

Courage My Friends Podcast Series VIII – Episode 9
Palestine and the Weaponizing of Hunger and the Climate Crisis

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

RESH: How has hunger become a weapon of war in Gaza? How does occupation and war accelerate the climate crisis in Palestine? Where does one find the will to survive when all vital life and community systems are under attack? And what is the connection between climate resilience and the resilience of the Palestinian people?

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In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

TOMMY (Actor): Courage my friends, 'tis not too late to build a better world

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the Courage My Friends Podcast.

RESH: Welcome to The Courage My Friends podcast, episode nine, *Palestine and the Weaponizing of Hunger and the Climate Crisis*

I'm your host Resh Budhu.

In this episode, we welcome visiting professor at Toronto's York University and Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, Dr. Ahmed Abu Shaban. We discuss how already fragile food systems and connected systems are being weaponized against the people of Gaza, the climate impacts of Israeli occupation and wars past and present and how Palestinian resilience is connected to climate resilience, belonging and land.

AHMED: Thank you very much for having me.

RESH: You are currently a visiting professor at Toronto's York University in the faculties of Liberal Arts and Environmental and Urban Change. And you're also Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. So could you tell us about your work?

AHMED: Actually I'm associate professor in natural resources management and my research focus on mainly food system in post-conflict zone. My main focus is on Palestine, in Gaza Strip in particular, considering all factors affecting food system in Palestine.

This is including climate change as it is a major issue in Palestine in general, but in Gaza Strip in particular. But also the implication of Israeli occupation and settler colonialism project on the food system. And also investigation of the food-related policies, either just imposed by the Israeli occupation, but also internal food policies and how actually we can just work on resilient food system in Palestine. And what kind of community coping mechanism were taken actually to reduce the negative implication of the food crisis in Palestine.

RESH: You recently delivered the closing presentation at the George Brown College Labour Fair in Toronto. And the session began with a Land Acknowledgement, which is now common in Canada.

What does the Land Acknowledgement mean to you as a Palestinian?

AHMED: As a Palestinian, I'm currently now displaced in Canada, it was really something very interesting for me to know about Land Acknowledgement. Because Land Acknowledgement actually is reflecting a very similar story of what's going on right now in Palestine about Indigenous people. People of this land. I mean the land property was taken from them by the new settlers. And this is really a very good exercise to acknowledge their right.

Although actually this is not reflecting any action. It's like just saying to the people, okay, sorry we took your land and we acknowledge that it is your land, but your land will not be actually given back to you.

For me, I believe this is a very good lesson for the whole humanity, that we should not allow this to happen again. And, if we do not take at least a lesson out of that, that the right of the original or the Indigenous people of a certain land should be respected and the crisis of taking land from the Indigenous people... I mean the right should be protected.

And as humanity here, regardless if you are talking about Canada or whatever international community, we should also all stand for the Palestinian, because this is something that we should learn from the history. And the Land Acknowledgement is standing there to remind us and also to give us a very good lesson that as a humanity we should all work against any attempt to take those people out of their land and to protect their right to live over their land.

And therefore, I believe this is something good only if we learn the lesson out of it. But if we don't learn the lesson out of this acknowledgement I think it has no significant meaning.

RESH: Right. It becomes bereft of meaning.

AHMED: Yeah.

RESH: Yeah. And you also started your talk by speaking on the meaning of Palestinian identity. What does it mean to be Palestinian?

AHMED: Yeah. This is really very good question because sometimes it is meant to reflect kind of a religious meaning of Palestinians. So usually I say, you know, my name is Ahmed. I am Muslim, I am Palestinian. But Jesus, Jesus Christ actually was Palestinian. And we have Palestinian Jewish.

What does it mean to be Palestinian? This is the Indigenous people of Palestine. The people who were there.

Now if you think about the new settlers, the new settlers who came after what happened in Europe when the Jewish were disadvantaged, they actually came to Palestine and Palestine provided them with the protection and shelter, whatever food of this land was shared. And this actually differentiate between the original people of Palestine who actually coming from all religions.

So being a Palestinian does not mean you are against Jewish or you are against Christian. It's not a religion, it's a nationality.

Like when you talk about the Indigenous people here in Canada. Indigenous people are the original people of this land.

So this is what is meant by being Palestinian. Like it's the original people of this land. They are Palestinian.

