مركز المرأة للارشاد القانوني والاجتماعي
Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling
WCLAC



UNTANGLING INTERSECTING INJUSTICES:

Climate and Environmental Realities for Palestinian Women under Occupation and Genocide

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Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling

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Chapter 1. Introduction: Intersecting Crises in Palestine: Occupation, Environment and Gender

Under Israeli occupation, Palestinians face three overlapping crises: settler colonialism, environmental degradation and climate change, each reinforcing the other. Palestinian women face a double jeopardy rooted in the intersection of colonial occupation and patriarchal structures. They are often forced to personify these crises, bearing the burden of sustaining life under siege through their essential roles as water collectors, food providers, farmers and primary caregivers. These are not separate problems but part of a single system of domination. In a region hard-hit by droughts and extreme temperatures, driven by climate change, water is becoming an ever-more precious resource. Across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), the occupation's appropriation of land and water reduces Palestinian's options to adapt to droughts and other climate shocks, making these three crises inseparable. Israeli authorities exert near-total control over water and land to enforce racialized dispossession and segregation. Since 1967, Military Order 158 has placed all Palestinian water resources under military control, producing a system in which settlers enjoy abundant supply while many Palestinian communities face chronic scarcity. Palestinian and other human rights organizations call these disparities an "environmental apartheid" regime.



Photo by: Btselem

In Gaza, years of blockade and bombardment have left most groundwater undrinkable, sewage is flowing into the sea, and families are surviving on less than minimal water. The testimonies WCLAC collected during the genocide make clear that this deprivation is neither accidental nor abstract: women describe being wounded, newly displaced, grieving martyred family members, and living through the deliberate destruction of water networks, wells, and desalination plants. As later chapters show, these conditions force women to absorb the collapse of entire systems within their own bodies and daily routines. After 7 October 2023, WCLAC's testimonies show women in Gaza struggling

desperately to secure even the most basic necessities. They spend hours waiting for small amounts of unsafe water while trying to care for malnourished children, all while their own bodies weaken from hunger and exposure to polluted air. With electricity and cooking gas cut off, they are forced to cook over open fires, inhaling thick smoke that burns their eyes and lungs. As later chapters show, occupation-driven policies, from sewage dumping to infrastructure demolitions, turn environmental harm into a tool of control, and that harm extends beyond water, affecting land, soil and biodiversity. Settlement quarries and industrial factories strip hillsides, release pollutants and destroy ecosystems, while land confiscation and the uprooting of olive trees undermine food security. These patterns reflect what some researchers describe as engineered ecocide, and they do not affect all Palestinians equally.

A gendered lens is essential

Environmental injustice in Palestine is also gender injustice. Women and girls are traditionally primarily responsible for securing water, food, and fuel; caring for dependents; and sustaining families under siege and displacement. Moreover, environmental harm intersects with patriarchy and violence, making a gender lens essential to understanding how responsibilities and risks are distributed and who is most affected.



Photo by: © Hassan Jedi/Anadolu via Getty Images

WCLAC's approach is grounded in this legal framework. The organization has long documented how occupation and patriarchy intersect to violate Palestinian women's rights. This report extends that work into the environmental and climate sphere, showing how environmental injustice functions as a form of gender-based discrimination and, in some cases, structural gender-based violence.

Methodology and scope of the report

This report combines desk research, quantitative data and legal analysis with field-based testimonies collected by WCLAC from women in Gaza and the West Bank in 2023-2025. Using a feminist, intersectional, rights-based approach, we integrate climate projections, water and health statistics and women's narratives to identify patterns of gendered climate and environmental injustice.

Structure of the report

The report is organized as follows. Chapter 2 examines key patterns of environmental injustice in the West Bank and Gaza, including water pollution, land degradation and infrastructure destruction, and highlights how these are produced by occupation policies. Chapter 3 analyses climate change and climate vulnerability in the oPt, showing how occupation hinders adaptation and how militarized emissions contribute to the global climate crisis. Chapter 4 presents testimonies from Palestinian women and girls, structured around themes such as reproductive and maternal health, menstruation, mental health, gender-based violence, unpaid care, food and water insecurity and life in displacement. Chapter 5 focuses on women's agency and leadership in resisting environmental harm and building resilience. Chapter 6 synthesizes the findings and provides recommendations for duty-bearers, including Israel as the occupying power, the State of Palestine, international organizations and donors.

Taken together, the chapters demonstrate that environmental and climate harms in Palestine are not unfortunate side-effects of conflict but central tools of colonial domination. They also show that Palestinian women are not only victims of intersecting injustices but also frontline defenders of land, water and life. A feminist, human rights-based analysis is essential to understand these realities and to chart a path towards environmental justice and gender equality.

Chapter 2. Environmental Injustices in Palestine

Environmental injustice in the occupied Palestinian territory is not a side-effect of conflict or a failure of governance; it is structurally embedded in a settler-colonial regime that fragments land, appropriates natural resources and renders Palestinian environments disposable with the sole purpose of ethnically cleansing Palestinians. Legal analyses of the law of occupation emphasize that an occupying power is a usufructuary of public property and must protect natural resources for the benefit of the local population, not exploit or destroy them.[01] Yet for decades, Israeli authorities have systematically exploited, restricted and destroyed Palestinian land and water resources in ways that weaponize the environment and deprive Palestinians of the basic ecological foundations of life. WCLAC's parallel reports to UN treaty bodies have repeatedly documented how Israel's discriminatory planning, zoning, water and settlement regimes in the West Bank and Gaza violate the rights to water, health, housing and an adequate standard of living, with disproportionate impacts on women and girls.[02] The UN Special Rapporteur in the Situation on the oPt, Francesca Albanese's 2024 report further framed the wholesale destruction of Gaza's built and natural environment as part of a wider pattern of "genocide as colonial erasure" that targets not only Palestinians but also the ecological systems sustaining life.[03]



Photo: Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor

01 Pearce Clancy, "Beyond the Environment: How the ICJ Climate Opinion Enhances Legal Avenues for Accountability in Palestine," International Law & Palestine Blog, Law for Palestine, September 10, 2025, https://tinyurl.com/yaxpzcn4

02 Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), WCLAC's Shadow Report for the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: 66th Session – Israel Review (2019),https://tinyurl.com/3s2pe4fe

03 United Nations General Assembly, Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967, Francesca Albanese (Genocide as Colonial Erasure), UN Doc. A/79/384 (October 1, 2024), https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/384.

Across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli control over environmental resources operates through what Palestinian and international researchers describe as a system of "environmental apartheid," a racialized regime in which Israeli settlers enjoy protected, abundant resources, while Palestinians face engineered scarcity, pollution and deliberate neglect.[04] Israel controls around 85% of Palestinian water resources and restricts Palestinian access to springs and aquifers through a matrix of military orders, Oslo-era institutional mechanisms, permits and physical barriers.[05] Since 1967, Military Order 158 has required Palestinians to obtain Israeli military permits to build or repair any water installation, while settlers receiving uninterrupted water from Mekorot, the Israeli state-owned company that controls and appropriates Palestinian water sources. In addition, the Oslo II Agreement (1995) further entrenched Israeli control over Palestinian water by granting Israel veto power within the Joint Water Committee and by restricting Palestinian drilling and infrastructure development, especially in Area C. WCLAC's shadow reports to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights note that Israel has appropriated most water resources in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, and severely restricted the repair of old wells, leaving Palestinian communities with inadequate and unsafe water while settlers enjoy continuous supply.[06] Between 2008 and 2020, at least 802 Palestinian cisterns and wells were demolished, often on the grounds that they lacked Israeli permits, even as new settlement infrastructure expanded.[07] This trend has been exacerbated over the past five years due to ever more racist Israeli government policies. These patterns directly contradict international law obligations to ensure non-discriminatory access to safe water and sanitation.

