



نحن نتذكر

WE REMEMBER

אנחנו זוכרים

*Khalil Abu Yahia lives on in  
us and we will continue to  
struggle in his memory.*



**"I AM SURE THAT  
THE HEARTS OF  
MY BELOVED  
FRIENDS WILL  
ALWAYS BE A  
SHELTER THAT  
CAN NEVER BE  
DESTROYED."**

*- Khalil*

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## **A TRIBUTE TO KHALIL**

*By Sahar Vardi*

*This article originally appeared in "The Landline," and +972 on November 3, 2023.*

*On Monday, Oct. 30, Khalil Abu Yahia, a past contributor to +972, was killed by an Israeli airstrike on the Gaza Strip. Below is a tribute to Khalil from his friend Sahar Vardi, an Israeli human rights and anti-militarism activist and occasional +972 contributor.*

**EVEN IN HIS DEATH, KHALIL REMINDS US OF OUR ROLE AS HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND FREEDOM FIGHTERS: TO KEEP GOING, SO THAT THIS WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN TO ANYONE.**

**Khalil.**

I scroll up through our messages. Our last normal correspondence is from Sept. 27, when we were talking about his grade point average. Or rather, how to convert his GPA from an academic institution in Gaza to an academic institution in the U.K. or United States. I sent him some ideas for scholarships. He said that even if he couldn't find one abroad, he might find something online that would allow him to write his PhD in literature inside Gaza.

The next correspondence is already from after. After that Saturday, Oct. 7.

We messaged a bit. Where is he? The Israeli army ordered them to evacuate from their neighborhood in Gaza City to the adjacent neighborhood of Al-Rimal, so he and his neighbors evacuated – but thankfully not to Al-Rimal, which was bombed two hours later. His neighborhood was, too. He told me his house was blown up. All of his memories of his father. "The

tears won't stop falling," he said. It continued like this: once every few days we would write to one another; once every few days he would update. Update that he is alive. Update on who else had died. And somehow, almost every time, he would sign off with how important it is to him that I know that this hasn't changed what he believes, hasn't shaken his desire for another world — a better, more equal one. "I wouldn't want this to happen to anyone," he wrote.

As with other friends in Gaza, I didn't know what to write. Four days into this nightmare, I told him exactly that: that I don't know what to write, except that I'm thinking about him, and that I wish I could do more. "It's enough for me that you asked about me," he replied. And I cried. The first time in that terrible week that I managed to cry. For everything.

I cried for all the fear, for all the helplessness, for all the photos of the people who were murdered and kidnapped, and the horror on their faces on Oct. 7. I cried for the horror of what was to come, his home that was bombed, the worry. I cried for the parallel worlds that I felt I was seeing and that I wasn't able to bridge, until I spoke to him.

How lucky that he exists, I wrote to a mutual friend. How lucky. The next day, he sent another update: the house that he was staying in, belonging to his relatives, had been blown up. He counted four dead family members and five dead neighbors. He called just over a week ago. We tried to speak but didn't manage to — I was in the middle of something, and afterwards he wasn't available. "We can speak later," he wrote.

The final message is from two days later. Oct. 23. Another airstrike on his family's home. More relatives killed. "I'm so sorry to hear about your family members," I wrote to him. "More and more people, names, stories, just adding to the list of pain that continues to grow." "Hence, our role as human rights

activists and freedom fighters," he replied.

A few years ago, he came to Jerusalem for surgery and needed blood donors. After that, some of my blood also flowed in his veins. There is a part of me that wants to write that on the day Khalil was killed, my blood was also spilled in Gaza. But that's a lie.

I am safe in my home, in front of my computer that is connected to the internet, with food in the fridge and water running through the pipes, and four walls that are all still standing. And he's not. Him, his wife, their two young daughters. All dead.

He will no longer submit his PhD application — which, he told me during one of these conversations, he'd have worked on, even during all of this, if he'd had a little more electricity. He will no longer respond to me with an impossible combination of horror and optimism. He will no longer tell me how much he is waiting to meet me one day, when all this is over. The only thing he is still able to do is make me cry.

And maybe one other thing: to remind us that this is why we are here, the human rights activists and freedom fighters. To struggle. To keep going. So that this won't happen again to anyone.

