

Palestine under Occupation: Is 2030 Agenda for Development possible?

Contribution to Social Watch Report 2018

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Preamble:

Two years have passed since the 90th session of The Palestinian Council of Ministers that was held on 19 February 2016, declaring a decision to form a national team to lead and coordinate national efforts to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in order to contribute to the dissemination of the Agenda; to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the outcomes and results of this national team have not been realized, despite the fact that the government attempted to integrate the goals and targets within the national development strategies.

The main obstacle to realizing these goals and targets is the colonial military occupation that continues to abolish and means of development in Palestine, in addition to the fact that more lands are being confiscated, continuous looting of Palestinians financial and natural resources, West Bank fragmentation due to settler expansion, Gaza Strip Blockade. UNCTAD's ¹latest study release indicated that Palestinians have been denied the human right to development after half a century of occupation and appropriation of land and resources.

We can sense the situation by reviewing a number of alarming indicators, such as poverty has reached 27.7% in the occupied Palestinian territories (1967), while it reached 44% in Gaza Strip. While the poverty rate for the year of 2017 has reached 29%, while it has reached 53% in the Gaza Strip – this reflects the catastrophic effect of the 10 year and ongoing blockade on the Palestinians.

¹ UNCTAD. 2018. The Economic Costs of the Israeli Occupation for the Palestinian People and their Human Right to Development: Legal Dimensions.

The Palestinian Government has dealt with the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 as a complementary tool instead of a fundamental framework for Palestinian development planning. In the first six years of implementation, the sustainable development priorities have been addressed within a six-year national planning framework and were mainstreamed to sectorial strategies and policy agendas.

On the other hand, the national team and government's efforts are perceived as reproduction of the same policies and practices, as there are no changes on the national developmental approaches, particularly employment and labor, social protection, progressive taxation, industrial and agricultural development, public expenditure that are intended to contribute to poverty eradication, unemployment and promote equity. On the contrary, the government is taking advantage of the political fragmentation and issuing acts to shrink civil society's space and take control of the judiciary, and affiliating with the private sector on the account of the Palestinian Society. For instance, residents in some cases were evacuated from their lands without any legal justification or community consultation to discuss appropriate alternatives serve as an ample evidence of governmental practices serving the large corporate companies in accumulating their profits.

Goal 1: Poverty Eradication or reducing it?

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) figures show that poverty rates are increasing in the occupied Palestinian territories in 1967, to reach 43.9%. The prevailing unemployment rate was highest among young people aged 15-24 years to reach 64.7%. While the poverty rate in the Gaza Strip reached 53.0%, which is more than four times the poverty rate in the West Bank, which is about 13.9% in the Gaza Strip according to 2017 data.²

Despite the gradual increase in the Palestinian public expenditure that reached 5 billion US dollars according to the PA's approved budget for the year 2018, with a total revenue 3.8 billion US dollars, and foreign grants to support budget and developmental expenditure that reached 775 million US dollars, and operating expenses and net lending expenditure that reached 4.5 billion US dollars, also, the developmental expenses reached 530 million US dollars, and the funding gap amounted to 498 million US dollars at a monthly rate of 40 million dollars³. Yet, these budgets and efforts didn't contribute to reducing poverty rates and unemployment.

The government's approach is not to eradicate poverty but to limit it as stated by the representative of the Ministry of Social Development⁴, the ministry follows this approach under the Cash Transfer Project (CTP) that is funded by the European Union, the World Bank, and Public

² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Press Release Ms. Ola Awad, President of the PCBS, reviews the conditions of the Palestinian people via statistical figures and findings, on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba. 14 May 2018.

³ Palestinian Ministerial Council. Ministerial Council Meeting.
<http://www.palestinecabinet.gov.ps/Website/AR/ViewDetails?ID=41298>

⁴ Ayman Sawalha. Workshop: Palestine under Occupation: Is 2030 agenda possible. May 3, 2018, Ramallah: Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad)

Expenditure. Under this project cash assistance payments of 750 – 1800 ILS⁵ every three months are issued to poor households. The project also provides assistance to 110 thousand households with a budget that amounts to 130 million US dollars annually⁶. However, reports indicate deterioration in number of project's household beneficiaries that reached in previous years 120 thousand households. Also, in this regard, the Ministry of Social Development will provide a total amount of 40 million ILS as part of its economic empowerment program.

