



## What is “greenwashing”?

Greenwashing is a practice that involves pretending to be environmentally friendly in order to deflect attention from criminal activity.<sup>1</sup> In 1948, when the state of Israel was created, over 700,000 indigenous Palestinians became refugees, and hundreds of thousands more were displaced from their homes by Jewish militias<sup>2</sup>. Since then, Israel has continued to commit grave human rights abuses against Palestinians.<sup>3</sup>

Israel greenwashes its colonial projects and human rights abuses against Palestinians in various ways. One way is through its rhetoric, claiming, for example, that Israel “made the desert bloom”<sup>4</sup>. But there are many other ways in which Israel and its proponents greenwash Israel’s abysmal human rights record.

## Did Israel “Make the Desert Bloom”?

No. This myth benefits Israel in two ways. First, this myth erases Israel’s expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians by falsely suggesting that Palestine was a deserted land, which Zionists were able to rightly claim without displacing or dispossessing anyone. Second, this myth portrays Israel as a progressive and technologically advanced country, which cares about the environment and was able to quickly green a desert. The claim that Palestine was an empty desert that Israel “made bloom” is false, because:

1. Almost all of the northern half of Palestine has a Mediterranean climate.<sup>5</sup>
2. When Zionist settlers arrived in Palestine in the decades before the creation of the state of Israel, the land was inhabited by the Palestinian people, most of whom were farmers.<sup>6</sup>
3. Palestinians have cultivated the land for centuries. Palestinian agriculture was sustainable and the “fertility of Palestine was unsurpassed”.<sup>7</sup> By 1930, all areas “which could be cultivated by Palestinians, were already farmed by them”<sup>8</sup>. The areas of Gaza, Jaffa, Hebron, Nablus, Galilee, and others were all “intensively cultivated” and became reputed for different crops, such as watermelons, tobacco, wheat, citrus, grapes, olives, and cotton.<sup>9</sup> Palestine was blooming long before the founding of Israel.

## Is Israel environmentally friendly?

Not particularly. There are a number of ways in which Israel is clearly *not* environmentally friendly:

1. Israel has one of the biggest per capita ecological footprints and carbon footprints in the world, ranking in the top 10% and 20% respectively.<sup>10 11</sup> Israel is a major contributor to climate change.
2. Israeli agriculture is “not sustainable, and contributes significantly to the growing environmental crisis on our planet”<sup>12</sup>. For example, Israel uses pesticides widely which contaminate ground water and soil and cause harm to certain bird species.<sup>13</sup>
3. Especially in the West Bank, Israel has waged a “massive, systematic destruction” of trees. It has uprooted hundreds of thousands of trees to date, including olive, citrus, date, almond, and banana<sup>14</sup>. Protected by the Israeli army, Israeli colonizers of Palestinian land often attack Palestinian farmers and burn or bulldoze their trees.<sup>15</sup>
4. Israel is one of the top 20 weapon exporters and importers in the world, underlining Israel’s role as a major contributor to warfare.<sup>16</sup> According to the UN Rio Declaration, “warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development”.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the war industry causes 6-10% of air pollution and 10-30% of the total environmental damage worldwide.<sup>18</sup> For example, in Israel’s 2014 war on Gaza, Israel needlessly shelled Gaza’s only power plant,<sup>19</sup> igniting two million liters of diesel fuel for no reason, severely polluting the air.<sup>20</sup>

Social justice experts also assert that human rights and environmental rights go hand in hand<sup>21</sup>. It is difficult to argue that Israel is environmentally friendly, while being a colonial and apartheid state which severely undermines the rights of certain racial minorities.

## How does the JNF greenwash Israel?

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) is an organization which enables Israel’s ongoing colonization of Palestine and helps greenwash Israeli crimes. The JNF was founded in 1901 to acquire land in Palestine for Jewish-only use. Despite its racially-based mandate and its involvement in settler-colonial projects, the JNF deceptively depicts itself

as an environmental charity, procuring charitable status in many countries – including Canada.<sup>22</sup> For example, the JNF plants trees over destroyed Palestinian villages to conceal evidence of the ethnic cleansing carried out by Israeli forces.<sup>23</sup> To date, 86 destroyed Palestinian villages are buried under JNF forests.<sup>24</sup> The JNF thus uses environmental policy, like tree planting, as a tool to greenwash Israel's destruction of Palestinian villages.

While the JNF claims to have had large successes with forestation, combating desertification, rehabilitating forests, and preventing forest fires,<sup>25</sup> the JNF has actually done the opposite:

1. The JNF has frequently destroyed the native environment in the name of development. In the 1950s, for example, it drained Israel's largest wetlands to gain land for agriculture. As a result, some species went extinct.<sup>26</sup>
2. While the JNF boasts it has planted over 240 million trees, the vast majority of trees the JNF planted were non-native trees.<sup>27</sup> While the impact of this decision is still being understood, it is known that needles from such trees kill native plants and that these non-native trees are more flammable than native species.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, JNF forests were found to be "ecologically impoverished", as they greatly reduced biodiversity.<sup>29</sup>
3. JNF plantations accelerated desertification. The JNF planted trees in the Negev desert, which absorbed water and heat, causing overheating and "a local effect of climate change".<sup>30</sup>