*Sahar Vardi is an Israeli anti-militarist activist and one of the founders of Hamushim, a project challenging Israel's military industry and arms trade.*

## REMEMBERING KHALIL ABU YAHIA

*The Gazan scholar and activist, who was killed in an Israeli airstrike last month, believed in the radical potential of solidarity.*

*This article originally appeared on Jewish Currents November 6, 2023.*

*By Maya Rosen and Erez Bleicher*

WHEN THEY WERE SAYING GOODBYE, HE SAID TO HIM: 'BLESS ME, MY TEACHER.' HE SAID TO HIM: 'I WILL CONVEY A PARABLE TO YOU. TO WHAT IS THIS MATTER COMPARABLE? TO A PERSON WHO IS WALKING IN THE DESERT AND WAS HUNGRY AND TIRED AND THIRSTY. AND HE FOUND A TREE WHOSE FRUIT WAS SWEET AND WHOSE SHADE WAS PLEASANT, WITH A CHANNEL OF WATER RUNNING BELOW IT. HE ATE FROM ITS FRUIT AND DRANK FROM ITS WATER AND SAT IN ITS SHADE. AND WHEN HE SOUGHT TO LEAVE, HE SAID: TREE, TREE, WITH WHAT SHALL I BLESS YOU? IF I SAY TO YOU - MAY YOUR FRUIT BE SWEET, BEHOLD YOUR FRUIT IS ALREADY SWEET! THAT YOUR SHADE BE PLEASANT - BEHOLD, YOUR SHADE IS ALREADY PLEASANT! THAT A CHANNEL OF WATER SHALL RUN BELOW YOU - BEHOLD, A CHANNEL OF WATER ALREADY RUNS BELOW YOU! INSTEAD, I BLESS YOU THAT ALL THE SAPLINGS THAT ARE PLANTED FROM YOU SHALL BE LIKE YOU.'

**-BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TAANIT 5B**

It is hard to fathom that such a sweet disposition could blossom in an environment of siege, enclosure, and saturating violence. Yet it did in our friend Khalil, a gifted speaker and writer, who believed unwaveringly in collective liberation and solidarity across borders. An avid student of postcolonial theory who had plans to earn his PhD, Khalil rejected the psychic blueprints of dispossession and segregation that the occupation imposes. His imagination was trained unflinchingly on a world of possibility, without border walls, colonialism, occupation, and massacre.

During previous Israeli attacks, Khalil would sit on the roof of his family's home in Gaza City, watching the rockets in the sky and sending us messages with snippets of poetry.



*Khalil at the sea with his daughter.*

Khalil was introduced to our international community of Jewish solidarity activists in 2018, during the Great March of Return—a series of weekly demonstrations near the Gaza fence demanding the Palestinian right of return and protesting Israel's blockade of Gaza and US recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital—over the course of which Israeli forces killed 223 Palestinians. Our communities supported the marchers being brutalized on the Gazan side of the militarized border by organizing creative actions—including this one with Khalil, in which Israelis and Palestinians connected by phone as they demonstrated on either side of the fence.

We met Khalil in person a year later, in 2019, in an East Jerusalem hospital room. It was the first time he had left Gaza; he'd been granted an exit permit to receive life-saving surgery for spinal cord cancer. It was a harrowing ordeal: The Palestinian hospital where he was being treated nearly ran out of blood during



his operation. We joined with other solidarity activists in Jerusalem to organize an emergency blood drive. Khalil survived, and our friendship grew as he recovered.

After the war on Gaza started last month, Khalil was in touch nearly every day. When he was unable to charge his phone due to the lack of electricity, he would buy external batteries so that he could message his friends during the brief periods when he had internet access. After Israel ordered more than one million people to evacuate the northern Gaza Strip in just 24 hours in anticipation of severe bombardment, Khalil sought safety by moving south with his family, leaving behind his beloved home in Gaza City. On October 10th, his home was destroyed in airstrikes, targeted, he informed us, by American-made F16s. “I can feel my heart burning,” he wrote to us. “I want to scream to wake the world up. Now, if we survive, we will be homeless. But I am sure that the hearts of my beloved friends will always be a shelter that can never be destroyed.”

On October 11th, Khalil reported that Israeli forces were using phosphorus bombs. “Tens of our neighbors are being killed now and we just hear screams of the wounded people under the wreckage and debris of the surrounding houses,” he wrote. “Still, I will never surrender.” The next day, he was inside a house when it was destroyed by an aerial bombardment, killing neighbors and members of his extended family. “What is the world waiting for to move?” he demanded. “Until we are completely annihilated?” A few days later, Khalil wrote to let us know of the deaths of more family members. “This colonial system doesn’t understand the language of equality,” he said. “We, the colonized and their partners and friends who advocate human rights, shall force this colonial system to stop by making a crack in the system through activism and solidarity. My family members who lost their lives to the Israeli bombing will always be the source of power to go on in this long way of struggle.”

abreast of new developments, but when he called, he was excited to talk about critical pedagogy, Edgar Allan Poe, his students, literature—everything beyond the war. On a video call ten days ago, when we found ourselves talking about Paulo Freire—a Brazilian educator and philosopher who argued that teaching and learning are critical practices for collective liberation—Khalil’s whole face lit up. He told us that he loved discarding the university curriculum he was handed and teaching his students what was truly important.

“Khalil” means friend in Arabic—and Khalil believed in the radical potential of friendship more than anyone else we’ve ever met. The very fact that we were speaking, he reminded us, meant that borders could be overcome and colonialism could be deconstructed—that the systems meant to keep us apart were not inviolable. During these past weeks, Khalil insisted that we must commit to seeing each other again. “Choose a date in your heart, and I will not leave this earth until we meet,” he wrote to us, promising often that, after the war, he would practice making coffee so that one day we could all share a perfect cup.