As a result of reviewing the criteria of eligibility, a significant number of household have been eliminated from the CTP's beneficiary list. This deterioration wasn't a result of any improvements in households' conditions or managing to get out of the poverty cycle; as we noted earlier, figures indicate that poverty rates are increasing. Besides the fact that the economic empowerment program that only targeted 28 thousand households is narrowly financed (around 11 million US dollars) and won't realize attaining manifest results towards economically empowering these families and moving them from poverty cycle to empowerment cycle.

Palestinian civil society believes that the colonial occupation is always working towards impoverishing the Palestinian society and demolishing elements of steadfastness and infrastructure. The impact of the three successive wars on the Gaza Strip and continuous blockade led more than half of the Palestinian population to the poverty cycle; is an ample example. Adding to that the occupation's control of borders and area 'C' , not to mention the economic protocols and agreements that turned the Palestinian economy to become distorted and dependent are main reasons of structural poverty of society and individuals. Also, the PA's policies aim to 'control' poverty instead of reducing it, not to mention eradicating it. Since that cash assistance is the primary tool that is implemented and sustains "acceptable" levels of poverty without implementing adequate foundation for social protection floors

Decent Work: is there work?

In 2017, unemployment within the Palestinian society has reached 27.7%, and the gap continues to widen between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip reached 43.9% compared with 17.9% in the West Bank; about 364 thousand unemployed Individuals in Palestine during 2017. Unemployment among females is higher than unemployment among males as in 2017 the unemployment rate was for females 47.8% and the rate was for men 22.5%⁷, and this gap is widening as more females are entering the labour market. The highest unemployment rate was 49.6% among youth aged (20-24) years. It is worth mentioning that for years of schooling, the highest unemployment rate among females with 13 years of schooling and more was 52.2%.of

⁵ ILS to US dollar rate is 3.6

⁶ Voluntary National Review on 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Implementation. Draft I. Palestine

⁷ Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Press Release "On the Eve of May 1st President of PCBS Ms. Ola Awad, presents the current status of Palestinian labour force on the occasion of the International Workers' Day.

female participants in labour force. Also, unemployment among female and male graduates reached 35%⁸.

All donors' programs didn't resolve unemployment and relevant issues within the Palestinian society. On the contrary, employment rates have drastically proliferated, most particularly in the Gaza Strip that is under blockade for more than a decade, in addition to Egyptian Authorities' continued closure of Rafah Border Crossing for most of the year and practices of countering the tunnels phenomenon – means for smuggling commodities and food supplies to the Gaza Strip – as requested by the US Administration. Increase in unemployment is driving more Palestinian youth to immigrate, as pointed in the PCBS 2015 survey on youth, around 24% of youth between (15-29) want to immigrate abroad – 37% of youth residing in the Gaza compared with 15% of youth residing in the West Bank. It is also apparent that male youth tendency to immigrate is more likely than female youth tendency, as these rates reached 29% for males compared to 18% for females⁹.

Also, all interventions conveyed by Palestinian officials are not feasible, as the government only allocated developmental budgets of 16 million dollars for the labour sector for the period between 2014 -2016, equivalent to 5.6% of the government's developmental budget. These amounts are frivolous and are expected to create decent jobs for hundreds of thousands of unemployed! Not to mention that these amounts are allocated to establish vocational training centers, supporting the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, and ensure occupational safety at work. And if we look at the goal aiming at protecting and empowering the Palestinian woman, and promoting her participation in the labour market and access to all basic services and needs – a parcel of goals – we find out that only 9 million dollars are allocated to realize this parcel of goals.¹⁰

The Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection is another tool that was designed to address the unemployment crisis. This fund was established in 2003 and was only activated in 2011. Despite the high expectations of this fund and its mission to promote employment policies and creating job opportunities, it was financed by an Italian loan of 30 million dollars. Unfortunately, this amount was directed to micro-credit companies to finance private youth and women projects and the fund only re-produced the same policies that don't address the unemployment crisis.

Then, were should Palestinians go for work?