One of the most visible manifestations of environmental apartheid is the systematic discharge of settlement wastewater onto Palestinian land. B'Tselem's "Foul Play" report estimates that Israeli settlements in the West Bank generate around 17.5 million m³ of wastewater annually; many settlements lack adequate treatment facilities, and 90-95% of Palestinian wastewater is also left untreated due to restrictions on Palestinian infrastructure.[08] Much of this effluent flows untreated down from elevated settlement sites into Palestinian valleys, streams and agricultural land. Detailed water and soil analyses in the Wadi Shakhit and Immanuel industrial zones, conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council, revealed extremely high concentrations of faecal coliforms such as E. coli, along with heavy metals including copper, chromium and nickel and elevated sodium levels that disrupt soil structure.[09] The contamination has devastated local agriculture: farmers around Immanuel reported up to 70% drops in olive yields and steep declines in income, while cultivable land in Wadi Shakhit shrank as repeated

04 Sara Salazar Hughes, Stepha Velednitsky, and Amelia Arden Green, "Greenwashing in Palestine/Israel: Settler Colonialism and Environmental Injustice in the Age of Climate Catastrophe," Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space 6, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211069898

05 Abeer Al Butmeh, "Palestine Women Defending Water, Land, and Life from the Israeli Occupation," Capire: Internationalist Feminist Magazine, November 8, 2021, https://tinyurl.com/bdf7dc99

06 WCLAC, Shadow Report, 2019.

07 Al Butmeh, "Palestine Women Defending Water."

08 B'Tselem, Foul Play: Neglect of Wastewater Treatment in the West Bank (Information Sheet, June 2009), https://tinyurl.com/4wwrwk66

09 Simon Randles, Ripple Effects: Exploring the Environmental Impact of Israeli Settlements' Wastewater Discharge (Norwegian Refugee Council, updated March 18, 2024), https://tinyurl.com/9p4t8u8z

sewage floods rendered plots unusable.[10] Palestinian authorities are routinely denied permits to build or upgrade sewage treatment plants, making Palestinian villages de facto dumping grounds for settlement waste.[11]

Beyond sewage, industrial zones built in or adjacent to settlements discharge solvent waste, metal residues and chemical effluents directly onto Palestinian farmland, often at night and without effective monitoring or accountability. WCLAC's submissions to the UNHRC Universal Periodic Review and other treaty bodies highlight how such environmental violations, combined with land confiscation and settler violence, have severely affected agriculture,[12] especially for women farmers who rely on small plots, livestock and home-based production for livelihoods and food security.[13] The Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON) has documented the cumulative degradation of soil fertility, biodiversity and traditional farming systems caused by settlement expansion, quarrying and military training zones, arguing that the long-term, widespread and severe damage approaches the threshold of ecocide as understood in emerging international criminal law debates.[14]

Settler violence often takes explicitly environmental forms. In addition to attacks on farmers during olive harvests and the uprooting of trees, settlers have repeatedly poisoned or sabotaged Palestinian water sources. A widely reported case near Nablus in 2005 saw settlers contaminate a village spring with toxic substances and waste, causing liver infections in children and aiming to drive residents from their land.[15] WCLAC's submissions to UN Special Rapporteurs since 2012 have documented a persistent pattern in which settlement expansion is accompanied by increased settler violence against women, night raids and attacks on agricultural assets, creating a coercive environment that facilitates displacement.[16] Women interviewed by WCLAC describe how the destruction of wells, cisterns and fields forces them to purchase expensive trucked water, cut food intake and pull children from school to cope with the loss of income and increased domestic labor. These testimonies show how colonial environmental violence is inseparable from gender-based and economic violence.

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10 Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), "West Bank: Israeli Settlement Wastewater Destroys Palestinian Lands and Livelihoods," March 21, 2024, https://tinyurl.com/3w4x33yr

11 Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), Parallel Report to Israel's Follow-up Report of Concluding Observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (August 29, 2022), https://tinyurl.com/47mxd83m

12 Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) et al., Joint Submission for the 4th Cycle of Israel's UPR: 43rd Session of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group (October 11, 2022), https://tinyurl.com/5dsejf5y

13 Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) and MIFTAH, Women's Voices in Light of Israel's Illegal Settlement Expansion and Violations of International Law: Analytical Report of Documented Human Rights Violations against Palestinian Women in the West Bank, including Occupied East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip due to Practices of Israeli Military Occupation and Settlers' Violence and Terrorism (2023), https://tinyurl.com/f28tre2f

14 Abdalftah Hamed Ali et al., Participatory Approaches to Conflict, Climate Change and Environment: Case Studies from the Middle East and North Africa (Arab Reform Initiative and Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH, 2025), https://tinyurl.com/52vmf756

15 Khalid Amayreh, "Settlers Poison Palestinian Well," Al Jazeera, February 21, 2005, https://tinyurl.com/42huhr8y

16 Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), Israeli Settler Violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem: Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (September 16, 2013), https://tinyurl.com/22eff9dy

In East Jerusalem, environmental injustices intersect with an aggressive regime of home demolitions, residency revocations and discriminatory urban planning that concentrates Palestinians in overcrowded neighbourhoods with poor infrastructure all with the aim of forcibly displacing Palestinians and annexing all of Jerusalem. WCLAC's report "Dismantled Dreams" documents how Israeli Occupation Authorities carried out extensive demolitions in occupied East Jerusalem between January 2022 and May 2023, often destroying water and sanitation infrastructure along with homes and placing the financial and emotional burden of rebuilding onto women.[17] In "Women of Jerusalem: On The Front-Line Facing Occupation", Palestinian women describe living in areas with inadequate waste collection, limited green space and exposure to pollution from nearby industrial and traffic corridors, while lacking the political power to influence urban or environmental policy.[18] These urban environmental conditions compound the psychological stress, insecurity and violence already generated by residency revocation, child arrests and punitive measures documented across WCLAC's submissions to CEDAW, CESCR and the Human Rights Committee.[19]

If the West Bank and East Jerusalem illustrate chronic environmental degradation under apartheid, the Gaza Strip represents its most acute and catastrophic expression. Sixteen years of blockade, and now genocide, have systematically destroyed Gaza's water, energy, waste and health systems, while repeated large-scale military assaults have targeted the very infrastructures that sustain life. UNEP's preliminary assessment of environmental impacts in Gaza, released in 2024, found extensive destruction of water and wastewater networks, severe damage to solid waste management systems and high risks of soil and aquifer.20 Greenpeace Aotearoa estimates that in the first 120 days of the current genocide alone, Israeli attacks produced over 536,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions, destroyed 57% of cropland and reduced drinking water access to just 2-8 litres per person per day for most residents, far below the emergency minimum of 15-20 litres.[21] The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reports that nearly 200,000 buildings have been damaged or destroyed, leaving millions of tonnes of rubble laced with asbestos and heavy metals and contributing to an "unparalleled ecological crisis".[22]

Gaza's only natural freshwater source, the coastal aquifer, was already over-extracted and salinized before the recent genocide due to Israeli blockade-imposed limits on electricity, fuel and materials needed to operate and maintain wells and desalination

17 Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), Dismantled Dreams: The Unceasing Demolitions in Jerusalem by the Israeli Occupation Forces and Their Impact on Women (Ramallah: WCLAC, 2023), https://tinyurl.com/484hk7he

18 Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), Women of Jerusalem: On the Frontline Facing Occupation (2019), https://tinyurl.com/5fa52sd3

19 WCLAC, CEDAW Submission, 2016; WCLAC, CAT Parallel Report, 2022; WCLAC, Al-Muntada, and GUPW, NGO Follow-Up Report, 2023.

20 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Environmental Impact of the Conflict in Gaza: Preliminary Assessment of Environmental Impacts (Nairobi: UNEP, 2024), https://tinyurl.com/4xupwyjw

21 Farah Al Hattab, "Scorched-earth: Making Gaza Uninhabitable for Generations to Come," Greenpeace Aotearoa, July 11, 2024, https://greenpeace.org/aotearoa/story/scorched-earth-making-gaza-uninhabitable-for-generations-to-come/.