Despite the Israeli directive to leave the north, the bombings continued in the south, too. On October 30th, Khalil was killed in an Israeli airstrike, along with his mother, his two brothers, his wife Tasnim, and his two young daughters, Elaf and Rital. Khalil once told us that he was so grateful to have his young daughters because, even if he were killed, they would carry on his legacy. We think back to the blessing offered to the tree upon parting: May all the saplings that are planted from you be like you. Now Khalil is gone, and so are his daughters.

When we woke for the first time into a morning without Khalil, we spoke to each other about the words from Song of Songs: *ki azza ke’mavet ahava*, for love is strong as death. Azza, strong, is also the Hebrew word for Gaza, a name for this fierce, ancient region that dates back at least as far as the Bible. We turned the words over: For love is strong like Gaza. For Gaza is strong like

death. For Gaza is death and love. Love cannot, we don't think, triumph over sorrow or pain or rage or grief. But, in creating immortality, it can triumph over death. The relationships Khalil created, the political clarity of his writing, his vision of a more just world, and his earnest care for all people—those are the saplings planted from him. The only blessing we can hope for in this moment of parting is that these saplings should all “be more like you”—kinder and more passionate, sharper and more loving. Because though there is death, there is also eternity. May that eternity one day be shaped like the unconditional solidarity that Khalil envisioned, infused with the unfettered imagination Khalil embodied.

*Maya Rosen is a graduate student studying history at the Hebrew University. She lives in Jerusalem and is active in anti-occupation work.*

*Erez Bleicher is a solidarity activist and writer living in Jerusalem. He is a member of All That's Left and the Green Olive Collective.*

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## REMEMBERING KHALIL ABU YAHIA: A VOICE OF PEACE SILENCED

*This piece originally appeared on November 20, 2023 by ReturnSolidarity.com.*

Khalil Abu Yahia, a remarkable individual whose impact among peace activists around the world has been profound, was killed together with his entire family: his mother, brother, wife and two daughters, by the Israeli army at the beginning of November 2023. For many of us, he represented a transformative political voice, and his remarkable kindness and boundless political imagination served as wellsprings of profound inspiration.

Khalil, a dedicated scholar immersed in postcolonial theory,

resisted the mental frameworks of dispossession and segregation imposed by the Israeli occupation. His vision was directed towards a world free of border walls, colonialism, occupation, and massacres.

During previous Israeli offensives, Khalil would position himself on the rooftop of his family's home in Gaza City, watching the rockets light up the sky. He would then share meaningful excerpts of poetry with his friends through messages. One of such poems he recorded on video in November 2019. Here is the transcription:

*Hi.  
I am here  
drowning in pain  
affording agony and fear and misery  
that you will never bear*

*But once come the rain  
all your repression, suppression, and despair  
go in vain  
in vain  
in vain*

*Hi again.  
I am here  
down the apartheid wall  
a fence that to make tall  
a barrier that sucks my blood,  
dignity  
and detain my little ideas*

*And my little tiny wish list  
for a world that gives humans the best  
for a garden without walls  
for a wound that can take a rest  
for me to get my rights in my home*

*not to be a guest*

*Hi dear.*

*Forget about the fear  
The story is shocking  
the aggression is clear  
My pain is blacker than black  
but when I am back  
I will shout with a full voice  
oppression is not a choice  
suffering is not an act*

*Is there any unwounded place  
in my body and bloody face?  
Is there more agony in our space  
than mine?*

*Hi finally,  
I think I am failing  
No words can tell our aching*

*I feel explosions of Gaza in my chest  
Is this death?  
Is this a test?*

*Well, apartheid is not a best  
nothing here is a best  
Until I achieve my little, tiny  
wanted for justice  
wishlist.*

Khalil was a devoted optimist, a true believer in humanity; his passion for a life of true freedom was undeniable, as he posted a beaming selfie by the sea and quoted Tayeb Salih: “I want to take my rightful share of life by force, I want to give lavishly, I want love to flow from my heart, to ripen and bear fruit. There are

many horizons that must be visited, fruit that must be plucked, books read, and white pages in the scrolls of life to be inscribed with vivid sentences in a bold hand.” It is no wonder then that he shared a deep connection to humans, animals and the environment.

Even in times of war and violence he saw the opportunity for real peace. “The one positive thing about war and genocide is that it brings true friends together and it is true friendship that is sustaining my hope and my ability to resist,” he used to say.

**Rest in power, Khalil**

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## **KHALIL ABU YAHIA: DISPATCH FROM PALESTINE ON COVID-19, CURFEWS, & MUTUAL AID**

*By Aaron Lakoff*

*Originally published on briarpatch Apr 2, 2020.*

Today’s dispatch is from Khalil Abu Yahia, a 24 year-old English teacher in Gaza City.