Unemployment is a structural crisis in the Palestinian territories, and greatly affects the Gaza Strip, youth, graduates and particularly educated women, while the interventions of concerned governmental officials is ineffective and unsustainable. Therefore, the Palestinians are forced to seek other opportunities, such as working inside the Green Line and settlements – about 121,000 female and male workers; 13% of working force serve in the Green Line and settlement. According to ILO standards, most of these workers work informally and represent 60% of workers.

⁸ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The Labour Force Survey Results Fourth Quarter (January– March, 2018)

⁹ PCBS. 2015. Palestinian Youth Survey: Main Findings. Ramallah – Palestine

¹⁰ Jaber, F and Riyahi, I. Informal Economy in Palestine: Arab Watch Report on Social and Economic Rights and Policies; Informal Labour, Beirut; 2016.

Many risks are associated with working in the Green Line and Settlements, such as working without permits, informally in informal facilities, or even informally in formal facilities – a haven for many workers to earn a living. The question remains, is this kind of labour considered decent?

Only 27.1% of waged workers have binding employment contracts, while 51.4% have no contracts, and 21.5% work based on verbal agreements. Also, 75% don't receive any severance pay, 76% don't get any paid annual leaves, 77% don't get any paid sick leaves, 59% of working females don't get paid maternity leave. Not to mention that 36% of workers are paid below minimum wage of 1,450 ILS.¹¹

It is evident that unemployment rates within the Palestinian society are relatively high, adaptation attempts and finding alternatives to working the Green line and settlements, and working in the informal economy didn't contribute to reducing unemployment. Also working conditions of workers, wages and labour rights aren't decent. All attempts conveyed by the Ministry of Labour and Employment fund didn't realize creating new job opportunities, nor did they realize better working conditions.

Occupation's hegemony of the Palestinian Economy and the neoliberal developmental approaches implemented by the PA led to drastic increases in unemployment rates, not to mention that the PA's programs and policies regarding job creation and employment neglect recognizing the interrelatedness of the issue. Development should be directed to the productive sectors, since they are most capable of attracting working forces. Depending on the private sector in the past two decades to generate growth and create job opportunities has radically failed.

The Palestinian Education: Does it strive to Equality and Equity?

Sustainable Development Goal (4) states: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Historically, the Palestinians gave distinctive consideration to Education and prioritized associated expenditure. However, the image of education, teachers and students has been deteriorating in the previous years. For instance, education is no longer the output/solution to develop symbolic/ human capital, nor it doesn't contribute to finding decent job opportunities for graduates – unemployment among graduates has reached 35%.¹²

In Palestine, Public Education is free till grade 12. The students pay small fees to enroll in public schools and UNRWA schools (schools that provide education to Palestinian refugees), as for the tuitions of civil and private schools; they vary between middle and high fees. Also, colleges and universities' regulate enrollment fees for technical colleges, universities, and higher education; these

¹¹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The Labour Force Survey Results Fourth Quarter (January– March, 2018)

¹² PCBS, Previous Source

fees are increasing gradually. This has become an issue of conflict between students' councils and universities' management, due to the fact that management continues to claim of financial deficits and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education doesn't provide any financial support to cover the universities' expenses.¹³

The Palestinian teacher doesn't receive enough recognition, and isn't compensated enough to subsidize a decent life. This has driven ten thousands of Palestinian teachers organized a massive movement represented by the "Teachers' Movement" to strike in 2016, and protested before the ministerial cabinet to demand improvement in working conditions and wages, role in the educational process, in addition to their union representation. Yet, the movement was conquered by the government and security forces, and an affiliated leadership by the presidency was imposed on the movement to carry on the dialogue. Furthermore, the government recently imposed sanctions of Arbitrary Early Retirement¹⁴ on Teachers' Movement leaders to hinder their roles and influence.