22 Misbah Khan, "Shattered Concrete, Dirty Water and Asbestos: Israeli Bombing Causes 'Unparalleled' Ecological Crisis in Gaza," The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, October 15, 2025, https://tinyurl.com/5bwjmy5f.

plants. Even prior to October 2023, 90-95% of groundwater in Gaza was unfit for human consumption.[23] Subsequent attacks have destroyed or severely damaged most water wells, pipelines and wastewater treatment facilities. In the light of electricity and Israeli fuel ban, sewage pumping stations have failed, leading to more than 60,000 m^3 of untreated sewage per day flowing into the Mediterranean and inundating neighbourhoods in open pools, imposing immense health hazards. Moreover, displaced families are surviving on an average of about 8.4 litres of water per person per day, compared to the minimum of 50 liters acknowledged by UNGA as a human right.[24] Much of it is unsafe, and families continue to face outbreaks of diarrhoeal and other waterborne diseases as sewage mixes with drinking sources. PENGON's analysis of water quality and displaced populations emphasizes that prolonged exposure to this contamination, coupled with heat stress and overcrowding in makeshift shelters, poses long-term public health risks that will particularly affect women, children and chronically ill people.[25]

The deliberate Israeli targeting of built infrastructure has generated an unprecedented volume of rubble whose environmental effects will persist for decades. Concrete dust, asbestos fibres, lead, mercury and residues from explosives and industrial chemicals contaminate soil and groundwater as rubble is bulldozed, burned or left in place. UNEP warns that without careful debris management and remediation, currently impossible under Israeli siege, these contaminants may make parts of Gaza uninhabitable and further degrade the already stressed coastal aquifer.[26] PENGON's damage assessment of Gaza's solar energy systems shows how even small gains in renewable, decentralized energy have been systematically wiped out by bombing, deepening energy poverty and reliance on polluting fuels when available.[27]

While Israel completely banned any humanitarian aid from entering Gaza, in August 2025, IPC (integrated food security Phase classification) confirmed famine in Gaza Governorate. Satellite and field assessments cited by Greenpeace indicate that 57% of cropland has been damaged or rendered inaccessible, while orchards, greenhouses and irrigation systems have been bulldozed or bombed. The fishing sector has virtually collapsed due to naval attacks, fuel shortages and coastal pollution; untreated sewage flowing into the Mediterranean has created algae blooms and contamination that make nearshore fishing hazardous. Humanitarian agencies and UN bodies now warn of widespread famine and catastrophic hunger, with women often eating last and least to prioritize children and elderly relatives, as highlighted by UN Women's Gender Alert and UNFPA's GBV and gender justice reports.[28]

23 Al Hattab, "Scorched-earth," 2024.

24 United Nations General Assembly, The Human Right to Water and Sanitation, A/RES/64/292 (28 July 2010), https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/64/292

25 Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON), "The Ecological Effects of the War on Gaza: Water Quality and Displaced People," PENGON – Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network, 2025, https://www.pengon.org/articles/view/199/en.

26 UNEP, Environmental Impact of the Conflict in Gaza, 2024.

27 Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON), "Damage Assessment and Recovery Plan for Gaza Solar Energy System 2024," PENGON – Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network, 2024, https://www.pengon.org/articles/view/175/en

28 UN Women, Gender Alert: Gaza Crisis, 2024; UNDP et al., Palestine: Gender Justice & The Law, 2018.

Fumes, gases and toxic residues released by continuous bombardment further degrade air quality, adding chemical pollutants and heavy metals to an already hazardous atmosphere. With fuel largely unavailable, families resort to burning plastic, wood and rubbish for cooking and heating, releasing dense smoke, dioxins and other carcinogens into already dust-laden air. Rubble burning and the destruction of industrial sites further contribute to particulate pollution. The WHO's report on gender and health in the occupied Palestinian territory notes that women, as primary caregivers, often remain inside poorly ventilated shelters with children and elderly relatives, increasing their exposure and heightening risks of respiratory disease, adverse pregnancy outcomes and long-term chronic conditions.[29] Medical studies from previous rounds of conflict already showed links between war-related heavy metal exposure and increased rates of preterm births, low birth weight and congenital anomalies in Gaza.[30] Newer commentaries and reports by Al-Mezan and others on reproductive health under genocide and reproductive violence similarly emphasize how environmental destruction, malnutrition and toxic exposure combine to threaten women's bodily integrity and reproductive autonomy.[31]



Photo: palestine.oic-oci.org

29 World Health Organization (WHO), Gender Analysis: Health Cluster oPt – 29 April 2024 (April 30, 2024), https://tinyurl.com/44datxp6

30 Nabil AlBarqouni et al., "Changes in Outcomes of Pregnancies in Gaza from 2011 to 2016: Relationship with Environmental Changes and Load of Heavy Metals in Mothers and Newborns," Reproductive Toxicology 72 (2017): 41–42, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.reprotox.2017.06.163

31 Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, Reproductive Health Under Genocide: The Struggle of Palestinian Women in Gaza (January 2025), https://tinyurl.com/sx6h9cc5

Several Palestinian and international analyses argue that the scale and intentionality of environmental destruction in Gaza and the wider oPt amount to ecocide. PENGON's recent chapter on agricultural land emphasizes that the destruction of soil, water systems and seed banks, combined with the long-term contamination of the aquifer and marine environment, meets the proposed definition of ecocide as "unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment".[32] A joint briefing by Tipping Point North South and the Palestinian Institute for Climate Strategy estimates that Israel's military and conflict-related emissions since 1948 amount to hundreds of millions of tonnes of CO_2 equivalent, with an associated climate reparation bill of around US$148 billion when the social cost of carbon is applied, underscoring that the occupation's environmental harms are not only local but planetary in scale.[33] A report by the UN Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on the oPt including East Jerusalem and Israel to the Human Rights Council, titled "More than a human can bear", on sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since October 2023, also situates environmental devastation, flattened neighbourhoods, poisoned water, destroyed health systems, as part of the coercive context in which such violence occurs.[34] The most recent report of the CoI further concludes that Israe's actions in Gaza amount to genocide, reinforcing that the environmental destruction documented, including poisoned water, devastation of agricultural land, and the collapse of health and sanitation systems, forms part of a broader pattern of genocidal acts targeting both people and the ecological systems sustaining their survival.[35]



Photo: Bashar Taleb/AFP]

32 Ali et al., Participatory Approaches, 2025.

33 Palestinian Institute for Climate Strategy (PICS) and Tipping Point North South, Military & Conflict-Related Emissions & Climate Reparations for Palestine (September 18, 2025), https://tinyurl.com/44y5acvh

34 UNHRC, "More than a Human Can Bear", A/HRC/58/CRP.6.

35 United Nations Human Rights Council, Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza Pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: Conference Room Paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem, and Israel, A/HRC/60/CRP.3 (16 September 2025).

These environmental injustices are experienced in gendered ways. Palestinian women, particularly in marginalized rural and refugee communities, are often responsible for securing water, fuel and food due to entrenched gender norms that assign women primary responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work, as well as managing household waste and caring for sick or elderly family members. Moreover, studies highlight how women in marginalized areas identify water scarcity, land degradation and climate-related stresses as key obstacles to livelihood and health, compounded by occupation-related restrictions and patriarchal norms.[36] Focus-group research in Jordan Valley communities finds that water insecurity increases women's physical workload, exposes them to harassment when collecting water and contributes to intra-household conflict and violence, as discussed in Chapter 4.[37] WCLAC's extensive body of reports and submissions, including its Beijing+25 and Beijing+30 parallel reports and documentation on access to health in Gaza and settler violence, consistently show that environmental destruction, movement restrictions and infrastructure collapse deepen existing gender inequalities, exacerbate gender-based violence and restrict women's access to essential services, including sexual and reproductive health care.[38]

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that environmental injustices in Palestine are neither episodic nor incidental. They arise from a structural regime that treats Palestinian land, water and air as expendable. This pattern reflects the acts described under Article II(c) of the Genocide Convention, which defines genocide as "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." It undermines the ecological foundations of health and livelihoods and weaponizes environmental degradation as a tool of control and erasure. This structural collapse of environmental systems forms the backdrop against which Palestinian women navigate daily survival. The testimonies examined in later chapters show how these macro-level injustices are inscribed on women's bodies and lives: in contaminated water and food, reproductive and mental health harms, unpaid care burdens and heightened exposure to violence.

36 Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD), Environmental Challenges in Palestine: Gender Perspectives, by Abdel-Rahman Al-Tamimi (October 2021), https://tinyurl.com/9kk6w94u

37 UCL Chadwick Trust, "Water Burdens Me in All Aspects of My Life", 2023.

38 WCLAC, Facing the Double Jeopardy, 2025.

Chapter 3. Climate Injustices in Palestine

Climate models consistently project that historic Palestine will warm sharply and dry out over the coming decades. Analyses of global data show the Eastern Mediterranean – including the West Bank and Gaza Strip – warming 1.5-3°C by mid-century under middle-range scenarios, with even larger rises under high-emission pathways. Rainfall is expected to decline, on the order of 10-20% by 2050-2090, driving longer droughts and heatwaves. Sea levels in the eastern Mediterranean are already rising (~2.8 mm/yr) and are projected to be on the order of 20-110 cm higher by the end of the century, threatening Gaza's low-lying coastal aquifer and farmland.[39] These climate shifts will intensify water scarcity, heat stress, desertification and wildfire risk.[40] In short, Palestine faces one of the world's most acute water and climate vulnerabilities, underscoring an urgent need for adaptation for all inhabitants of a region trapped between warming global temperatures and a repressive political regime.