Khalil is soft-spoken and thoughtful as we speak over a Skype video call from his home. A wide smile doesn’t leave his face during the interview, even though he goes to dark places at times. He begins by offering his reflections on the arrival of the deadly Coronavirus in the Gaza Strip.

“For me, it’s like a deja-vu. We’ve been through things like this many times. Some people are saying, ‘we’ve faced the fourth strongest army in the world, so we’re not afraid of being prevented from going out in the streets.’

The responsibility for the situation lies with Israel and its army. Gaza is still under occupation, therefore under international law, ||

Israel should be held accountable. Israel is responsible for our health — they need to be getting us our medicines and treatment, but they don't."

There are mounting fears that a COVID-19 outbreak, combined with the Israeli siege, could be a recipe for genocide in Gaza. To date, Israel has only allowed a few hundred Coronavirus test kits into the besieged territory with a population of nearly two million.

### **Biological racism**

"The sad thing that we are thinking here in Gaza is that Israel is going to get away with this: they will not be held accountable for our health. Because if you ask yourself why we're suffering, and why we're not getting proper treatment for the virus, it's because we weren't born to Jewish mothers. Think about it. If I, Khalil, had been born to a Jewish mother, my health might be better and I would have access to treatments. And that biological racism that Israel is basing its policies on is killing us.

**"IF YOU DON'T PUT THE MAXIMUM PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO LIFT THE SIEGE RIGHT NOW, GAZA WILL BECOME A GRAVEYARD."**

In addition, there's a conspiracy of silence that is killing us. The international community is watching what is happening in Gaza, and never does anything concrete to stop it.

People have compared Gaza to a zoo. There have been reports that have said that Gaza would be unliveable in 2020, and this was without the Coronavirus. Well, now we are in 2020, and we just discovered the first nine cases of the virus in Gaza. God knows how many more cases there are. The situation is getting worse in Gaza. What we want to say to the world is 'enough is enough'. If you don't put the maximum pressure on Israel to lift the siege right now, Gaza will become a graveyard."

12 I asked Khalil to describe the atmosphere in the streets of Gaza

City today.

"Most people are saying, 'Isn't it enough that we are under occupation, and have been under siege for the last 14 years?' Isn't that enough without the Coronavirus? Now we are expecting the world to say something."

### **A state of emergency since 1948**

"You know, in countries like Britain and America, they've been declaring states of emergency. We here in Gaza have been in a state of emergency since 1948. But no one has listened to us. So we're asking, aren't we human like you? Don't we have feelings like you and problems that need to be solved? Why so much racism against us? This is what people are saying in Gaza.

The only people that will help the Palestinians are the Palestinian people themselves. No one heard us in 2008, no one heard us in 2012, and no one heard us in 2014. The only solution is ourselves."

I asked Khalil about quarantines or other protective measures in place right now in Gaza.

"The police are saying you can't have more than five people together at once, or have parties. You can't do anything that brings people together. They have also closed the public markets. And of course no one can travel in or out of Gaza, but that hasn't changed much since the beginning of the Coronavirus."

**"ALL WARS ARE ETCHED IN OUR MINDS"**

People around the world right now are facing all sorts of travel restrictions, and I tell him that people are trying to learn from Palestinian experiences of life under siege. So I ask him how people in Gaza have managed to survive and cope.

"People here, like anyone else in the world, have feelings. I think 13



that 100% of the population of Gaza is traumatized. They want to show they are coping with life, because they know life has to go on. Their hope is that the next generation will be able to make change. To be honest, though, you asked about how we have survived, but we haven't survived. All wars are etched in our minds. We see it in our dreams.

But now what we are saying is that Israeli apartheid needs to end. If Israel is saying they are a democratic country, fine, show us your democracy. But they are a democracy for Jews only.”

I agree with Khalil that the world hasn't heard Gaza's voice, but I ask him that if the world could hear his voice right now, what would he want to let people know as they face the Coronavirus pandemic.

“What you are experiencing right now, Gaza has been experiencing for decades. What you fear is not the worst for us. You, the world, may have not heard us, but we hear you, and we are responding to you.

What we want from the world is to show us solidarity. And to show that they care about us, we want one thing from you: we want you to boycott Israel. That is the one thing that will hold Israel accountable for its crimes against international law, and to get us justice — more BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions) actions. This is the only way to deal with apartheid. It worked in South Africa, and it will work for Israel.

We have lives we need to live. We don't want to die because of the Coronavirus. We are human like you, and we're not asking for too much. We're asking you to be human too.”

*Aaron Lakoff is an award-winning independent journalist, media-maker, and community organizer based in Montreal. He is currently working as the Communications and Media Lead for Independent*

## GAZA'S RACE AGAINST CLIMATE BREAKDOWN

*By Khalil Abu Yahia, Natasha Westheimer and Mor Gilboa*

*Originally published on +972 January 13, 2022.*

**AMID A DEEPENING CLIMATE CRISIS, PALESTINIANS IN GAZA ARE FIGHTING TO SALVAGE THEIR LAND AND LIVELIHOODS. BUT REPEATED BOMBARDMENTS AND AN UNRELENTING BLOCKADE ARE DEVASTATING EFFORTS TO BUILD CLIMATE RESILIENCE.**

Ever-worsening shortages of water and electricity. Catastrophic flooding in dense urban areas. Food insecurity exacerbated by drastic temperature increases, reduction in overall rainfall, and the long-term impact of toxic chemicals.

