

Abstract

The environmental problems in Palestine due to the Israel occupation and the violations prompted by the settlement activities are plenty. The practices of the Israeli occupation and settlement activities cause a continuous destruction to the West Bank and Gaza environment. In Bethlehem and Hebron Governorates, the situation is very serious, however, remained unrevealed.

The purpose of this study is to explore the major environmental problems caused by the Israeli occupation and the settlement activities to present an intensive summary of these problems. To carry out this purpose, a variety of studies concerned were reviewed and field expbratim was conducted.

The results of the study show that the Israeli settlement activities in both governorates are a real threat to the peoples civil and legal rights. The settlement activities cause permanent changes in land, which is legally prohibited. These changes prohibit Palestinians from utilizing from their land and natural resources and lead to considerable imbalance in environmental dynamics, to depletion of land and desertification.

Besides that, it was found that the Israeli authorities didn't deliberately establish sewage systems and dumping sites in the occupied Palestinian territories in general and in Hebron and Bethlehem Governorates in particular.

Due to negligence and shortage of budgets necessary for carrying out vital projects, the infrastructure in both governorates was noticed to deteriorate substantially. The role of the Israeli civil Administration was found to be centered around establishing roads among the settlements and for facilitating the settlement expansion. The study also showed that settlements endanger the peoples health, pollute the water and the agricultural lands. They are rich sources of sewage, solid garbage and poisonous residues.

The study, moreover, revealed that consumption of the Palestinian water by the occupation authorities, which consumes a slightly more than 86.5 % of the total water reserved, and the establishment of settlements in regions rich in water lead to shortage in water quantities and to deterioration of water hygenic conditions. These problems lead to serious environmental catastrophes and henceforth, prohibiting the Palestinians from utilizing their water resources.

In addition, it was found that due to systematic uprooting of trees for security purposes and for establishing settlements, the land became naked and animals were endangered as they lost their natural (green) habitat. The occupation of Jabel Abu Ghnaim (Harhoma) and uprooting trees there is a case in point. The annexation of land for establishing further settlements is a serious problem and can be considered as one of the most problematic violations in Bethlehem and Hebron governorates. This problem was noticed to decrease the area of land necessary for natural demographic expansion of the indigenous residents. A situation of over- crowdedness was created mainly in Beit Sahoo, Beit Jala and Nahaleen, due to this problem. Besides that, many Palestinian cities and towns were disconnected by the bypass roads established to serve the Israeli settlements.

Some banned contaminating industries, moreover, are transferred from Israel and established in the settlement in Hebron and Bethlehem Governorates. These industries in most cases create serious ecological imbalance and the Israeli authorities are going on in establishing such industries. The Israeli nuclear activities and nuclear residues, radiation emitted from Demona nuclear plant, mines left by the Israeli Army and dangerous substances and residues smuggled from Israel to the Governorates are considered harmful factors and endanger the environment. They are even likely to endanger, not only the immediate environment, and the whole region.

In conclusion, the Israeli violations prompted by settlement activities are the main threat to the Palestinian environmental and ecological systems in Bethlehem and Hebron Governorates. As long as the Israeli occupation persists, the deterioration will persist and become more devastating. Thus, the study suggests the following:

- Adopting new mechanisms to put an end to the Israeli violations in the occupied territories.
- Protecting the Palestinian natural resources.
- And establishing professional centres for environmental and ecological monitoring in all of the Palestinian territories, as all Palestinian governorates suffer or are likely to suffer the results of the Israeli environmental violations.