The fact that Education expenditure increased to reach 20.7% of government's budget in 2017 is positively perceived, as the allocated budget percentages for Education and Higher Education have significantly improved, if compared with public spending on education in the prior three years; as the budget allocated for the education sector reached 17.7% in 2014, 17.0% in 2015, and 19.96% in 2016, while the cost of one student in the education sector reached (849.44) US dollars. Yet, any increase in expenditure is usually allocated to construction, salary increases, new appointing; meaning that they are not directed to developing the educational process, as the allocated developmental expenditures are relatively low and only present 18% of the budget, while 66% of the budget is allocated to salaries and wages. Therefore, any developmental initiatives will be driven by international donor agencies and associating agendas. Additionally, the deterioration of quality of education is highly recognized when speaking of integrating and accommodating schools' facilities for students with disabilities, since different supervising authorities within the education system fail to integrate and accommodate these students in their schools. For instance, 35% of children with disabilities aren't enrolled in the formal education system. Also, the number of student beneficiaries of activated resource classrooms is low, these rooms are even considered an obstacle to integrating students with disabilities in formal education since most teachers aren't qualified. This usually leads to school drop-outs and children stay at home, or in other cases a limited number manage to go to special schools and this isn't actual integration.¹⁵

Lack of financing isn't the only and primary hindrance of shortcomings that influence the quality and outcomes of education in the occupied Palestinian territories. Even with the availability of funding to finance school construction in vulnerable areas, yet the restrictions imposed by occupation's practices hinder developing quality education and attributes. Despite increases in number of higher education graduates and increase in unemployment rates within the Palestinian society, yet the Ministry of Education faces shortages of teachers in certain areas due to movement restrictions, as is the case in Jerusalem, where this city has particularly faced the worst cases of assaults, oppression,

¹³ Adel Zagha. Birzeit University. Link: <http://www.birzeit.edu/ar/blogs/hwl-lzm-lmly-fy-jm-byryzt>

¹⁴ Al Haq Association. http://www.alhaq.org/arabic/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=910:qq-&catid=82:2012-05-09-07-27-45&Itemid=197

¹⁵ Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad). Teacher Creativity Center (TCC). 2018. Equality and Quality of Education. Not Published.

and injustice, which negatively affected its residents, and mostly affected the education system elements of students, teachers, and parents. So education is a reflection of the conditions that face the city and hinder any attempts for development. Also, with available financing means the ministry cannot compete with the wages of occupation's municipality, not to mention that it cannot compete with the services of schools sponsored by the municipality, in addition to the fact that any attempts of infrastructure is subjected to restrictions imposed by the occupation.¹⁶

Likewise, the ongoing restrictions on movement didn't make the situation in the Gaza Strip any different, keeping in mind the stacking and overcrowding of the residents of this small geographic area. The on-going blockade for more than a decade negatively impacted students' access to new expertise and specializations from universities outside Gaza Strip's borders, or benefiting from trainings and international conferences on education – these negative effects are usually overlooked when addressing the deterioration of quality of education. Saying that, we are going to discuss critical conditions that indicate that availability of funds and budget allocations don't in any case guarantee to solve drawback of equality and quality of education. But, the size of these drawbacks becomes more complicated with a system that follows two shifts (the same management running morning and evening shifts), this system is still widely implemented in a large number of public and UNRWA schools – 70% of UNRWA schools and 63% of public schools operate two shifts. Not to mention, that in some cases schools operate three shifts to respond the increase in the number of enrolled children, due to shortages in schools and classrooms.¹⁷

Representatives of the civil society, and most particularly the ones concerned with the education sector, indicated to a number of additional challenges that face education in Palestine, such as: 1) absence of clear strategies with particular funds assigned to develop human resources in the field of education; 2) innovation and scientific research; the ministry and universities fail to allocate budgets; 3) the privilege of designing long-term strategies while under occupation; 4) question of high community participation on empowerment policies level and implementation mechanisms to realize goal (4) especially when a new law was decreed with the absence of proactive participation of the society, civil society, and active sectors in this field.¹⁸

¹⁶ Previous source

¹⁷ Previous Source

¹⁸ Mutasim Zayed. Workshop: Palestine Under Occupation: is 2030 agenda possible?. May 3, 2018, Ramallah: Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad)

The PA's education policies fail at meeting just education requirements, as a result of failing at facing challenges imposed by occupation and operating in a complex context. Also, the inadequacy that pertains to its policies and distribution priorities in order to minimize the gaps associated with overcrowding, drop-outs, care given to children with disabilities and appropriateness of schools, in addition to specific indicators, such as teacher/students ratios, here facets of exclusion, marginalization, and absence of equality and parity arise.