Structural Climate Injustice Under Occupation

The harsh climate trends in Palestine do not fall on equal shoulders. Under Israeli military occupation, climate vulnerability is manufactured by systemic deprivation of resources and rights. Since 1967 all Palestinian water and land is effectively under Israeli military control – a fact enshrined in Military Orders 92 and 158. Israel appropriates roughly 80% of West Bank water, leaving Palestinians as little as 20-73 liters per person per day while nearby settlers use many times more. Mekorot, the Israeli state-owned water company, drills deep wells in the West Bank for settlements and large agribusinesses, while Palestinian communities are routinely denied permits to drill or repair comparable wells, entrenching settlers' resilience to drought and leaving Palestinians increasingly exposed to water scarcity. Even rainwater cisterns are demolished. In al-Aqabah, a Palestinian village in the northern Jordan Valley, the military's refusal to connect homes to the water network forces residents to buy water at triple the cost, even as a Mekorot pipeline passes nearby.[41] Army checkpoints, closure policies, and permit bans in Area C prevent Palestinians from repairing wells, building rainwater cisterns or greenhouses, or drilling new boreholes. As one expert notes, Israel forbids over 70% of the technical equipment (pumps, water filters, chemicals etc.) needed to maintain Gaza's water and sanitation systems.[42] These restrictions block even basic climate adaptation. Agricultural land is fragmented by settler enclaves and military zones, dumping of industrial waste contaminates fields, and irrigation is stifled – all of which erodes indigenous food and water resilience. In Gaza, decades of blockade and war have turned the aquifer into

39 MedECC, First Mediterranean Assessment Report, 2020.

40 World Bank, European Union (EU), and United Nations (UN), Gaza and West Bank: Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (IRDNA) (February 2025), https://tinyurl.com/y36wyypk

41 Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), The Right to Water in the Occupied Territories: Legal Background (February 2016), https://tinyurl.com/2xcdz7b6

42 Shira Efron, Jordan R. Fischbach, Ilana Blum, Rouslan I. Karimov, and Melinda Moore, "The Public Health Impacts of Gaza's Water Crisis: Analysis and Policy Options," RAND Health Quarterly 8, no. 3 (2019), https://tinyurl.com/4fp2jvvs/

a toxic swamp: over-extraction and seawater intrusion are unchecked, and 95% of groundwater is unsafe to drink.[43] In sum, the structures of occupation – checkpoints, demolitions, permit regimes and siege – systematically weaponize climate hazards. Palestinians face a fabricated scarcity: it is mostly not climate change per se but colonization that deprives them of the means to cope.



Photo: Keren Manor/Activestills

Global Climate Governance and the Belém Gender Action Plan

The relevance of these patterns has been underscored at COP30, where parties adopted the "Belém Gender Action Plan (2026-2034)" as part of efforts to strengthen gender-responsive climate action. It reflects a broad consensus that gender equality, participation, sexual and reproductive health, and protection from violence are central pillars of climate policy.[44] For Palestinian women, whose climate vulnerability is produced through occupation, siege and systemic resource denial, the Belém GAP priorities highlight a critical reality: gender-responsive climate action is impossible without demilitarization, access to land and water, and protection from military violence.

43 World Bank, EU, and UN, IRDNA, 2025.

44 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Proposal by the Presidency on COP 30 Agenda Item 14: Gender and Climate Change – Belém Gender Action Plan (Draft Decision -/CP.30, Version 21/11/2025 3:00) (2025), https://tinyurl.com/55dh49ww



Photo: Flash90

Militarism, Emissions and Ecological Destruction

Military occupation is also a major driver of climate change and ecological harm. Israel's warfare in Gaza – and its global arms exports – not only generate environmental destruction but also colossal greenhouse emissions, dangerously accelerating climate changes globally. Analyses now put a monetary figure on this climate harm: researchers estimate that Israel's military since 1948 is responsible for roughly US$103 billion of climate "debt" (out of $148 billion total) owed to Palestinians in long-term reparations.[45] In the current assault, air strikes and bombardment alone emitted on the order of 0.5 million tonnes of CO_2 in just a few months. Beyond carbon, warfare has obliterated Gaza's green spaces, polluted soils, and poisoned air and water. Rubble from leveled buildings chokes aquifers; asbestos, heavy metals and explosives litter the earth and coast. The killing of trees and destruction of wetlands furthers desertification. Gaza's fisheries have collapsed after years of naval raids and pollution.[46] In short, every bout of militarized violence deepens the climate crisis here, as carbon sinks are incinerated and fragile ecosystems destroyed. This violent ecocide compounds historic water injustice: when adaptation is needed most, war and blockade ensure Palestinian communities must urgently demand both human and environmental rights.

45 PICS and TPNS, Military & Conflict-Related Emissions, 2025.

46 Aya Bseiso, "Navigating Gaza's Weaponised Sea: Resistance against Energy Extraction Projects in Palestine's Waters," shado mag, June 12, 2025, https://tinyurl.com/3f59hmse

Climate Change Deepening Gender Inequalities

Women and girls pay the highest price for these intersecting ecocides. Climate stress amplifies existing gender inequalities, compounding burdens on Palestinian women as caregivers, farmers and heads of household. In Gaza today, the breakdown of health, food and water systems hits women hardest. UNFPA and UN Women emphasize that climate change, gender inequality and reproductive health are inextricably linked across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.[47] There are over 50,000 pregnant women and 337,000 children under five in Gaza currently,[48] many facing severe malnutrition and illness. The Israeli blockade on humanitarian aid means pregnant women cannot get vitamins or prenatal care, while war-time hunger causes anemia, miscarriages and stunting. As one Gazan mother pregnant during the bombardment recalls, "My face is always pale. I have stomach pain from polluted water and the lack of healthy food. Being pregnant during war is unbearable".[49] Women at home also shoulder endless labor: queueing for scarce water, cooking over open flames without fuel, and caring for ill family members. In testimonies gathered by WCLAC-field researcher testimonies, women describe washing clothes by hand while inhaling smoke from makeshift fires, cooking food with cut briquettes, and bathing young children over flames – all worsening respiratory illness and stress.[50] These challenges are layered on top of Israeli restrictions: a woman farmer denied irrigation water and land access feels the squeeze of climate change as deeply as the heat, yet has no legal recourse. In short, climate shocks in Palestine morph into gendered injustice – shifting women's roles from empowered stewards of the household to desperate providers just trying to survive a man-made crisis.

47 UNFPA, Integrated Climate – SRH-GBV Action, 2023.

48 WHO EMRO, "Risk of Disease Spread Soars in Gaza," 2023.

49 Sh.F., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Pregnancy under conditions of hunger, July 2025.

50 Gh.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025; Sh.F., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Pregnancy under conditions of hunger, July 2025.

Intersection: Climate Injustice to Environmental Injustice to Gendered Harm



Photo: Anadolu Ajansı

Climate injustice in Palestine flows seamlessly into broader environmental injustice and back into gendered suffering. The same forces that pump CO_2 into the atmosphere and bullet holes through buildings – Israeli colonial occupation and militarism – create polluted soil and toxic waste that compromise every aspect of health. Women bear the unique harm of this overlap. Water that is scarce is also unsafe; food that is imported is often spoiled or nutritionally empty; the burden of managing these hazards falls disproportionately on women. In one WCLAC interview, a mother from Gaza caring for infants pleaded, "I go for days without eating anything but water – and even that water is not safe to drink".[51] Her words capture the intersection: a displaced woman, denied nourishment by blockade and genocide, feeling the weight of a scarcity produced by climate change. Psychological trauma and community breakdown – driven by ethnic cleansing and environmental destruction – then amplify gender inequality. Sexual violence rises as families break down, and mental health collapses without support. Yet Palestinian women are also leading resistance – building gardens in refugee camps, designing water filters under siege, and demanding rights-based climate solutions. A feminist, rights-based framing reminds us that justice here means not only reducing carbon emissions, but dismantling colonial power. It means recognizing Palestinian women's resource sovereignty and ensuring climate reparations fund maternal care, clean water, and livelihood restoration. Ultimately, the climate crisis in Palestine is less a natural disaster than a political one, and addressing it requires both environmental remediation and the liberation of Palestinian People.

