in its war on Gaza and is “collectively punishing” all Palestinians by using disproportionate force against them and the territory’s environment.

“In my view, Israel is intentionally and systematically trying to drain life out of the Gaza Strip,” he said, pointing to the environmental costs of the protracted war on the besieged territory. “What Israel is doing in Gaza is actually an ecocide: apparently they have planned to deplete this territory of any signs of life so that no one can live there anymore or in case people choose to live there they should suffer the harshest consequences.”

According to Mohammadi, the densely populated territory was already grappling with environmental challenges before the war due to its growing population and limited access to modern technology. “The Israeli siege imposed on the territory for nearly two decades that has turned Gaza into an open-air prison is another reason for the environmental degradation Gaza is facing,” he added.

The Gaza Strip, located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, generally has a temperate climate and used to be rich in flora and fauna, the environmental activist highlighted. The vast environmental impact of Israel’s war on Gaza, including land, air and soil pollution, is tied to the deepening humanitarian crisis unfolding in the besieged territory.

Mohammadi noted that decades of war and Israeli occupation have seriously harmed its ecosystem. Israel’s onslaught on Gaza, which was launched in October last year, has dire consequences for more than 2.3 million Palestinians, including children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups as well as the wildlife and the ecosystem of the narrow strip, Mohammadi stressed.

“What the Zionist regime is doing in terms of systematically targeting civilians and civic infrastructure is in blatant breach of the Geneva Conventions.” He referred to a report published in March by Forensic Architecture, a UK-based multidisciplinary research group, which identified more than 2,000 agricultural sites, including farms and greenhouses in Gaza, destroyed since October 2023.

The destruction has been most intense in the northern part of Gaza, where 90 percent of greenhouses were destroyed in the early stages of the Israeli ground invasion, the report said.

As per the report, 40 percent of greenhouses in the areas around the southern city of Khan Younis, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are displaced, have been destroyed since January 2024. “I think it is safe to say that after more than three months since the report was originally published, with Gaza farmers being unable to access their lands for more than 9 months and relentless bombardments of the area, all agricultural lands are completely destroyed by now,” Mohammadi stated. He explained that to irrigate these lands, millions of cubic meters of water have been used for decades and now “they have gone to waste.”

On Gaza’s water crisis, Mohammadi said that Israel’s incessant bombardment of the Gaza Strip has increased the likelihood of water contamination in the region. About 90 percent of Gaza’s water supply comes from the Coastal Aquifer Basin, which runs along the eastern Mediterranean coast from Egypt through Gaza and into occupied territories, he said.

However, he added, over the years the water is contaminated due to seawater intrusion, over-extraction, sewage and chemical infiltration and the recent war has worsened its condition as bombs raining down on Gaza are releasing thousands of tons of hazardous chemicals into water and soil.

“The effects of these chemicals cannot be immediately reversed and they make it almost impossible to restore these water resources and agricultural lands and the crop cultivated in these areas will contain such chemicals for years,” he warned.

The preliminary assessment published last month by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) also exposed the rapidly growing soil, water and air pollution and risks of irreversible damage to Gaza's natural ecosystems caused by Israel's war. "Such reports demonstrate that the Israeli regime has been preventing the provision of safe drinking water in the Gaza Strip, in brazen breach of international law."

According to customary international law, he said, Israel is prohibited from poisoning or rendering water unfit for human consumption which is essential for the health and survival of the civilian population. In addition, he added, civilians are entitled to an adequate water supply under all circumstances.

"Nonetheless, Israel has been depriving millions of Palestinians of access to a regular supply of clean water from the very beginning of the war," he lamented.

Water shortages have also led to inadequate sanitation services and hygiene challenges which can pose serious health risks by causing many diseases related to water quality, including diarrhea, skin diseases, and dehydration, he added.

The UN Palestinian refugee agency has warned of catastrophic environmental and health risks in the Gaza Strip amid the Israeli regime's months-long war against the besieged territory.
Tons of debris due to Israeli invasion

Mohammadi said that nearly 39 million tons of debris is now generated in Gaza following Israel's aerial and ground invasion of Gaza. As the dead bodies remain scattered in streets and under the rubble of the destroyed buildings in the strip, a new health disaster looms over Gaza, he warned. "Moreover, so much fuel, water and construction material were used to erect those buildings in Gaza and now that they are razed to the ground collecting and disposing of the debris can negatively affect the environment," Mohammadi remarked.

"So much more water, fuel and building materials must be used for reconstruction of the urban spaces which could result in depletion of millions of cubic meters of water."

Generally speaking, Mohammadi said, war is the biggest enemy of the environment.

"During wartime, the immediate priority, whether you want it or not, becomes protecting civilians and saving lives. For example, people cut off trees to cook food, they essentially burn anything to cook," he said.

"All wars are like this, but in this particular war, the Israeli regime has crossed all redlines and all Palestinians are victims of a collective punishment and Israel's use of disproportionate force which is resulting in many civilian casualties. That is why we can say Israel is ethnically cleansing the Palestinian territory," he said.

The Israeli minister of military affairs Yoav Gallant in the first days of the war said they were fighting against "human animals" in Gaza, a dehumanizing sentiment picked up by other Israeli authorities throughout the war, he said.

From an environmental point of view, the activist said, attributing evil human traits to animals is unacceptable, as all systematic crimes and genocides are committed by human beings and animals, even predators, do not usually perform mass killings.

"Israeli authorities are the ones who clearly do not care about human lives, wildlife or the environment and are justifying their crimes by dehumanizing Gazans."

There is no end in sight for the Gaza war and the United States and the European Union do not seem to be inclined to stop these humanitarian and environmental catastrophes despite their big talks, he said.

“This war is a crime against humanity and a crime against the environment and is exceptionally and unprecedentedly degrading the environment and killing people.”

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