There is an evident deterioration in quality of education, increase in drop-outs, and later lack of justice in the labour market. Not to mention the absence of clear governmental policies concerning promoting steadfastness of Jerusalemites, Bedouins, and refugees.

Clean Water and Sanitation Service

The water crisis is a serious issue in the occupied Palestinian territories in 1967, most particularly as a result of occupation's control of most groundwater sources, despite of connecting 96% of residential areas with public water distribution networks, yet we observe irregular water supply and access. As a result of these practices, most Palestinians are living on less than the minimum water consumption recommended by World Health Organization, which is 120 liters per day per person, as the average Palestinian that is connected to distribution networks only consumes 70 liters per day. Also, the consumption might be less in some areas in the West Bank to reach 38 liters per day, as is the case in Jenin Governorate. In other cases, water consumption reaches 20 liters per day per person for Palestinian residing in residential area in area 'C'. Since the 'Israeli' aggression in 2014, water supply has become a central element in the Gaza Strip Crisis; a population of 1.2 million in Gaza (around 2/3 of the residents) suffers of high shortages of water, and there isn't enough electricity for sewage processing or pumping. While, the coastal aquifer, which supplies most of its water to Gaza, is subject to excessive pumping of three times its capacity. As a result pumped water is contaminated with sea water and untreated sewage. Currently, 97% of the water withdrawn from the aquifer isn't suitable for drinking, and only 10% of Palestinians residing in Gaza have access to safe drinking water¹⁹.

The problem lays with the logic of dealing with this issue of clean water and availability and right to access. As this logic includes 'solutions' such as, rationalization use of water and finding Palestinian alternate water supplies – which are usually adequate for water resources sustainability – but doesn't address the root cause concerning lack of Palestinian control of water sources. Not to mention, that the international agencies' tendency to promote rationalization of water use, while the individual's consumption is much less than the minimum internationally recommended share is in fact ironic. As if this isn't enough, higher prices for unavailable water were regulated, which deteriorates the economic and social conditions²⁰.

It is worth mentioning that one of the implications of control on water resources is the transformation of Palestinian agricultural patterns. For instance, rain-fed agriculture has increased

¹⁹ Voluntary National Review on 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Implementation. Draft I. Palestine.

²⁰ An interview with Manal Taha, Environmental expert. 17/5/2018

on account of irrigated agriculture; which threatens food security of Palestinians. Also, transformations in agriculture patterns resulted with shifting to cultivating palm trees and increasing palm farms on the account of vital basic plantings²¹. Adding to that, the Paris Protocol for Economic Relations granted the joint committee (a committee composed of representatives of the Palestinians and occupation) authority to give consent to any planned water project in the occupied Palestinian territories, which led to rejecting these projects, due to the fact it requires final approval from the occupation's administration.

The Palestinian territories face a complex water crisis, as the Palestinian receives less water than the internationally recommended share and most Palestinians residing in the Gaza strip consume contaminated water. Not to mention that the occupation controls most drinking water resources, ground wells and prevents any project from accessing water resources and prohibits well construction. Adding to that the international projects' focus on rationalization of water use and renovating water networks instead of addressing right to access drinking water.

Cities and sustainable communities: is sustainability possible under occupation?

Sustainable Goal (11) aims at making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, however, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development failed at mentioning independence and national liberation to reflect a context in which a society faces settler military occupation. But this is needed to relate goal (11) to the singularity of the Palestinian context.

The residential communities are divided to urban, rural, and refugee camps, also the occupied Palestinian territories in 1967 are divided to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Due to roads, checkpoints, and the Apartheid Wall, the West Bank is fragmented to smaller lands and ghettos that the occupation controls all entrances and exits and affiliated security companies, not to mention that Jerusalem is completely separated from the West Bank and the all types of connections were weakened between Palestinians residing in Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinians.

The Gaza Strip has been under blockade for more than a decade. Despite the small area of Gaza Strip, the Israeli Occupation set up a buffer zone over more than 1,500 meter along the Eastern border of Gaza Strip. Consequently, the Israeli Occupation controls about 24% of the total area of Gaza Strip (365 km²), which is considered the most populous area in the world with about 5,203 capita/km^{2.22}. Additionally, the Egyptian Authorities' continued closure of Rafah Border Crossing – the only passageway between the Strip and Egypt – prevents patients, students, merchants from travelling anywhere. Besieged Gaza Strip suffers from the highest density of population in the world;

²¹ Pervious source.

²² Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Press Release "Ms. Ola Awad, President of the PCBS, reviews the conditions of the Palestinian people via statistical figures and findings, on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba."

5,203 individuals/km² noting that 66% of the total population of Gaza Strip are refugees. The flux of refugees turned the Gaza Strip in one of the highest population densities in the world²³.

The Palestinian refugee camps were built to temporarily accommodate the Palestinians whom fled from their home, villages and cities when 'Israeli' occupation took over the 1948 lands. However, after seven decades, these 'temporary' accommodations turned to permanent residential areas. These camps are overcrowded, absence of any infrastructure, lack of sanitation networks, worn-out of water and electricity networks, adhesion of residential buildings, which does not prevent day light and air.

Records of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) reported on 1st January 2017 a total of 5.87 million Palestinian refugees, 28.4% of whom live in 58 camps, 19 in the West Bank and 8 in the Gaza Strip.²⁴

Jerusalem is under occupation and is separated and isolated from the rest of the West Bank cities. Also, Jerusalem is surrounded by a large number of military check points that facilitates 'Israeli' settlers' access to the city while restricting Palestinians from reaching it. In 2017, the Israeli occupation demolished 433 buildings (houses and establishments), 46% of them in Jerusalem; forcibly displacing 128 households (700 persons) in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, half of them are children. They also issued demolishing orders of 1,030 buildings in Jerusalem and the West Bank in 2017, at a time when the needs of housing units for Palestinians increase. According to the data of housing conditions survey 2015, 61% of households in Palestine need to build new housing units over the next decade (one residential unit or more). The demolition of the buildings resulted in large economic losses with a value of about 300 US dollars per square meters, meaning that the losses of Palestinians in Jerusalem amounted to about 51 million US dollars during the years 2000-2017.²⁵

At the time that the Israeli occupation demolishes Palestinian buildings, and put obstacles and impediments to the issuance of building permits, they approve licenses to construct thousands of housing units in Israeli settlements on the Palestinian land of Jerusalem. The Israeli occupation began building 1,600 housing units in the settlements of Gilo and Harhoma during the year 2017 within the framework of a plan to separate the city of Jerusalem from the city of Bethlehem, and it accelerated the preparation of plans for the construction of a new settlement on the Qalandia airport to isolate Jerusalem from its Arab surroundings from the North West side, in addition to the annexation of 250 dunams to the municipality of Jerusalem, which located within the area so-called "no-man's land" since 1967 for the establishment of new settlements projects, as well as announcing a plan to build 6 hotels including 1,300 hotel rooms on the land of Jabal AL-Mukaber. In 2017, the Israeli occupation intensified settlement expansion in the West Bank ratifying the construction of 16,800 new housing units, one third of which in Occupied Jerusalem. Furthermore, the Israeli occupation approved plans for the construction of four new settlements to the south of Nablus Governorate and three other in the Jordan Valley, with the objective of tripling the settlers' population in the Jordan Valley. In the same time, the occupation authorities hinder any Palestinian

²³ Previous Source

²⁴ Previous Source

²⁵ Previous Source

construction expansion, especially in the areas in and around Jerusalem and in the so-called “Area C” in the West Bank, which is still under full Israeli control.²⁶

The policy of annexation and isolation of Palestinian communities derives its strength from the military orders that exploit the Palestinians and confiscate their lands. The Israeli occupation approved the confiscation of about 2,100 dunams of Palestinian land during the year 2017, as well as the confiscation of hundreds of dunams of Palestinians through the expansion of Israeli roadblocks and the establishment of military checkpoints to protect the settlers, in addition to renewed orders to seize 852 dunams of Palestinian land in the West Bank. The Israeli measures are one of the main reasons for the decline in agricultural land in the West Bank. Area C forms about 60% of the West Bank, which is still under full ‘Israeli’ control, depriving many farmers from accessing their land and farming it. The Israeli occupation razed and uprooted about 10 thousand trees in 2017, and thousands of dunams were transferred to ‘Israeli’ settlers to cultivate more than 70 thousand dunams with irrigated crops.