This is the bleak near-future that awaits the Gaza Strip, a climate change hotspot within a hotspot that is being denied both its basic humanitarian needs, and the capacity and resources to prepare for and minimize the impacts of climate breakdown. Yet tackling both these issues requires taking steps under nearly two decades of an unrelenting land, air, and sea blockade imposed by both Egypt and Israel — and repeated bombardments by the latter are also exacerbating environmental devastation in the strip, further undermining Gaza's ability to prepare for the unfolding climate crisis.

Gaza's two million residents are therefore effectively living in an open-air prison — one which is exposed to incessant rounds of aggression and destruction, as well as Israel's uncompromising restrictions over the movement of people and materials. In this fragile reality, the most basic life-supporting infrastructure, such as access to clean water and continuous electricity, are under continual threat. And those are the very resources and supplies that are most susceptible to climate breakdowns — leaving Gaza and its residents in a race against time to make the strip livable

not only in the present, but also in an uncertain, and increasingly volatile, future.

### **A dual crisis**

At its core, climate resilience is about strengthening the capacity for people to meet these basic needs amid a changing climate. But reinforcing water and electricity supply is essentially impossible under the conditions that Israel and Egypt have imposed on Gaza.

Gaza's inability to build climate resilience is "part of a systematic mechanism of oppression aimed at deepening Israeli domination over Gaza," Alexia Guillaume, a legal researcher at Al-Haq, one of the six Palestinian rights groups Israel outlawed in October, told +972.

While Gaza also shares a border with Egypt, which maintains control over the movement of people and goods through its two crossings, Guillaume said the most powerful actor in the area is Israel. "Systematically speaking, Israel's blockade is what deprives Palestinians from sustainably managing their natural resources and building climate resilience," she added.

Israel's policies vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip are aimed at "entrenching vulnerabilities in order to make it unlivable and unadaptable," Guillaume continued, calling them "just another tool to uphold apartheid."

The combined effects of siege and global warming on Gaza's adaptability and livability are clear in the grave shortage of access to clean water in the strip. Higher temperatures and variable rainfall threaten water supply and quality around the world, and particularly in the Middle East, where temperatures have risen by 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees F) since the Industrial Revolution, well above global trends of 1.1 degrees Celsius. Temperatures are expected to increase by more than 4 degrees Celsius by the end of the century — accompanied by a

decrease in annual rainfall, with estimates ranging from 30-60 percent.

In Gaza, however, where access to clean water is already limited due to Israel's blockade, people are even more vulnerable to climate change-induced water shortages. On average, a person in Gaza receives about one fifth of the amount of safe drinking water recommended by the World Health Organization (just 21 liters per day, against the 100 liter recommendation). This is less than 10 percent of the average 280 liters that Israeli citizens receive per day. Only 3 percent of the strip's sole natural water source, the groundwater basin known as the Coastal Aquifer, is safe to drink. The basin has been polluted by both seawater intrusion, as a result of over-extraction, and wastewater, which has historically flowed openly in Gaza's wadis due to a lack of treatment plants.

"We know that the sustainability of our only natural water source requires that we try to rehabilitate and clean the aquifer through replenishing it with rainwater," said Monther Shoblaq, head of Gaza's largest water utility, the Coastal Municipality Water Utility. "This requires big, open land areas, which we do not have much access to in Gaza. But it also requires finding ways to collect rainwater, and the rainfall frequency is changing," he added.

A regular rainy season starting in October has given way to unpredictable "showers [and] storms" that are far harder to plan around, and thus collect rainwater from, explained Shoblaq. And in light of Gaza's intensive urbanization and poor stormwater infrastructure, the projected short periods of heavy rain will likely cause severe flash floods in densely populated areas.

Moreover, as global warming melts ice sheets and glaciers, sea levels are rising. In Gaza, this will likely intensify the ongoing intrusion of saltwater into the Coastal Aquifer. Furthermore, low-lying agricultural land along the coast — which accounts for 31

percent of the strip's total agricultural production — will be at risk of flooding, further impacting food security.

Energy resource access in Gaza has similarly been shaky for decades. Due to both Egypt and Israel's long-standing control over Gaza's energy provision, amplified by governance disputes between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, the electricity supply to Gaza suffers from chronic instability and meets less than 50 percent of demand.