51 J.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025.

Chapter 4. Gendered Injustices

This chapter examines how environmental degradation, climate stress and the policies of occupation converge on women's bodies, time and livelihoods. Drawing on testimonies from women in Gaza, and complemented by quantitative and legal evidence presented in earlier chapters, it shows how the destruction of land, food systems, water and basic infrastructure produces distinctly gendered harms. These harms range from reproductive and maternal health crises to heightened exposure to gender-based violence, intensified unpaid care work and the erosion of women's dignity and autonomy.



Photo: B'Tselem

While many of the patterns identified are not new, the current phase of genocide and siege in Gaza has escalated them to an unprecedented level. Famine conditions, the collapse of health and WASH systems, and mass displacement have turned already fragile environments into spaces where everyday survival is uncertain. Within these conditions, women's responsibilities for children, elderly relatives, household food and water make them both first responders and last to eat or rest. Their testimonies and experiences tell stories about environmental and climate injustices that are inscribed on their bodies and daily routines.

4.1 Reproductive and maternal health under siege

Reproductive and maternal health is a central site where environmental destruction, hunger and exposure to toxic pollution materialize as direct violations of women's rights. The collapse of maternity services, combined with contamination of air, water and food, has created conditions in which pregnancy itself becomes life-threatening.

A.M.Y.K., a 24-year-old widow from Gaza City, became pregnant during one of the most severe periods of food shortage.[52] For months she survived with almost no access to flour, fruit, vegetables, eggs or protein. Essential supplements such as folic acid – routinely prescribed to prevent neural tube defects and other congenital anomalies – were simply unavailable in both hospitals and pharmacies. As her pregnancy progressed, she experienced persistent vomiting and uncontrolled hypertension, conditions that require close monitoring and adequate nutrition. When she finally managed to access diagnostic imaging in her fifth month of pregnancy, doctors found severe fetal malformations. Several specialists confirmed that key organs, including the bladder and lungs, were absent and that fluid had accumulated in the fetus's abdomen.

The head of the maternity ward ultimately advised termination of the fetus to save A.M.Y.K.'s life.[53] She described the procedure and its aftermath as "real death", recounting that she woke from anesthesia to see the body of her baby girl – a child she had longed for as a sister for her young son. Medical staff informed her that the malformations were consistent with exposure to toxic gases and smoke from bombardments in northern Gaza, where she had remained throughout repeated airstrikes and displacement. Already weakened by malnutrition, A.M.Y.K. struggled to recover from blood loss and the psychological shock of losing both her baby and, later, her husband, who was killed while distributing food to displaced families.

Other women described pregnancies and births that unfolded entirely under famine and infrastructural collapse. A.M.Y.K., who is in her mid-twenties, learned she was pregnant only after returning to a destroyed neighbourhood in northern Gaza.[54] Throughout her pregnancy she lacked access to folic acid, iron or regular antenatal care. Overcrowded and under-resourced hospitals admitted only emergency cases and the wounded, while private clinics were unaffordable. She reported feeling her baby's movements weaken and having to rely on small amounts of sugar to stimulate fetal movement, because nutritious foods had disappeared or become prohibitively expensive. She lost almost ten kilograms during pregnancy, experienced stomach pain linked to polluted water, and faced the prospect of giving birth in a health system with no equipment, limited staff and active bombardment.

52 A.M.Y.K., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Miscarriage caused by war-related trauma and malnutrition, July 2025.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

These testimonies illustrate how reproductive and maternal health cannot be separated from environmental and climate realities. Toxic air, contaminated water, rubble and debris, and the systematic obstruction of food and medical supplies combine to create what many Palestinian and international experts have begun to describe as structural reproductive violence. Under occupation and siege, women's right to decide the conditions under which they become pregnant, carry a pregnancy to term or access safe termination is effectively denied by a material environment that makes safe motherhood impossible.



Photo: Reuters

Based on testimonies collected by WCLAC, patterns of reproductive harm during the Israeli occupation and the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip raise serious concerns under Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defines genocide as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. The evidence highlights miscarriages, premature births and stillbirths linked to extreme stress, physical injury, forced displacement and severe malnutrition. Pregnant women have also reported invasive searches, detention, denial of access to hospitals and the necessity of giving birth in unsafe conditions, including ambulances or overcrowded shelters, sometimes resulting in the separation of mothers from premature newborns.

In addition, the destruction of hospitals, shortages of fuel and medical supplies, the blockade on aid and the collapse of neonatal services have created conditions in which infant survival is severely compromised. Reports of babies dying from malnutrition, lack of formula and absence of intensive care raise further legal concerns regarding the infliction of conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction and measures that effectively prevent births within the group.

4.2 Menstrual health and dignity

Menstrual health is a further area where environmental collapse and displacement have immediate gendered consequences. While often marginalized in humanitarian assessments, access to menstrual products, clean water and private sanitation is essential to women's dignity, mobility and participation in public life.

Several women in Gaza emphasized that they are unable to secure sanitary pads for themselves and their daughters. S.A.H, a 52-year-old mother of twelve, now lives with her daughters in a tent pitched directly on a street in central Gaza after their home in Beit Hanoun was destroyed. Her family faces severe hunger, but she also struggles to meet basic hygiene needs.[55] Her daughters, aged 19, 16 and 25, lack menstrual products; the tent has no bathroom; and water is scarce. The family uses a small bucket inside the tent for urination and defecation, covering the entrance with cloth to create minimal privacy. For S.A.H and her daughters, menstruation has become a source of profound humiliation and discomfort, managed without adequate supplies or facilities and under constant fear of exposure.



Photo: Abed Rahim Khatib/Flash90

55 S.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Severe living conditions and killing of her eldest son before her eyes, July 2025.

Other testimonies and WCLAC's wider documentation from Gaza echo similar realities: women resorting to improvised materials for menstruation, sometimes re-using them without adequate washing because clean water is scarce, and managing their periods in overcrowded shelters or tents where there is no separate space for women. These conditions increase risks of infection and undermine women's sense of bodily integrity. They also restrict movement, as women may avoid leaving the tent or standing in aid lines while menstruating because of fear of leakage and stigma.

The environmental dimensions of this crisis are clear. The destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure, contamination of groundwater, and the breakdown of supply chains for basic goods all contribute to a situation where menstrual health is neither recognized nor resourced. From a rights-based perspective, this constitutes a form of gender-specific degrading treatment linked directly to occupation, war-induced environmental collapse, and ban of Humanitarian Aid.

4.3 Mental health, trauma and eco-anxiety

The testimonies also reveal pervasive psychological harm. Women describe a cumulative burden of grief, fear, humiliation and uncertainty about the future. This is not only related to direct violence and loss, but also to living for months or years in degraded environments where basic needs cannot be met.

A.M.Y.K. recounted falling into deep depression upon learning of her fetus's malformations and subsequent loss, compounded by the constant threat of bombardment and lack of adequate food.[56] S.A.H spoke of "constant suffocation, shaking and panic" after witnessing her eldest son killed instantly in front of her tent and being unable to process his absence.[57] She takes antidepressant medication but continues to relive the moment of his death as a recurring nightmare.

J.H., a 31-year-old mother living in a tent in central Gaza, described feeling "lost" and ashamed of being a burden on her already struggling family. She has diabetes and hypertension exacerbated by severe malnutrition.[58] After years of domestic abuse from her husband, she now shoulders sole responsibility for her children in conditions of famine and displacement. She experiences constant anxiety and anger, sometimes directed at her children, and is receiving psychological support, yet feels that her distress is inseparable from the material conditions around her: "There is no food, no supplies, no aid distributions. I live a life with nothing."

These narratives illustrate forms of eco-anxiety and trauma that emerge when environmental destruction and climate-related hazards are experienced as intentional, prolonged and inescapable. The testimony of M.A. further illustrates this: as she watched

56 A.M.Y.K., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Miscarriage caused by war-related deformities and malnutrition, July 2025.

57 S.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Severe living conditions and killing of her eldest son before her eyes, July 2025.

58 J.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine and domestic violence, July 2025.

her three-year-old son deteriorate from severe malnutrition, she described feeling "panicked, helpless and ashamed" that she could not find the food doctors said would save his life, which is a psychological burden inseparable from the environmental and political conditions that produced the famine.[59] All the women interviewed are acutely aware that their suffering is not the result of a natural disaster, but of human decisions to bomb infrastructure, restrict aid and maintain a blockade. This awareness intensifies feelings of abandonment and injustice, and underscores the need to understand mental health in Palestine as rooted in both political violence and environmental harm.