RESH: So the situation facing Palestinians as the situation facing Indigenous peoples here is fundamentally about land and sovereignty?

AHMED: Yeah. I believe this is actually... I don't like to say that there is any positive thing about what's going on in Palestine right now or in Gaza. But if we think of any good thing about it, it just brought the attention to the area or what's going on to the area. Because all the atrocities that we are seeing right now and all the aggression that is practiced against the Palestinian people, the genocide against the Palestinian people is maybe the most massive that we experience right now. But it's not new. It's a long story. And this is what I usually try to reflect even through my research. That the Israeli policy to challenge the Palestinian people to access their land, to practice their activities to produce food, that is not actually started only after the 7th of October. It has a long history. Taking different forms of challenging the Palestinian people.

I mean, in Gaza we can talk about different forms of restricting access to land to practice farming activities. One third of our arable land in Gaza is taken long before the 7th of October, and it is called "Access Restricted Area", where farmers actually they own the land, but they cannot access the land.

And they have even different regulations. A certain portion of their land they can access, but they have a very limited model of practices that is allowed there. This is not only for land, but also for the sea. Fishing area is restricted by the Israeli occupation in Gaza. So this is in Gaza, but also in West Bank.

So it is part of a strategy, a long-term strategy by the Israeli occupation to challenge all means of life for the Palestinians.

One of the main challenges is to create kind of a fragile food system where people cannot actually independently practice food production. And land and food sovereignty here is an issue because people actually, cannot have good access to their land. But also limitation. Because when you think about food system in Gaza, either it is locally produced from our farms, or it is imported through the borders.

Now come to the food that is produced locally, you have a limited access to the land. You have a limited access to water. You have also a limited access to inputs. Input supply is coming only through the borders, and it is restricted by or limited by the Israelis.

Now, when you think about what is imported as food, before the 7th of October it was controlled by the Israelis and the amount of food that was allowed to come inside Gaza was controlled before.

Now this is long-term strategy with even a long-term aggression because this is not the first war against Gaza. Destruction of farm assets and farming sector was practiced long before the 7th of October. We have five wars before and even period between the wars the Israelis usually would come inside Palestinian land and destroy farm assets.

But also it's a long-term strategy to challenge the food system and to create kind of a fragile food system in Gaza. That when they decide as what happened during this war, now we are going to use food as a weapon they were successful.

One very good question about this, why actually the people inside Gaza were facing food insecurity only five days after the ongoing genocide started? Because before that, their food system was controlled by the Israelis. Their land was controlled by the Israelis. Their agricultural inputs is challenged by the Israelis. This is one of the major issues in Gaza. It is a long-term control of all means of life. But one of the main sectors that were controlled by the Israelis were the food system with a very clear intention that they would like to control the food of the Palestinian people inside Gaza.

But by the way, they are doing even the same thing right now in West Bank. So even long before the 7th of October, the intention to use food as a weapon and to control the natural resources. But this is also the same thing for all other sectors. Like for the education sector it's the same thing. For the health sector it's the same thing. For the environmental sector it's the same thing. Always they have the strategy to challenge

all means of life for the Palestinian people, to create a situation that the people would just select: Okay, we cannot live like this and we should leave this land.

RESH: Talking about land, just to give some more context to this. The land that the Palestinian people are on today is very different from the Palestine of pre-1948, the Nakba, when they were violently displaced from the land. Could you give sort of a brief overview of how historic Palestine has transitioned into the Palestine that we see today, Gaza and the West Bank and East Jerusalem?

AHMED: Before 1948, Palestine was the whole historical Palestine. The settlers who were coming from outside Palestine was actually representing less than 5% of the historical Palestine.

As I said, it is a very long story with a very strategic settler colonialism project utilizing wide range of strategies to decline historical Palestine or the territories where the Palestinians live. And now we are just talking about less than 20% of the whole historical Palestine, where the Palestinian with a very high population density. And they are just pushing the Palestinian people into smaller pieces of land that are controlled by the Israeli Occupation from all sides. Yeah. This is in West Bank and in Gaza Strip.

Gaza Strip used to be one piece of land, like 365 kilometers of land where you have around 2.2 million people live in this piece of land. And it is known internationally as the biggest open-air prison in the world, where actually people live under siege now for more than 17 years.