Aytzim, a New York-based organization which also engages in greenwashing for Israel admits: "[the JNF] had a blemished record on the environment throughout its history".<sup>31</sup>

## What is Canada's relationship to Israeli greenwashing?

Successive Canadian governments have supported Israel politically, financially and diplomatically for decades, ignoring Israel's violations of human rights.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps as a result of this close relationship, the JNF's branch in Canada has enjoyed charitable status for years, and therefore has its activities subsidized by the Canadian taxpayer. Decades ago, the JNF Canada raised \$15 million to build "Ayalon Canada Park" in the West Bank – occupied Palestinian territory. This park was built over the Palestinian villages of Imwas, Yalu, and Beit Nuba, which were destroyed by Israel in 1948.<sup>33</sup>

Outraged by the Canadian government's silence on Israeli human rights abuses, especially greenwashing, many Canadians have joined the international "Stop the JNF" campaign, which was launched by Palestinian civil society and various human rights groups.<sup>34</sup> You can learn more about it at <http://www.stopthejnf.org/>.

<sup>1</sup> "About Greenwashing", *Greenwashing Index*, 2018. <http://greenwashingindex.com/aboutgreenwashing/>

<sup>2</sup> Ilan Pappé. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006. Pg. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Falk & Virginia Tilley. "Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid Palestine and the Israeli Occupation". *UN. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)*, No. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Alan George. "'Making the Desert Bloom' A Myth Examined". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1979: 88.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 89.

<sup>6</sup> Samah Sabawi. The environmental impact of Israel's occupation. *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Orenstein, et al. (2013). *Between ruin and restoration: an environmental history of Israel*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Alan George. "'Making the Desert Bloom' A Myth Examined". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1979: 100.

<sup>9</sup> Lorenzo Kamel. *Imperial perceptions of Palestine: British influence and power in late Ottoman times*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015. Pg. 77

<sup>10</sup> Countries Ranked by Ecological Footprint Per Capita (in global hectares)", *Global Footprint Network*, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> "Carbon emissions per person per country". *The Guardian*, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Alon Tal. "To Make a Desert Bloom: The Israeli Agricultural Adventure and the Quest for Sustainability". *Agricultural History*, Volume 8, No. 2: 251.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Orenstein, et al. (2013). *Between ruin and restoration: an environmental history of Israel*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Ali Abuminah. "If it's against Jewish law, then why is Israel doing it?" *Electronic Intifada*, 28 Jan, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> "Settlers' Attacks Report for January of 2014. Uprooting More Than 2,000 Olive Trees And Almost Daily Attacks On Citizens". *Palestinian Grassroots Anti-apartheid Wall Campaign*, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Saar Haas, "Israel is 7th largest arms exporter in the world", *Ynetnews*, 17 Mar, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> UN. "Report of the UN Conference on Environment and Development", 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Ahmad Saleh Safi. "War on Gaza Strip: Participatory Environmental Impact Assessment". *Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network – FoE Palestine*, 2015: 15.

<sup>19</sup> "Gaza: Widespread Impact of Power Plant Attack," *Human Rights Watch*, 10 Aug, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Saleh Safi. "War on Gaza Strip: Participatory Environmental Impact Assessment". *Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network – FoE Palestine*, 2015: 17.

<sup>21</sup> David A. McDonald. *Environmental justice in South Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002. Pg.3.

<sup>22</sup> Sara Kershner, et al. "Greenwashing Apartheid: The Jewish National Fund's Environmental Cover Up". *International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network*. Vol 4: 6

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: 7

<sup>24</sup> Masalha, Nur. *The Palestine Nakba: decolonising history, narrating the subaltern, reclaiming memory*. London: Zed Books, 2012 Pg. 177.

<sup>25</sup> "Trees in KKL-JNF Forests". *JNF*.

<http://www.kkl-jnf.org/forestry-and-ecology/tress-in-kkk-jnf-forests>

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Orenstein, et al. (2013). *Between ruin and restoration: an environmental history of Israel*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 59-60.

<sup>27</sup> Ilan Pappé. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006. Pg. 400.

<sup>28</sup> Max Blumenthal. "The Carmel Wildfire Is Burning All Illusions in Israel". *The Electronic Intifada*, 6 Dec, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Orenstein, et al. (2013). *Between ruin and restoration: an environmental history of Israel*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 65.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Pessah. "How colonialism and climate change displace the Negev's Bedouin". *972 Magazine*, 14 Mar, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> "Greening Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael / Jewish National Fund in Israel (KKL-JNF)". *Aytzim*, 2017. <http://aytzim.org/greenisrael/kkk>

<sup>32</sup> "Why Canadian aid won't really help Palestinian entrepreneurs". *The Conversation Canada*, 23, Aug 2018.

<sup>33</sup> "Help Us Stop the Jewish National Fund (JNF)". *Independent Jewish Voices Canada*, 2017. <https://ijvcana.org/campaign/the-jewish-national-fund-jnf/>

<sup>34</sup> "About" *Stop the JNF Campaign*, 2018 [www.stopthejnf.org/about/](http://www.stopthejnf.org/about/)