4.4 Gender-based violence in contexts of war and scarcity

Gender-based violence (GBV) is both reinforced and reshaped by the current environmental and humanitarian crisis. While conflict-related sexual violence has received increasing international attention, the testimonies here underline how structural violence and domestic abuse escalate under the pressure of hunger, displacement and destroyed livelihoods.

J.H.'s testimony is central in this regard. She describes a husband who routinely beat and insulted her, showed no concern for his children and refused to provide for the family even before she left him.[60] Under siege conditions, his neglect and violence became intertwined with economic and environmental precarity: he demanded that she "find food any way [she] can" while he refused to seek work or aid. The constant physical violence left her with psychological scars that persist even after separation; she continues to experience anxiety and anger, which she sometimes directs towards her children.

In such contexts, food and water scarcity, lack of income and overcrowded shelters create conditions where tensions escalate and patriarchal norms harden. Women's dependence on male relatives for access to aid, transport or cash can expose them to coercion and abuse. At the same time, limited access to safe reporting mechanisms, shelters and legal remedies – themselves constrained by occupation and the collapse of institutions – means that many forms of GBV remain invisible or unaddressed.

These patterns highlight the need to view GBV not as an isolated issue, but as part of a continuum of gendered harm that includes environmental injustice and deprivation. When women are forced to endure hunger, queue for aid under fire, live without privacy in tents or rely on abusive partners for survival, their exposure to violence increases. Any effective response must therefore integrate environmental, humanitarian and protection interventions.

59 M.A., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, WCLAC testimony, Gaza – Al-Rantisi Hospital, 25 July 2025.

60 J.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine and domestic violence, July 2025.

4.5 Care work, livelihoods and time poverty

The destruction of livelihoods and basic services has dramatically increased women's unpaid care and survival work. As men are killed, injured or rendered unable to work, women assume primary responsibility for feeding families, caring for children, supporting elderly relatives and managing the logistics of life in displacement. This labor is largely invisible in official statistics, yet it is essential to sustaining life under siege.

S.A.H's story again illustrates this dynamic. With her eldest son – the family's main provider – killed, and her husband elderly, mentally ill and physically unwell, she is now responsible for caring for a large family of children and her spouse in a tent with no reliable access to food or water.[61] She must coordinate begging for food from neighbours, send her teenage sons to stand in aid lines, manage her daughters' health and hygiene needs, and attend to her husband's deteriorating condition. This unpaid labor is physically exhausting and emotionally draining, particularly when combined with her own injuries from shrapnel and ongoing grief.

Other women describe similar burdens: washing clothes by hand for entire families because washing machines and electricity are unavailable; standing for hours in queues under the sun to obtain a few litres of water or a single meal from communal kitchens; spending nights awake due to children's hunger, fear of bombardment or illness. One pregnant woman explained that heating water for bathing requires her to stand over open fires that produce dense smoke, causing her eyes to burn and leaving soot on her face and hands. She described feeling that she had "lost [her] femininity", as the constant physical labor and exposure to smoke and dirt made it impossible to care for her own body.[62]

At the same time, women's opportunities for paid work have collapsed. Many had limited access to formal employment before the current war; now, with markets destroyed and mobility restricted, even informal income-generating activities are difficult. This combination of increased unpaid care work and loss of income deepens women's economic dependence and undermines their ability to exercise autonomy, reinforcing patterns of gendered poverty described in previous WCLAC submissions.

This intensification of unpaid care work is directly linked to environmental and infrastructure collapse. When water networks, sanitation systems, electricity supply and household fuel access are destroyed or restricted, the work of securing water, cooking, cleaning and caregiving is displaced into the home and overwhelmingly onto women. Environmental destruction therefore functions not only as ecological harm, but as a driver of women's time poverty, physical exhaustion and economic dependency.

61 S.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Severe living conditions and killing of her eldest son before her eyes, July 2025.

62 Gh.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025.

4.6 Food, water and environmental insecurity in women's daily lives

Across the testimonies, women consistently frame their suffering through the lens of hunger and unsafe water. They are often the last to eat, prioritizing children and husbands, and the first to feel the physical effects of famine and dehydration. Environmental conditions – extreme heat in tents made of plastic sheeting, exposure to insects and pests, and the inhalation of smoke from burning wood or waste – intensify their vulnerability.

J.H., who is 31 years old, reports weighing only 43 kilograms, with frequent episodes of low blood pressure, dizziness and drops in blood sugar due to lack of food.[63] She sometimes survives on water alone for days, yet even that water is unsafe. Gh.A.H., a 26-year-old mother of two, explains that she often eats nothing and drinks almost no water because of scarcity, leaving her too weak to produce sufficient breast milk for her baby, who cries constantly from hunger.[64] A doctor has told her she is in stage-two malnutrition, but with no food available she cannot recover.

Several women describe their small children suffering from severe malnutrition, with dangerously low blood sugar, rapid weight loss and weakened immune systems. One mother recounts how her three-year-old son's body swelled and developed red patches due to profound protein and vitamin deficiency after months of living in a tent without access to eggs, milk, fruit or meat.[65] Even when parents have some money, food often does not exist in the market, or prices are so inflated that a single tin of infant formula costs far more than a family's remaining savings.

M.A., a 33-year-old mother displaced from Tel al-Hawa, described one of the most severe cases of child malnutrition documented in WCLAC's testimonies.[66] Her three-year-old son, Amir, developed abdominal pain, intestinal infection and red patches on his skin after months of living in a tent without access to protein, milk, eggs, fruit or meat. As the famine intensified, his body began to swell, his immune system collapsed and his nutritional indicators fell to critically low levels. Doctors explained that he required eggs and milk to survive, foods that are entirely unavailable in Gaza under siege and genocide. She recounted: "We have some money, but money means nothing when food doesn't exist."

Unable to find the food prescribed, she watched her son weaken until he could no longer stand or walk. He survived only because another child, recently discharged, left behind a single IV protein infusion that doctors administered to him "by chance." M.A. emphasized the terror of raising a child in a landscape where every recommended

63 J.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine and domestic violence, July 2025.

64 Gh.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025.

65 L.A., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025; Gh.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025; M.A., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025 (especially M.A.'s account of her three-year-old son, Amir).

66 M.A., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025.

treatment, such as milk, fruit, protein, is impossible to obtain.[67] She says, "he keeps asking me for oranges and apples. Before the war we had everything. Now I cry every time."

These experiences confirm that women are managing the frontline of food insecurity and water scarcity. They are responsible for rationing scarce supplies, deciding who eats and how much, and seeking out aid in dangerous conditions. The environmental degradation documented in Chapter 2, including contaminated groundwater, destroyed sewage and desalination systems, and toxic dust from rubble, is a direct cause of these everyday struggles by making water unsafe, food systems collapse and disease risks surge.

For women, environmental injustice is experienced not as a distant ecological concern, but as the inability to feed a child, access safe drinking water or protect a baby from infection.

4.7 Displacement, shelter conditions and loss of privacy

Forced mass displacement, which disproportionately affects women and children, immediately erodes the fundamental rights to dignity and security. When hundreds of thousands are driven into precarious living conditions like tents, makeshift shelters, schools, destroyed homes, and overcrowded public buildings, the resulting loss of privacy translates directly into severe gendered harm. For women and girls, this environment removes safe spaces essential for intimate bodily functions, such as sleeping, changing clothes, breastfeeding, and managing menstruation. The absence of separation between public and private life compromises their bodily integrity and increases vulnerability to health risks, stigma, and gender-based violence (GBV), ultimately denying them the basic ability to rest or maintain personal dignity.

S.A.H and her daughters live in a tent pitched on a street, where her husband and sons sleep outside on the sand and the girls sleep inside. There is no separation between living, sleeping and sanitation spaces. The family uses a bucket for a toilet, which they empty nearby, further contaminating an already degraded environment. Gh.A.H. lives in a similarly overcrowded tent with her extended family, without a bathroom or independent space of her own. She describes the tent as "the height of humiliation and suffering", with extreme heat in the summer, bitter cold in the winter, and a constant presence of insects, flies and crawling pests.[68]

Another woman, L.A., shares a small shelter with three families – twelve people in total.[69] Caring for a malnourished infant in such conditions requires constant vigilance and sacrifices of sleep, food and emotional stability. The lack of lighting at night and

67 Ibid.

68 Gh.A.H., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025.

69 L.A., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025.

the sounds of bombing, planes and stray dogs leave young children terrified and mothers unable to calm them.