Electricity to Gaza comes from three sources: a single power plant in the strip, which currently operates on diesel (and which, according to Hussein al-Nabih, the Director General of the Palestinian Energy and Natural Resources Authority, is only operating at 70-75 percent capacity due to maintenance of one of the fuel turbines, fuel shortages and low levels of user bill collection); Egypt, which used to account for 15 percent of Gaza's electricity supply, but whose lines have been down since April 2017 due to technical malfunctions; and Israel, which is currently only supplying 60 percent of its supply capacity. In this reality, residents of the strip report receiving an average of four to six hours of electricity a day, often with blackout periods lasting over 12 hours (published data on electricity availability varies, ranging from 5-15 hours per day).

"We are drowned in humidity, and my respirator, which I struggled for years to get, just turns off when there is no electricity," said Saeed, a lung cancer patient living in Gaza. Saeed has been refused treatment in the West Bank and relies on Gaza's under-resourced medical system. He asked not to disclose his last name, out of fear that doing so might lead Israeli authorities to deny him an exit permit again.

"My breathing problems have increased, and food spoils with no refrigerator operating in the house," continued Saeed. "Our phones are out of battery all the time, and so are our lives."

This chronic shortage of electricity, which has lasted over a decade, severely affects the availability of essential services, including health, water, and sanitation. As such, it also undermines Gaza's fragile economy, especially industry and agriculture.

### **Building climate resilience under siege**

As energy, water, and food security in Gaza continue to crumble, Israeli restrictions on material entry are also restricting the strip's ability to respond to the humanitarian crisis or help prepare, mitigate, or adapt to climate change. For years, Israel has severely restricted the entry of materials into Gaza that it defines as "dual-use," which it perceives as usable for both civilian and military purposes, said Miriam Marmur, international media coordinator at Gisha, an Israeli human rights organization working to protect the freedom of movement of Palestinians in Gaza.

Access to core materials for construction and the maintenance of infrastructure is under the control of the Israeli military. The army imposes, at will, bureaucratic measures that often delay the import of materials into the strip, and can decide at any moment to halt the entry of materials entirely. This slows projects, sends contractors into debt, drains donors' capacity and interest in supporting the sectors, and ultimately limits the ability of water, energy, and food security projects to produce and deliver safe water, electricity and food.

For the water sector, importing critical materials such as pipelines and cement has been largely restricted by the Israeli Civil Administration, the bureaucratic arm of the occupation that sits within the Defense Ministry. As a result, water and wastewater infrastructure projects, while planned and often funded to meet the urgent humanitarian crisis, are delayed for years before completion. Without a reliable and safe drinking water supply, Gazans rely on expensive, private water suppliers (which is also unregulated by the water authority and therefore often unsafe to

drink) to meet their drinking water requirements.

Ali Alasmer is a 55-year-old vegetable farmer whose 12 family members fully depend on his income due to unemployment as well as chronic health issues in the family. Ali has not been able to farm since his land was targeted in Israeli airstrikes — the first of which was in 2008, and again in 2012. He asked not to publish his real last name for fear of retribution from Israel.

Ali has since been unable to import materials critical for rehabilitating his agricultural land (such as water pipes, pumps and filters for irrigation networks, seeds and seedlings, fertilizer, chemical materials, plant antibiotics and nets for greenhouses) and has therefore defaulted on his municipal water bills. Like many in Gaza, he maintains a longstanding debt with the water utility, and still needs to supplement the municipal supply with purified water from private vendors. Residents of Gaza, including those who spoke to +972, report spending between 40 to 90 NIS (13 to 29 USD) per month on safe drinking water.

For Ali, the 70 NIS (23 USD) he spends on water is approximately 20 percent of his monthly income. “We cannot even collect rainwater, because we do not have a tank that is suitable from a health aspect,” he said. “Our everyday life is disturbed and unstable because of food, water and health insecurity.”

### **‘Full of poison’**

Even when water supply infrastructure is built, it faces the risk of destruction. According to the Palestinian Water Authority, the latest round of aggression in Gaza this May left residents with 40 percent less water due to direct and indirect targeting of water infrastructure. Efforts to rebuild or rehabilitate water infrastructure, among other sectors, were also barred by extreme material entry restrictions, which lasted many months into the summer.

The energy sector is also not immune from the impact of periods of escalation. Last May, during the bombardment, Israeli authorities completely banned imports of fuel to supply Gaza’s power plant, closing the crossings after a soldier was lightly wounded by a mortar shell fired from the strip.

This “total fuel ban,” in the words of Gisha’s Marmur, severely limited the already-faltering electricity supply and, during a period of mass injury and death caused by the bombing, “jeopardized the functioning of hospitals and other civilian infrastructure, such as water supply and sewage treatment.”

Hani Abu Rass is an electricity technician who works at Gaza’s power plant and used to be on a team that would repair electrical lines during Israeli aggressions. He says that “we were targeted several times while wearing vests that show we are electrical technicians. The first time Israel targeted one of our vehicles, two of my staff were severely injured. The second time Israel attacked the staff with shells so that we could not even reach the lines that needed repairing. It is a miracle that I am still alive.”