With, of course, implication of the siege on the livelihood of the people. Very high rate of poverty even long before the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Very high level of unemployment. Very limited infrastructure. Very limited public services.

But also in the West Bank where you have 3.2 million live in around 5,550 square kilometer, which is disconnected. Geographically 227 disconnected districts where you would like to move from one town to another town, you should go through Israeli checkpoints, where different forms of dehumanization of Palestinians are practiced.

So this West Bank even is categorized into three categories based on this Oslo agreement that was supposed actually to end with a Palestinian independent state on only around 32% of the historical Palestine. But according to that agreement, which was a temporary agreement till we reach a final agreement, that has never been reached. The Israelis keep talking about these process, but without result. But they keep taking more and more land to establish more and more illegal settlements.

Now West Bank where we have 18%, which is according to the agreement, is supposed to be controlled by the Palestinian Authority, it's not practically controlled by the Palestinian Authority because the Israeli Occupation every day they invade these territories, and even practice aggression. They demolish houses, demolish infrastructure.

You have the Area B where you have 21% of the West Bank, is in joint control between the Israeli Authority and the Palestinian Authority. But again, in practice this is not the case because the Israelis do not allow the Palestinian to control anything.

And you have around 61%, which is Area C in West Bank, which is whatever small piece or a portion of historical Palestine, which is supposed to in a temporary base to be controlled by the Israeli Authority until the peace agreement reach kind of a final agreement for a Palestinian independent state. The Israelis keep taking more and more of this land to establish more and more illegal settlements. So we have there around 121 illegal settlements. And when we talk about illegal settlements, we are talking about internationally acknowledged as illegal settlements. This is not a Palestinian just definition of illegal settlements.

And you have around 102 , outposts where you have around half million Israeli settlers. They live in this illegal settlements on the Palestinian land that is based on Oslo Agreement, that actually signed by the Israelis considering that this is a Palestinian land. And according to the international law, those half million Israeli settlers live on a Palestinian land that is actually internationally acknowledged as a Palestinian land.

So this is kind of a reflection of the current situation, reflection of actually the Israelis utilizing, as I said, different strategies. One of them even the political peace talks, ongoing for maybe 30 years without reaching any results. But the Israelis never stopped to take more and more land to establish more and more illegal settlements. And now even their intention is outspoken by their politicians talking about: we don't want a Palestinian independent state. We want actually to destroy any potential for independent Palestinian state in the future.

And therefore, in a very systematic way when they establish their illegal settlements on Palestinian land, they try to create a fact on the ground that actually enhance this disconnection between the Palestinian Territories, that in future, we cannot actually have one full piece of land where we can establish our independent Palestinian state.

I mean, the problem for them actually is the demographic one. Because they have been trying for maybe 80 years now to push the Palestinian people out of their land. They have been trying several things. But still you have 3.2 million Palestinian on West Bank with all the challenges that they have. And you have around 2.2 million Palestinian in Gaza Strip. And this is for them like Okay, we push them on a smaller piece of land, we create a very tough living condition for them, but the people, they still would like to stay on their land.

And now with all the aggression, what we observe now, the genocide, even the utilization of food as a weapon, using even starvation as a weapon, this is actually a mean, how they were to solve this demographic problem. They want to get the people out of their country, out of their land. And this is what they are trying right now to do through the aggression on the ground.

RESH: And this aggression is also seen within narratives about Palestinian heritage and identity. I mean, it has been 18 months since the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel and the start of the most recent, there have been many, as you say, but the most recent assault on Gaza by Israel, which again is intensifying since the ending of the last ceasefire. Could you speak more to sort of the dominant narratives, particularly in mainstream media that have sought to negate Palestinian history and identity. Because I find Palestinian scholars, people speaking about Palestinian culture and history and stories and attachment to land, they are also forced to provide a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative that is also an anti-Palestinian narrative.

AHMED: This is really important because now the narrative that they are trying actually to promote, like everything has started after the 7th of October.

By the way, me, myself, I am not supporter of what happened in the 7th of October. I'm not justifying that. But what I say, that level of depression of the Palestinian community could lead to such action. I'm not talking about the political decision that was taken behind this. But I'm talking about even those young people... as someone who's 100% sure they will lose their life to do such action, but they still decided to do that.