These shelter conditions are not incidental; they are the direct outcome of large-scale destruction of housing, schools and public infrastructure. For women, they mean a profound loss of bodily privacy and control over intimate aspects of life. The resulting distress and shame are part of the broader pattern of gendered harm produced by environmental and military violence, and displacement here becomes an environmental health crisis, and women bear its most intimate consequences through loss of privacy, increased infection risk and heightened vulnerability to violence.

4.8 Intersectional vulnerabilities and compounded discrimination

Finally, the testimonies demonstrate that gendered injustices are experienced in intersectional ways. Age, marital status, disability, widowhood, displacement history and socio-economic status all shape how environmental and climate harms are felt.

Widows like A.M.Y.K. face the combined burden of grief, single parenthood and economic precarity in a context where employment opportunities have collapsed.[70] Older women like S.A.H must cope with their own health needs, care for large families and support husbands with serious physical and mental health conditions, all while navigating displacement and loss. Young mothers such as Sh.F. and L.A. are simultaneously caring for infants and unborn children, mourning murdered relatives, and managing hunger and environmental hazards.[71]

Women with chronic illnesses – diabetes, hypertension, mental health conditions, calcium deficiency – are especially vulnerable when medicines, nutritious food and clean water are unavailable. Those living in tents or makeshift shelters face higher exposure to heatwaves, cold snaps, vector-borne diseases and respiratory infections, all of which are worsened by climate change and environmental degradation. For many, displacement has been repeated, with multiple evacuations and returns to destroyed neighbourhoods, eroding any remaining social support networks.

These intersecting vulnerabilities confirm that climate and environmental injustices in Palestine cannot be addressed without tackling the underlying structures of occupation, blockade and gender discrimination. They also highlight that women are not a homogeneous group; any legal, humanitarian or policy response must recognize and prioritize those who are most at risk – including widows, single mothers, elderly women, women with disabilities and those living in informal shelters and displacement camps.

70 A.M.Y.K., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Miscarriage caused by war-related deformities and malnutrition, July 2025.

71 Sh.F., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Pregnancy under conditions of hunger, July 2025; L.A., Field Researcher: Safad Al-Qishawi, Malnutrition due to famine, July 2025.

Chapter 5. Women as Agents of Change

Palestinian women's environmental and climate agency emerges from the same landscape of occupation, patriarchy and ecological collapse described in the previous chapters. WCLAC's long history of documenting gender-based violence, settler attacks, demolitions and political repression shows that women are not only victims of intersecting harms.

Testimonies documented by WCLAC field researchers, and analysed within the framework of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), consistently show that Palestinian women are disproportionately subjected to systematic violence resulting from the Israeli occupation. This violence manifests through a complex intersection of harms, including settler terrorism, home demolitions, forced displacement, reproductive and sexual violence, abuses against female prisoners, the use of women as human shields during night raids in refugee camps, and the pervasive humiliation and sexual harassment experienced daily at checkpoints, highlighting how occupation structures perpetuate intertwined political and gender-specific violations.



Photo: OSV News photo/Dawoud Abu Alkas, Reuters

But women are also agents of change, organisers and caregivers who hold together the social and ecological fabric of their communities. Their agency is not exercised in conditions of choice or abundance; it is carved out of siege, displacement and structural discrimination. This chapter therefore understands women's "resilience" not as an individual trait to be celebrated, but as a political practice that contests environmental injustice while exposing the failures of state and international duty-bearers.

Everyday survival work is one of the most important, yet least visible, forms of

environmental resistance. In Gaza, women interviewed by WCLAC testimonies describe surviving months of famine-like conditions, queuing for hours for unsafe water, negotiating scarce bread and baby formula, and improvising cooking and heating with scrap wood and open fires. After repeated forced displacement and the destruction of homes, women organize communal cooking in tents and makeshift shelters; they pool food rations, share child-care, and take turns queuing at aid lines despite the risk of being shot at distribution points.[72]

These practices are not merely humanitarian; they are political. Deliberate Israeli attacks on water systems, cropland and energy infrastructure aim to make life unliveable and pressure people to leave. By keeping families fed "just enough" to survive, maintaining mutual-aid networks and insisting on staying on their land whenever possible, women undermine this logic. The everyday acts documented in WCLAC's testimonies – from sharing bread, washing children's clothes by hand when there is no electricity or detergent, and turning cloth scraps into nappies to walking long distances to find a loaf of bread – all sustain community cohesion under an intentional system of environmental collapse. They keep open the possibility of collective recovery in places that have been targeted for erasure.

Women are also on the front lines of defending land, water and livelihoods, particularly in rural West Bank areas, the Jordan Valley and Area C. ActionAid Palestine documents how women farmers have lost orchards and greenhouses to frost, drought and heatwaves intensified by climate change, and Israeli settlers arson attacks, while Israeli restrictions on wells, cisterns and irrigation networks make adaptation almost impossible. Yet women continue to cultivate small plots, keep goats and poultry, and maintain household gardens as buffers against food insecurity.[73]

Environmental activists such as Abeer Al Butmeh of PENGON/FOE Palestine describe how women's committees rehabilitate springs, protect communal grazing land and replant trees after settler arson and sewage flooding. They experiment with drought-resistant crops, revive seed-saving practices and insist on returning to fields even when exposed to Israeli Occupation's harassment and violence.[74]

In the Gaza Strip, women farmers and cooperatives have worked with organizations like PENGON to assess soil and water contamination, plan for the recovery of solar-powered irrigation systems and advocate for recognition of ecocide-like destruction of agricultural land as a crime that must be repaired[75]. These efforts resist the attempt to render Palestinian land disposable and uninhabitable.

Community organizing, legal mobilization and advocacy form another crucial layer of women's environmental and climate agency. WCLAC's own practice is rooted in supporting women to document violations: such as night raids, house demolitions,

72 UNSDG, " 'We Need Real Action'," 2024.

73 ActionAid Palestine, "ActionAid Palestine to Shed the Light on the Impact of Climate Crisis on Palestinian Women," March 8, 2022, https://tinyurl.com/5fjwuyhx

74 Al Butmeh, "Palestine Women Defending Water," 2021.

75 PENGON, "Ecological Effects of the War on Gaza," 2025.

settler violence, water denial, movement restrictions and environmental contamination, and that is primarily to bring their testimonies before UN treaty bodies and special procedures. Women have contributed evidence to reports submitted to CEDAW, CESCR, CAT, the Human Rights Committee and the Universal Periodic Review, linking environmental violations and denial of natural resources to gender-based violence, health harms and forced displacement. Through this work, Palestinian women are not only narrating their suffering; they are shaping international legal debates on apartheid, ecocide and reproductive violence.

At the local level, women participate in village councils, camp committees, agricultural cooperatives and neighbourhood groups that organize around water access, waste management, renewable energy and anti-demolition campaigns. Beijing+30 and earlier Beijing+25 civil-society reports coordinated by WCLAC and Al-Muntada highlight women's leadership in campaigns to protect springs and communal lands, challenge discriminatory planning and zoning in Area C and East Jerusalem, and demand gender-responsive environmental policies from Palestinian authorities.[76] Legal empowerment such as knowing one's rights to land, water, housing and health, and how to invoke international mechanisms, is itself a form of climate and environmental justice work, particularly when states and occupying powers refuse to act.

Women's environmental agency is also deeply rooted in indigenous and local knowledge systems that have sustained life under chronic scarcity. The "Water Stories" project, which collects narratives of older Palestinian women as "water-keepers," shows how they historically managed cisterns, rooftop tanks and communal springs, and how they rationed water for drinking, animals and crops in ways that minimized waste and conflict.[77] Similar bodies of knowledge exist around seed selection, food preservation, fuel-saving cooking methods and coping with heat, which are transmitted across generations in families and women's networks. These practices represent low-carbon, community-centred adaptation strategies long before "climate adaptation" entered policy language. Yet Israeli policies of land confiscation, settlement expansion and forced displacement continually erode these knowledge systems by separating women from their fields, wells and ancestral homes.

At the same time, the costs and risks of women's agency are severe. WCLAC's submissions to UN mechanisms document how women human-rights defenders, including those who speak out about settlements, environmental violations or sexual violence, face intimidation, arbitrary arrest, smear campaigns and threats from Israeli authorities, settlers and, at times, within their own communities. Women leading local campaigns against demolitions or water cuts may be targeted with increased surveillance, denial of permits or harassment at checkpoints. Under conditions of siege and deepening poverty, women who take on public roles can also face family pressure, gendered stigma and backlash rooted in patriarchal norms.