Due to these power cuts, drastic reductions had to be made in safe drinking water production from desalination facilities: they could only operate for a few hours per day, while one facility serving 250,000 residents shut down entirely. Operations only resumed according to the electricity grid cycle (about eight hours per day) after the ceasefire.

The agriculture sector has also been attacked. Israel dropped phosphorus bombs on the land of Ali and his family, and fired on their water wells. “We first felt a rocket and were suffocated by a smell,” Ali recalled. “Then we saw the bombs falling on our land. Once the violence settled, I brought my friend, an agricultural engineer, to check our lands, and he said it was full of poison. We later learned from the Health Ministry in Gaza that Israel was using phosphorus bombs.”



Israel has been accused of using these bombs in an unlawful manner, particularly during its 2008/9 assault, due to its indiscriminate firing over densely populated civilian areas. Besides having a detrimental impact on human health and bodily safety, these chemical bombs can contaminate land and are toxic to plants, fruits, and vegetables.

“We could not plant any kind of vegetable in the places that were destroyed by the phosphorus bomb,” Ali said. “Since these bombs were used on our land, all of the surrounding trees produce crops with different colors and tastes than those that we were able to grow before. Israel uses these weapons to target us and sterilize our land. They poison our fruit and vegetables, even after washing them, creating food insecurity due to the decline in production.”

The chemicals used in Israeli weapons like phosphorus further jeopardize the health of people in Gaza. Dr. Tamer Yousef, a neurologist based in one of Gaza’s major hospitals, explained that because “trees and plants can absorb these poisonous chemicals, their agricultural production is not healthy.”

According to Human Rights Watch, even a medical report by the Israeli Health Ministry concluded that white phosphorus is dangerous, noting it “can cause serious injury and death when it comes into contact with the skin, is inhaled or is swallowed,” leading to further damages to internal organs if absorbed. While research is lacking on the long-term impacts of white phosphorus in Gaza, soil samples following Israeli military aggressions indicate that a cocktail of heavy metals were introduced into Gaza’s environment, which can impact agricultural productivity as well as environmental and human health in the long-term.

In addition, a joint investigation by Gisha, Adalah, and Al-Mezan indicated that Israel has, on dozens of occasions, conducted aerial spraying of herbicides at dangerously high concentrations across 12 square kilometers of land in Gaza, including of ‘Roundup,’ a

Monsanto-owned chemical compound of Glyphosate. While the International Agency for Research on Cancer marked this compound as probably carcinogenic and agronomists and environmental experts have raised concerns about their effects, this herbicide continues to be used globally.

Beyond the periodic military assaults, Israel has also bulldozed productive crop areas across Gaza over the past few decades, and has placed severe restrictions on developing agricultural land in the “buffer zone,” a 984-foot wide area along the fenced perimeter that separates Gaza from Israel, which Israeli authorities have maintained restricted access to Gazans. “Israel has been systematically targeting our agricultural land as if it wants to paralyze our living conditions,” said Ali. He noted that over the years, Israel has bulldozed countless crops such as olive, fig, and citrus trees.

The devastation of Gazan land further robs many Palestinian agricultural workers of their livelihood. Ali says that the land is the main source of income for most of the families he knows. “There is no other job option for farmers in Gaza because of the economic stagnation caused by the Israeli siege,” he said. “I am an old man. My sons are university graduates but have no jobs. I was planning to have them work in our agricultural land, but alas, everything is gone.”

The tightening space for agricultural development — both from Israeli bombing campaigns and land development restrictions, not only impact livelihoods and strain agricultural development, but also accelerates soil degradation and desertification, deepening Gaza’s vulnerability to the climate breakdown.

### ***Between humanitarian and climate crises***

Ali’s story is representative of the unrelenting economic crisis created by Israel’s occupation of Gaza, with more than half of Gazan Palestinians living below the poverty line. In this reality, where, for example, water and electricity bills are going unpaid



across the strip, water and energy authorities are unable to cover their basic costs, maintain their existing infrastructure, and meet the population's basic needs — let alone make it climate resilient.

There is an elephant in the room regarding the need to both significantly increase energy and water supply in Gaza, and to make them climate resilient: the global struggle against the climate crisis calls for an urgent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, and the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recommended halving CO2 emissions by 2030 and transitioning to a net-zero carbon economy by 2050.

However, the combination of a severe electricity shortage and the urgent need to address the humanitarian crisis mean that the West Bank and Gaza still require tremendous and rapid development that may not align with the spirit of the climate struggle. Illustrative of this is the Gas4Gaza project, which aims to significantly increase domestic energy production, lower costs to residents, and reduce Gaza's dependence on electricity and fuel imports from Egypt and Israel.

Al-Nabih from the Palestinian Energy and Natural Resources Authority sees this project as central to Gaza's energy crisis — it will not only bridge the electricity deficit, he said, but will also “support [Gaza's] economic development...and will significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

While this project is designed to mark a shift in the Palestinian energy economy and emissions make-up, the development of natural gas, potent in methane, has enormous impacts on the climate due to greenhouse gas emissions that can come from leakages in production and transportation (a standard occurrence that carries the added concerns of infrastructure and pipeline damage from Israeli bombing campaigns in Gaza).

