

PALESTINE: THE STRUGGLE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY UNDER OCCUPATION



International webinar in English, Arabic, French and Spanish

5 October 2021
15.00 CET / 16.00 Gaza



Link to register on Zoom:

https://viacampesina.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_nshanvHHSGGF7GrG-MsN5w

In October 2021, we are celebrating 25 years of defining¹, building and fighting for Food Sovereignty all over the world. The concept of Food Sovereignty was developed by La Via Campesina and brought to public debate during the World Food Summit in 1996 as an alternative to neoliberal policies. Since then, peasant organisations, unions and social movements have been fighting for the true implementation of this concept, as the real solution to end world hunger.

Food Sovereignty encompasses the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. The concept asserts the right of peoples to control their food resources including land, water, seeds, pastures, animal and fish stocks.

More than just a concept, Food Sovereignty is a strategy for development and a way of life. It looks at the type of food we eat, the conditions in which it is produced, and its relationships with the environment and local community. It is a strategy for struggle against agribusiness, monoculture, crop standardisation and exploitation of peasants and agricultural workers, within the hyper-productivist, profit-driven, capitalist model of food production.

For Palestinians, the struggle for Food Sovereignty is an important part of their struggle against a military occupation which has full control over their natural resources, including land, water, seeds and fisheries.

In Gaza specifically, it is a matter of survival.

¹ <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty-25-years-in-the-making/>

The Israeli blockade imposed in 2007 turned Gaza in to an extreme form of open-air prison, where people struggle every day to feed themselves and make a living, let alone adapt to climate change and crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. Israel's subsequent offensives in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021 caused mass destruction of human life and infrastructure. In 2012, the United Nations already stated that the Gaza Strip will not be liveable² by 2020 unless urgent action is taken to improve living conditions including water supply, electricity, health and schooling.

During the Israeli military offensive on the Gaza Strip for 12 days in May 2021, Israeli Forces continued to disregard International and Humanitarian Laws by imposing collective punishment on Palestinians in Gaza. As of 21 May , Israel's massacres have killed³ over 260 civilians including 60 children and 40 women. More than 1,900 people have been injured, more than 60% of them children and women. During this intensified assault on Gaza, seven farmers were killed on their land with missiles bombed from Israeli aircrafts. There has been around \$27 million in damage, including demolition of 490 agricultural facilities such as greenhouses, lands and poultry farms. According to the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)⁴ the destruction entailed: 30,000 km of irrigation networks and transmission lines, 50 solar energy units, 190 ponds, 500 dunums (aces) of crops, 2,100 greenhouses, 20 wells, 50 fishing boats, 220 missile holes in farmlands and 200-250 farm animal deaths.

The Israeli occupation deprives Palestinians of their right to food, right to life and right to development. 32.7%⁵ of Palestinians overall are food insecure. In the Gaza strip, this figure rises to 68.5%. Israeli occupation still prevents the entry of goods and raw materials , as well as the export of many industrial and agricultural products.

After 15 years of suffocation , it is surely time for international institutions to carry out their legal and humanitarian duties towards the Palestinians and ensure that their basic rights are protected.

In this webinar, we will hear from farmers and fisherfolks on the frontline in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as international experts and activists.

We invite you to join us to learn more about Palestinian reality and struggle for rights.

SPEAKERS FROM PALESTINE

Abeer Butmeh

Abeer M. Butmeh is an environmental and water engineer and the coordinator of PENGON-Friends of the Earth Palestine. She has over 10 years of experience in campaigning, coordination, communication and facilitation. Abeer is also a trainer on water management and environmental issues, and an active member of various social movements and environmental networks at local and international levels.

² <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-gaza-un-idUSBRE87Q0OE20120827>

³ <https://uawc-pal.org/pdf/UAWC's%20statement%20on%20the%20recent%20escalations%20in%20Gaza.pdf>

⁴ <https://uawc-pal.org/pdf/UAWC's%20statement%20on%20the%20recent%20escalations%20in%20Gaza.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.wfp.org/countries/palestine>

Basheer Al-Ankah

Basheer Al-Ankah is the Operations and Development Department Manager of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) Gaza Branch. He is a mechanical engineer, specialised in water resources management. Basheer has 20 years of progressive experience, 17 years of which are in the field of environmental, water resources and rural development, along with vast experience in networking and coordination. As a strong advocate for farmers' rights to access water, land and seeds, he has contributed to developing hundreds of initiatives and programmes in support of Palestinian peasants' right to Food Sovereignty.

Bushra Zidan

Bushra Zidan is a young woman leader in her community and a strong advocate for women's rights in the agricultural sector. She holds a BA in Education and worked mainly in family-owned agriculture. Bushra has contributed to supporting women to start food processing cooperatives, and in 2021 she led the establishment of an agricultural youth cooperative in Burin, in the West Bank.

Khaled Ibrahim Al-Habil

Khaled Ibrahim Al-Habil, 56 years old, is a fisherman in Palestine. He has been fishing with his brothers and sons for more than 40 years, mainly for sardines in his two small boats. Khaled is the head of a large family of five sons and four daughters. He has spent his life struggling for peasants' rights. Through his humble fishing career, he has supported the employment of 30 fishermen, many of whom are extended family members and neighbours. Under the occupation, Israel's gunboats have destroyed his boats on more than one occasion.

INTERNATIONAL SPEAKERS

Asad Rehman

Asad Rehman is the Executive Director of War on Want, a radical, anti-poverty and social justice organisation that works with social movements in the global North and South to achieve a just and safe world. Based in London, War on Want is a strong advocate for Justice for Palestinians and campaigns for an end to Israeli occupation and apartheid. Asad is a leading climate justice advocate whose work has helped to reframe the climate crisis as a crisis of economic inequality and racism. He is co-coordinator of the Global Green New Deal Project and spokesperson for the COP26 coalition. Over the last 35 years, he has worked with many social movements and international NGOs both at the global and national level.

@chilledasad100 / @WarOnWant

Carlos Marentes

Carlos Marentes, a native of the Juárez-El Paso border region, is a farm labour organiser and advocate for farm workers' rights. He is the founder and director of the Border Agricultural Workers Project (BAWP), an effort to organise farm workers in their fields and communities on both sides of the US-Mexico border, especially chile pickers. He participates in many local, state and national organisations dealing with poverty, economic inequality, environment and climate issues, and co-coordinates the International Collective on Migrants and Rural Workers of La Vía Campesina. He is also co-coordinator of LVC's North America Region and active member of LVC's International Coordinating Committee where he accompanies UAWC-Palestine in strengthening LVC's efforts in the Arab and North Africa region.

@carlosmarentes