76 WCLAC, Facing the Double Jeopardy, 2025.

77 Kholoud Al-Ajarma, Ghadeer Arafeh, and Jawida Mansour, «Water Stories: Older Women and Water Management Practices in Palestine» (Working Paper, Centre for Mediterranean Integration of the United Nations Office for Project Services, 2022), https://tinyurl.com/yafk9rdc

The Gaza testimonies collected by WCLAC illustrate the emotional and physical costs of sustaining families in unliveable conditions: women suffering hypertension, malnutrition, miscarriages and severe psychological distress while continuing to care for children and elders, search for food and water, and support neighbours. Agency here is not a sign that conditions are acceptable; it is a survival response to structural abandonment. It must never be used to justify further cuts to aid, delay reconstruction or shift responsibility away from those who are legally obliged to end occupation, lift the blockade and ensure access to water, food, health care and a safe environment.

Recognizing Palestinian women as environmental and climate actors therefore requires a double move. On the one hand, their everyday survival work, land defence, organizing and knowledge-sharing contradict dominant narratives that portray Palestinian women only as victims of war and disaster. On the other, a feminist and decolonial lens insists that this agency remains structurally constrained by military rule, colonial dispossession, legal discrimination and climate breakdown. WCLAC's feminist vision, which forms the basis for this study, is precisely to hold these two truths together: to document women's resistance and creativity while refusing to normalize the conditions that make such extreme forms of resilience necessary.

The stories and practices highlighted in this chapter point beyond individual coping strategies towards broader projects of structural change. Women's demands for an end to the blockade, for the protection and restoration of land and water, for the repeal of discriminatory laws, for accountability for environmental crimes and gender-based violence, and for meaningful participation in climate and reconstruction planning, are integral to any just recovery in Palestine. Their experiences offer a crucial realisation that should inform climate policy at all levels: that climate action without demilitarization, decolonization and gender equality will reproduce the very harms it claims to address. The final chapter builds on this insight to set out concrete recommendations for states, international institutions and Palestinian authorities to support Palestinian women's environmental and climate work, not as a substitute for their own obligations, but as part of a broader struggle for rights, reparations and liberation.

Chapter 6. Summary

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that environmental and climate harms in the occupied Palestinian territory are not isolated crises. In the current context of the genocidal war on Gaza, the Israeli systematic destruction of life-sustaining ecosystems, infrastructure and agricultural land constitutes an act of ecocide intended to render the environment uninhabitable. This environmental collapse, combined with the deliberate targeting of healthcare, food and water systems, produces a form of reproductive genocide in which toxic exposure, extreme malnutrition, the absence of medical care and continuous bombardment make safe pregnancy, childbirth and the survival of newborn life almost impossible. The convergence of genocide, ecocide and reproductive genocide reflects a complete breakdown of climate justice. For Palestinian women, this combination of crimes is a lived reality in which survival on degraded and poisoned land is experienced not only as environmental destruction but as the most extreme form of gendered and political violence. Nor are they the result of natural vulnerability. They are structural outcomes of a political system that governs land, water and natural resources through military control, and of a climate context in which the impacts of warming, drought and ecological collapse fall most heavily on those already denied basic rights. For Palestinian women, these harms converge on the body: in unsafe pregnancies, contaminated water, toxic air, demolished homes, extreme food scarcity and the collapse of sanitation and health systems. Their stories show that environmental injustice under occupation is experienced not only as ecological degradation, but as a form of gendered violence.

Across the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, women described environments in which the basic conditions for health, safety and dignity have been systematically eroded. In Gaza, the destruction of water networks, sewage systems and cropland, combined with the blockade's restriction on fuel, medicine and materials, has produced an environmental collapse that turns daily tasks into life-threatening responsibilities. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, discriminatory planning laws, settler wastewater, land confiscation, and the demolition of wells and cisterns undermine women's livelihoods and household security. Climate change magnifies these patterns, intensifying heat, drought, water scarcity and disease while Palestinians are denied the very tools needed to adapt, such as basic mobility, infrastructure, and resources.

The climate crisis in Palestine therefore cannot be separated from the occupation. Rising temperatures and declining rainfall deepen water apartheid, accelerate agricultural loss and heighten the risks of disease and displacement. Military operations, settlement expansion and the destruction of natural systems contribute to greenhouse-gas emissions and large-scale ecological harm, including the contamination of air, soil and aquifers. At the very moment when communities require resilient infrastructure, the structures of occupation dismantle it. The testimonies of women reveal how this manufactured vulnerability turns environmental shocks into gendered emergencies.

These intersections are clearest in the realm of reproductive and maternal health.

Women spoke of pregnancies unfolding without access to nutritious food, folic acid, clean drinking water, safe delivery services or basic medical care. Some recounted miscarriages linked to toxic smoke, malnutrition and continuous bombardment. Others described giving birth in overcrowded hospitals, tents or damaged clinics without equipment, light or privacy. These experiences underscore that reproductive health cannot be safeguarded when the environmental foundations of life—water, soil, air, shelter, and basic warmth—are intentionally degraded. Under such conditions, environmental destruction becomes a form of reproductive violence.

Women's testimonies also highlight mental health harms rooted in material deprivation and ecological collapse. Chronic hunger, displacement, contaminated water, exposure to rubble dust and the deaths of family members combine to produce acute anxiety, depression, insomnia and trauma. Many women described "suffocation," panic attacks, and the psychological weight of caring for children through famine and bombardment with no resources to protect them. This distress is inseparable from the environment in which it arises: a landscape of toxic air, open sewage, disease risks and continuous insecurity.

Gender-based violence is similarly shaped by environmental scarcity and displacement. The collapse of livelihoods, overcrowded shelters, water shortages, and the breakdown of social safety networks intensify domestic tensions and expose women to heightened risks of coercion and abuse. Limited access to aid, transport, privacy and legal remedies further constrain women's ability to seek support. These patterns reflect the continuum of violence that emerges when patriarchal norms intersect with military occupation and environmental collapse.

The testimonies in this report reveal the enormous labor women undertake to sustain life in conditions of deprivation. They queue for hours for unsafe water, improvise cooking fuel from rubble and debris, ration food among hungry children, wash clothes by hand, and carry infants through displacement routes. They rebuild routines after each bombing, search for scarce medicine and formula, and negotiate daily survival in tents without sanitation, electricity or protection from heat and winter rains. This unpaid care work, intensified by environmental destruction, represents one of the most profound gendered impacts of the current crisis.

Yet the report also shows that Palestinian women are not merely absorbing the consequences of ecological and political violence, but they are actively resisting it. In rural communities, women protect springs, rehabilitate land and maintain seed-saving practices. They organize communal kitchens, mutual-aid networks and psychosocial support under siege. They document human-rights violations, advocate in international forums, preserve indigenous knowledge and rebuild community structures despite displacement and loss. Their agency is neither incidental nor symbolic; it is central to environmental stewardship, climate adaptation and community survival.

Recognizing this agency, however, does not diminish the structural injustice that conditions it. Women's resilience is not a substitute for state responsibility, nor can it compensate for the environmental destruction and legal discrimination that shape

their lives. A feminist, rights-based understanding of climate and environmental justice requires acknowledging that meaningful adaptation and recovery are impossible without ending the policies that deliberately erode the ecological foundations of Palestinian life.

Any just response to the intersecting crises documented here must therefore rest on several core principles. First, environmental destruction under occupation must be understood as a violation of international humanitarian and human-rights law, with gender-specific impacts that require targeted protection and accountability. Second, reconstruction and adaptation efforts must prioritize the restoration of water systems, sanitation infrastructure, healthcare, energy access and safe housing, with explicit attention to the needs and rights of women and girls. Third, Palestinian women must be active participants in shaping environmental and climate policy, both within Palestinian institutions and in international processes. Their knowledge, labor and leadership are essential for any sustainable recovery. Finally, the international community must ensure that humanitarian access, environmental remediation and gender-responsive support are not treated as charity, but as legal obligations arising from the duties of occupying powers and the global commitments to climate justice, gender equality and ecological protection.

Taken together, the findings of this report show that climate and environmental injustices in Palestine are inseparable from the political conditions that give rise to them. They also show that Palestinian women, despite facing profound deprivation and violence, remain central to preserving life, protecting land and sustaining communities. Addressing their needs, amplifying their voices and safeguarding their rights is essential not only for gender equality, but for the possibility of a just, dignified and sustainable future in Palestine.

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