There is therefore a deep tension between prioritizing Gaza's economic and humanitarian recovery, which would reinforce its

energy reliance on fossil fuels, versus the need to combat the climate crisis, which would require an urgent transition to renewable energy. It is likely that due to the fragility and gravity of its situation, Gaza will not undergo the same process of fossil fuel withdrawal as other parts of the world. Such a shift would require extensive measures such as improving energy efficiency, reducing the use of coal and fuel, and generating renewable energy such as solar power — baseline conditions that Gaza has nowhere near the resources or capacity to meet.

This difficult reality aligns with a growing acknowledgement within the climate justice movement that although we are all indeed affected by the climate crisis, not all of us are “in the same boat.” Populations that suffer from systemic discrimination, racism, and violence, as well as those that live under occupation, have greater difficulty in building climate resilience and will therefore suffer far more from the climate crisis than other populations. As Gaza is striving to secure even its most basic humanitarian and human rights needs, the idea of gearing toward a low-carbon economy and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions is inevitably taking a back seat; instead of proactive climate resilience, then, the focus becomes about reactive adaptation and rehabilitation following climate breakdown.

Guillaume at Al-Haq fears that Palestinian institutions are far too fragmented to pursue any meaningful coordination in climate adaptation, with Hamas in Gaza, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and Israel's overall rule between the river and the sea. Such divided governance, she warned, “will hinder the creation of any effective roadmap toward mitigating the effects of climate change.”

Moreover, Guillaume stressed, Israel's control over natural resources in Gaza will further exacerbate the strip's climate vulnerability — and this state of affairs will only deepen, she added, with Israel all but certain to further exert control over Gaza's resources “in order to adapt to the climate crisis.”

## **'FIGHTING COLONIALISM GOES HAND-IN-HAND WITH THE FIGHT FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE'**

Despite these immense obstacles, authorities and institutions in Gaza are doing whatever they can to build climate preparedness and resilience. Shoblaq, of Gaza's Coastal Municipality Water Utility, said that the water sector is continuing to make progress on integrating renewable energy into their systems. "We're lucky that when there's a big storm, the sun comes out afterwards," Shoblaq said. "Most of our water and wastewater facilities are currently or will shortly be running on as much renewable energy as possible."

Wastewater treatment in Gaza has also significantly improved in recent years, according to Shoblaq. "Where once wastewater would flow through Wadi Gaza and into the sea, we have advanced wastewater treatment infrastructure to improve the conditions of our environment, and we are rehabilitating the wadis where this wastewater once flowed," he said. "While these infrastructure projects were delayed for years due to material entry restrictions, we hope that Wadi Gaza can be a symbol of hope."

Yet for Palestinians in Gaza, such piecemeal interventions fall short of the systemic overhaul needed to rehabilitate and protect their environment. "Years have gone by and our reality has not improved," said Ali. "Israel has only tightened discriminatory policies against Gaza. The international community must start by putting pressure on Israel to break the siege, so that we can have the equal ability to respond to climate change as anyone else would."

Yet discussion of the interplay between the political, economic, humanitarian, and climate disasters in Gaza is not breaking through into the global climate debate. The recent UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow provides a stark

illustration of this dynamic: although it underlined the world's current focus on the climate crisis, not a single resident of Gaza was able to attend the event. (The Palestinian civil society delegation was, furthermore, denied visas to attend, although two members were able to present via a video link.)

For the strip's residents, this absence of Palestinian voices from Gaza highlighted the reality that change will not come from elite decision-makers at COP26 alone, but through embracing an intersectional approach within the movement for climate justice.

"We know that climate change affects people all over the world, including Gaza," said Ali. "So the solution to the global climate crisis has to take Palestine into consideration. I am afraid that if the world continues to ignore Gaza's suffering, this would threaten not only local but also international climate resilience."

Saleem Jaber, a human rights activist who was wounded in the 2008 Israeli assault on Gaza, echoed this sentiment. "Fighting Israeli colonialism goes hand in hand with the fight for climate resilience," he said. "Both struggles resist different kinds of injustices that, at the end of the day, are a matter of protecting human beings. But these struggles are also connected — and we cannot support one struggle without understanding that we must support all efforts for advancing justice."

*Khalil Abu Yahia is a Gaza-based academic writer and researcher in literary, postcolonial, and cultural studies.*

*Natasha Westheimer is a water and climate governance specialist and an anti-occupation activist based in Israel-Palestine.*

*Mor Gilboa is an environmentalist and climate justice activist and part of the 'One Climate' movement which promotes climate justice between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.*



*Khalil Abu Yahia at his graduation from the Islamic University of Gaza in 2022. (Instagram)*

**"WHEREVER  
OPPRESSION  
IS THE LAW,  
REBELLION  
IS A MUST."**

*- Khalil*