While the Palestinian Authority has no housing-oriented program, most particularly housing for poor and middle classes, and young people that are planning to start a family. This is completely left to contractors and high market prices, where the price of one square meter in the Governorate of Ramallah and Al-Bireh varies between 1,000 to 1,500 US dollars, which is beyond the purchasing power of most mentioned classes in light of unemployment, poverty, and low income. Not to mention that the Palestinian Authority doesn’t play a regulatory role concerning regulating housing prices, or organizing the housing sector to truly respond to increased demand, and most particularly in light of overcrowding the centers of Palestinian cities due to the Apartheid wall and limited access to area ‘c’.

The Administration of the Palestinian refugee camps falls under the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), and the Palestinian authority doesn’t develop any infrastructure, or water and electricity networks, despite its poor quality and the fact they collect direct and indirect taxes from Palestinian refugees²⁷. Not to mention that the refugee camps suffer from overcrowding and hazardous buildings due to lack of adequate infrastructure criteria.

The Palestinian cities and built-up areas suffer from occupation’s policies that work on demolition, confiscation, fragmentation, and isolation. Jerusalem as well suffers from demolition and continuing Judaization, and stealing and appropriating Palestinian culture. Vast areas of the West Bank are under direct military control. According to international reports the Gaza Strip became inhabitable due to the continued blockade²⁸.

²⁶ Palestinian Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). Press Release “Ms. Ola Awad, President of the PCBS, reviews the conditions of the Palestinian people via statistical figures and findings, on the eve of the 70th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba.”

²⁷ Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad). Link: <http://www.almarsad.ps/archives/849>

²⁸ Maan News Network. Report. The Gaza Strip is inhabitable in 2020. Website: <http://www.maannews.net/Content.aspx?ID=795994>

Towards the Future:

The future of the Palestinians lies in emancipation from 'Israeli' occupation, sovereignty over their lands, and controlling their capabilities and natural resources. Despite the shortcomings of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in dealing with issues of self-determination, national liberation, and independence; yet, goal (16) on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and goal (11) on sustainable cities and communities provide grounds for international community to advocate for Palestinians right to realize their national goals and mostly elimination of settler occupation. This will contribute to building prospect and hope for future generations, not to mention realizing development, prosperity, and to live in dignity and freedom.

Increasing investment in education is of vital importance, for instance, increasing budget allocations from 20% to 25%, meaning an increase of 5% of 2018's public expenditure to developmental aspects of education, as the budget allocated for the Ministry of Education and Higher Education amounts to 855 million US dollars and the additional cost will reach 43 million dollars. Investment in education will meet society's needs and positively contribute to integrating children with disabilities in formal education, and eradicating unemployment among Palestinian universities' graduates.²⁹ Quality education will present better opportunities and human resources capable of innovation and creativity.

Dissolving the issue of unemployment requires a parcel of solutions, on top of it lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip and opening all crossings, so citizens can travel and basic supplies are provided. Also, one of the solutions to eliminate poverty and influence the cash transfer project to develop programs to activate the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, so it won't be dependent of assistance, grants and foreign loans that are declining each year. It would be more feasible to allocate more amounts of public expenditure to support the fund and articulating interventions concerning job creation and employment. This could be realized by allocating 2% of the public expenditure that is around 14 billion ILS and annually add a total of 280 million ILS to the budget item of employment to create job opportunities.³⁰

Palestinian taxation scheme is completely subordinated to a current and inherited colonial taxation scheme. Due to the clearance bill mechanisms, the losses of Palestinians amount to 370 million US dollars annually of fiscal leakages. Also, the Ministry of Finance appraises the size of tax evasion and fraud between 500-600 million US dollars. This means that Palestinians can renounce foreign funding and locate surpluses to increase expenditure on health, education, employment and developing production sectors; this will be attained when national development policies are adequately designed.

²⁹ Iyad Riyahi. Workshop: Palestine under occupation: is 2030 agenda possible?. May 3, 2018. Ramallah: Social and Economic Policies Monitor (Al Marsad)

³⁰ Previous Source.