For me, I never agree on that. I never support that. But we need to understand because it's always a good thing to ask a question. Why do you think such number of young people decided to go for such action while they are still young people and they still have a potential future?

Because actually the life of the Palestinian became worthless. Because of the sustainable aggression, sustainable policies, stressing policies by the Israeli Occupation on the Palestinian in Gaza Strip and in the West Bank created that situation that has exploded. And I believe that this mentality of keeping people under pressure will lead to no peace will be obtained.

And the only thing we need to think about, we need to understand that the Palestinian cause is mainly people under Occupation, that their basic rights were denied by the Israeli Occupation, putting them under pressure and continuous pressure.

Now the whole world is talking about what happened during the 7th of October and the Israeli retaliation on this that, of course, can never justify the level of aggression. Because even if you just consider the number of people who were killed from both sides, it's obvious, that the Palestinian are weak, the Palestinian are victims.

And all those innocent people who were killed. I mean vast majority of the people who were killed, who lost their houses, who lost their life, who lost their future, they have nothing to do with Hamas. They have nothing to do with what happened on the 7th of October. They are disadvantaged simply because they are Palestinian.

And I believe what is going on has nothing even to do with the 7th of October. It is part of the continuous, ongoing Israeli policies to push the people out of their land. Their interest is the land, but without the people. And the only thing is to push the people outside of their land.

And I believe we need actually to tell the story of the Palestinians, who would like to live on their land in peace. They need the international community to support their right to live on their land. And this is actually one of the major facts that is neglected or not promoted through the narrative that general western media would not reflect.

The Palestinian people are victims. The Palestinian people are victims, not only during this ongoing genocide, but it is a long-term story.

You know, usually I use this very good example of my university. I am currently leading a Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at Al-Azhar University. But I was a student in the same university, in the same faculty. I was undergraduate student. I obtained my bachelor degree from this faculty. During the last 32 years, this faculty was destroyed three times before. And this time is the fourth time during this war.

But the resilience model of the Palestinian people, that every time they destroy the building, we just start from zero, and we rebuild the building and we just continue what we are doing.

This is kind of a Palestinian resilience and resistance model. Resistance of living the life on the ground of Gaza. This is the real miracle of the Palestinian people.

Even when there was the a ceasefire and you saw this really impressive image of the Palestinian people coming from the south to the north. They are coming back to the North Gaza to put their tents over their destroyed buildings with a very clear message: Whatever you are going to do, we are not going to leave this land.

RESH: And this very much counters, again, one of those phrases that we often hear that the land was a land without people for a people without land.

But I wanna get back to what you're talking about in terms of this resilience, because you have said that this is also the most meaningful kind of resistance. Could you speak about how resilience is resistance?

AHMED: Yeah, of course. I conducted like several studies or interviewed people from Gaza as part of my research on resilience of food system in Gaza. I was interviewing farmers, women. You have really A wonderful models of resilience.

I usually reflect a very good model of one of my students, Yousif Abu Rabee. Yousif Abu Rabee, he was in his fourth year in Faculty of Agriculture studying to obtain bachelor degree in plant production and protection.

So he's from Northern Gaza, from Beit Lahia. And Beit Lahia is one of the locations where the Israelis made the evacuation order to the people to leave their land in this area. But the people said, we are not leaving. So they destroyed all means of food production.

They destroyed all farms, all agricultural input supply, supply stores. Even most of the water wells were destroyed in Northern Gaza, in Beit Lahia. And they did not allow even humanitarian food to come inside Northern Gaza. So the people were starving.

Yousif decided, no, I am going to rehabilitate my farm.

He started to establish a nursery with very limited resources. And he started to produce seedlings. To cultivate the seedlings and to distribute the seedlings for his neighbors. It's a farming community. And to produce food to feed the people in Northern Gaza because they were starving.

The farming, the locally produced food was destroyed in a systematic way by the Israelis. But also they did not allow the humanitarian food to come in. Of course, the private sector was not allowed to bring food in. And even if the private sector is allowed to bring food in, people don't have the money to buy it.

And therefore, Yousif Abu Rabee started a very good initiative to produce seedlings, to distribute seedlings and to enhance local food production with very limited resources inside Gaza. And he was successful to produce some food and some vegetable, and distributing this vegetable to the people in Northern Gaza.

