



General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 February 2025

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-eighth session

24 February–4 April 2025

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Iranian Elite Research Center, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 February 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Conflict in the Gaza Strip and Extensive Environmental Damage

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis and extensive environmental damage, profoundly affecting livelihoods and infrastructure in both Gaza and the West Bank. Since the outbreak of hostilities on October 7, 2023, civilian casualties have escalated dramatically, particularly among women and children. Over 2.1 million people have been displaced, and more than 70,000 housing units have been destroyed, leaving countless families homeless and increasingly vulnerable.

According to the United Nations Satellite Centre (UNOSAT), approximately 66 percent of all structures in the Gaza Strip have sustained damage, totaling 163,778 buildings. This includes 52,564 that are completely destroyed, 18,913 severely damaged, 35,591 possibly damaged, and 56,710 moderately affected. The extensive destruction of residential, commercial, and other infrastructures exacerbates the humanitarian crisis, complicates recovery efforts, and hinders access to essential services.

The immediate carbon emissions from the war have been staggering, with estimates suggesting that around 536,410 tonnes of carbon dioxide were emitted in the first 120 days, 90% of which is attributed to Israeli airstrikes and ground operations. This level of carbon output exceeds the annual carbon footprint of many climate-vulnerable nations. Additionally, heavy metals have contaminated the environment due to intensive bombings.

Air quality has deteriorated as a result of chemical pollutants from munitions, such as white phosphorus, which not only endangers human health but also harms agricultural land and crops. Water resources have been critically compromised, with approximately 60,000 cubic meters of untreated sewage and wastewater flowing daily into the Mediterranean Sea. Before the conflict, Gaza's drinking water system was already inadequate, with 90-95% of groundwater deemed undrinkable. By April 2024, Gazans had access to only 2 to 8 liters per person per day, a drastic decrease from 85 liters per person per day before October 2023. Research indicates that a minimum of 20 liters per capita is required to meet essential health and hygiene needs.

The destruction of agricultural lands—exacerbated by a decades of blockade that restricted essential farming inputs—has led to severe food insecurity, with 57% of Gaza's cropland damaged as of May 2024. The conflict has also adversely impacted the fishing sector, with reports indicating that 70% of Gaza's fishing fleet has been destroyed. Livestock are starving due to food shortages, severely limiting food production.

Moreover, olive trees, which are crucial for their cultural significance and economic contributions to Palestinian society, have been deliberately targeted by Israeli forces. This destruction symbolizes the broader dispossession of Palestinians from their heritage and ability to access land and resources. The systemic targeting of olive trees reflects a larger pattern of land and property destruction, particularly in the West Bank, which carries significant implications for Palestinian livelihoods, food security, and environmental stability.

Ultimately, the war's repercussions extend far beyond immediate humanitarian needs, fundamentally altering the socio-economic landscape of Gaza. The halt of most economic activities has led to drastically reduced job opportunities, soaring unemployment rates, and widespread economic despair. The ongoing displacement of workers and destruction of means of production have made it nearly impossible to sustain economic activity, resulting in either a complete stop to work or reliance on informal, irregular employment focused primarily on essential goods and services.

Overall, the protracted state of conflict has critical and long-lasting consequences not only for the population's immediate survival but also for the environment and agricultural sustainability in the region.

Recommendation

We urge the Human Rights Council to remind its member states of several critical recommendations for addressing the ongoing crisis in Palestine. First and foremost, a global embargo on all arms sales and transfers is essential to prevent further escalation and violence. Furthermore, an end to the illegal occupation of Palestine must be prioritized to pave the way for peace and stability in the region. The Council should also facilitate access for investigators and environmental specialists to conduct field-based surveys, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the situation on the ground. International and regional donor support should be directed towards developing water infrastructure, critical for the health and well-being of affected communities. Additionally, comprehensive post-war environmental assessments are needed to evaluate the damage and implement effective restoration strategies. Sustainable reconstruction efforts must focus on climate mitigation and resilience policies while actively involving local communities in the process. Lastly, it is imperative to establish measures to hold Israel accountable for the damage inflicted in Gaza, particularly those actions that violate its international obligations. Collectively, these recommendations aim to foster accountability, promote environmental sustainability, and support the rights and livelihoods of the Palestinian people.

-A Year of War in Gaza: Impacts on Employment and Livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, ILO 2024 Report, Bulletin No. 5.

-<https://www.fao.org/governing-bodies/council/cl-174/introduction-to-agenda-items/en>

-<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/human-dynamics/articles/10.3389/fhumd.2024.1463902/full#B3>