



Press Release by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and the Environment Quality Authority on World Environment Day (WED) about "Celebrating Biodiversity"

World Environment Day (WED) is celebrated annually on the 5th of June since 1972. WED is the United Nations' principal vehicle for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment. Over the years, it has grown to be a broad, global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated by stakeholders in more than 190 countries. Thus, the theme for 2020 is "Biodiversity".

Despite its small geographical area, State of Palestine is characterized by a great variation in topography. This variation is directly reflected on climate and the distribution and diversification of agricultural patterns.

The West Bank is divided into four major geomorphologic parts: Nablus Mountains, Jerusalem Mountains, Hebron Mountains and the Jordan Valley. The mountainous area of the West Bank serves as the main rainfall collection and replenishment zone for the underground water aquifers. This has contributed to the spread of many valleys, springs and artesian wells in these areas.

Gaza Strip is essentially a foreshore plain gradually sloping westwards. In the north of the Gaza Strip, there are four ridges with different elevations ranging between 20 to 90 meter above Sea Level. The ridges are: Coastal ridge, Gaza ridge, the El-Muntar ridge and the Beit Hanoun ridge.

Importance of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is of great importance in many areas of life. The protection of Biodiversity is life insurance for all humanity, which guarantees the stability and balance of environmental systems.

Biodiversity is considered a natural genetic store of species, as it is considered one of the basic principles for the sustainable development of environmental resources. Biodiversity has a

scientific importance through the process of developing and improving the food situation in the world, in addition to the economic importance (ecosystem services) and technology, especially pharmaceutical industries and environmental tourism.

Global Facts about Biodiversity

Experts estimate the number of species available on the planet at around 8.7 million species, of which 6.5 million species live on land and 2.2 million live in the depths of seas and oceans.

A study published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) found that there are 7.8 million species of animals, 298 thousand species of plants, 611 thousand species of fungi, 36.4 thousand of protozoa and 27.5 thousand species of chromists.

Reasons for Biodiversity in Palestine

Despite the small area of the state of Palestine, it is one of the most beautiful parts of the world. Its natural world is characterized by the diversity of vegetation caused by variations in geography, climate and rainfall distribution, in addition to the diversity of soil and different geology. Moreover, there are obvious contrasts in natural topography that range from areas of desert, mountainous areas reaching a height of more than 1000 meters above sea level, to the plains and coastal regions at sea level and areas 394 meters below sea level. As a result, Palestine is a natural repository full of immense wealth, including many wild plants and all kinds of organisms.

Biodiversity in Palestine

There are about 51 thousand living species (flora and fauna) in historical Palestine, constituting around 3% of global biodiversity.

In the State of Palestine, there are an estimated 30,848 animal species, consisting of an estimated 30 thousand invertebrates, 373 birds, 297 fish, 92 mammals, 81 reptiles and 5 amphibians.

Plants and Wild Flowers in Palestine

EQA data reveal that about 2,750 species of plants have been identified in historical Palestine within



138 families, of which 261 are endemic to Palestine and 53 are special to Palestine.

In the State of Palestine, there are about 2,076 plant species, of which 90 species are threatened with extinction and 636 species are recorded as very rare species.

In the West Bank, there are estimated to be 391 rare plant species (20% of the total plant species in Palestine) and 68 are classified as very rare species (3.5% of the total plant species in Palestine).

In Gaza Strip, there are 155 rare plant species (12% of the total plant species) and 22 are classified as very rare species (1.8% of the total plant species).

Protected Areas

With regard to natural reserves, the National Spatial Plan prepared by the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) in 2014 indicates that the total area of natural reserves in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem 51,157 hectares representing 9% of the West Bank area.

They are located mainly in the Eastern slopes and Jordan River area. The Palestinians were prevented from accessing and working freely in them, which clarifies that the Israelis occupation policy of nature protection has political aims rather than those of protecting biodiversity. A portion of these reserves have been converted to Israeli settlements regime and occupation military bases and a large part were included within the annexation and separation wall.

Most of the existing nature reserves in the West Bank belong to areas classified as C. Only 13 reserves (or 11.3% of the total reserve area) are within the areas classified as B.

Israeli Occupation Violations are the main causes of Biodiversity deterioration

Biodiversity in Palestine suffers from great threats and dangers, which may lead to the extinction of many living organisms and their disappearance very quickly if the necessary measures are not taken to stop them and limit their impacts.

Among these threats are the continuous Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands, natural resources and related activities such as the establishment of Israeli settlements on green lands and natural reserves, the construction of bypass roads, the construction of the annexation and expansion wall, as well as the resultant of these Israeli activities of bulldozing forest lands, logging, fragmentation, fragmentation habitats and natural environments, dispersal of populations for wildlife, in addition to placing many species on the list of endangered species.

Also, the invasive alien species that inhabit natural habitats and fragile and vulnerable ecosystems that did not exist in Palestine. The birds invasive species includes three species (*Pisttacula krameri*, *Acridotheres tristis*, *Lonchura malabarica*). The invasive plants species includes about 50-species, the species of high invasiveness include (*Prosopis juliflora*, *Ailanthus altissima*, *Conyza bonariensis*, *Nicotiana glauca*, *Oxalis pes-caprae*, *Solanum elaeagnifolium*). These invasive alien species lead to a disruption in the ecosystems and causing major impacts on indigenous plant and animal communities and the lack of services they provide, in addition to depleting natural environmental sources such as overfishing, overgrazing and logging, as well as pollution resulting from human activities, such as solid waste, agricultural waste and excessive use of pesticides in addition to pollution with wastewater.

That desertification and the accompanying deterioration of productive and fertile lands and the lack of food production and; thus, weak national food security, in addition to weak scientific research related to biological diversity, weak public awareness of the importance of biological diversity and its sustainability for us and for future generations, the scarcity of financial resources and the failure to allocate a budget for the conservation of biological diversity and its components which is also a threat to biodiversity in Palestine.



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