For the Israelis that was a big threat. In October, 2024, intentionally they killed Yousif Abu Rabee. Drones attacked Yousif Abu Rabee while he was farming in his land, and he was killed. And this is actually something that you can just see and observe everywhere.

I mean, during even the whole war they were attacking bakery. They were attacking community kitchens. They were attacking the humanitarian food aid. And they were attacking people even just seeking to find food. Going to those like humanitarian food aid stores or go to the community kitchen. They attack the people while they are seeking to find some food with a very clear intention just to push the people to leave their land. But again, I mean, it's story like Yousif and others.

Like the women. Wonderful models of women. They are just utilizing whatever means to produce food for their families, for their communities. Trying even sometimes to invent new recipes. To utilize things that very simple, to produce food to feed the people, to feed the children on the ground.

I reflect to my father. My father passed away in 2021 and we had a farm in Gaza. This farm was destroyed several times. And this farm is a olive farm, olive trees

farm. And olive, you know, you need to wait at least three to five years to get production out of it.

So several times we cultivate the seedlings. We wait until we just about to produce, the Israelis come inside the land and destroy the land, cut the trees. My father would just cultivate, recultivate the trees again.

And I remember one discussion happened between me and my father. I told him, okay, listen, but this is really too expensive because we are investing a lot of money in this and we never see actually the production of them.

And my father said, okay, let them cut it for 100 time and we will recultivated for 101 time. So this is actually the resilience model. This is the Indigenous people, the people who belong to this land.

I believe someone who's Indigenous to this land would never actually commit a crime of cutting a tree.

If you are a stranger, if you do not belong to this land, you may just commit that crime. But Palestinian will never just commit that crime.

RESH: Now, the stories of your students. You were speaking of food aid and the attacks on those trying to access the food aid, but also those trying to deliver the food aid. And I believe one of your students was part of a World Kitchen team

AHMED: Yeah, Asma Bodiga, he's one of my really very good students. He graduated long time ago, and he was leading actually, a community kitchen mission in city of Khan Younis to deliver food for vulnerable starving people in southern Gaza.

And he was actually in a vehicle well known as a vehicle belonged to the World Kitchen. And it was very clear it's a humanitarian mission with his driver and another coworker inside that car. And they attacked this car and all of them, the three of them were killed.

And this is not the only case. Also they attacked like several, even international delegates, who are working for a humanitarian. Some of them working for the World Kitchen, but also they attacked United Nations staff who are working on a humanitarian mission in Gaza.

So you have several examples of creating a situation that there is no respect for any humanitarian mission. It is intentionally meant to destroy any means of living. Even those who are trying to help the people to sustain a minimum means of living, they are trying actually to attack them, to get the people frightened that they should not actually support them.

Currently, I don't know if you follow the news, they are attacking even cafeterias. Where people actually just seek those cafeterias to get internet connection.

RESH: That was just a couple days ago that I think it was 30 something people.

AHMED: Yeah. And you know, like now we are still running our higher education and institutions, but online we are providing online teaching.

Our students actually have no access to internet, have no access to electricity. And students usually go to those cafeterias to get some internet connection. To get their online courses. And that was not the first time, but like several times before.

So the Israelis now, they are not only restricting the food to come inside Gaza, so there is no seeds allowed to come inside Gaza. There is no agricultural inputs are allowed to come inside Gaza. So it is a very systematic way to create a situation that living on this land will be impossible. So the people has no choice but leaving the land.

RESH: And again, going back to basically the weaponization of food and how starvation has become a weapon of war.

This has been voiced by the UN, by humanitarian and aid agencies, as you've said, also openly, very openly admitted by Israeli officials as well.

In terms of talking about the attacks on humanitarian agencies, the biggest humanitarian agency is UNRWA, the United Nations Relief Agency for Palestine Refugees. And they have been systematically targeted. What is the significance of UNRWA?

AHMED: I think it is, it's very clear. It's a refugee-supporting institution. And what they believe, and I don't know if we can describe it as naive, if we destroy this institution designed to serve the Palestinian refugees, then there will be no Palestinian refugees. Because UNRWA is not serving Palestinians only in Gaza or West Bank, but they are also serving the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

And since actually 1949 till now, there were several attempts to end this refugee status for those Palestinians and to consider them as citizens of the countries that they live in. Like the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. They are trying actually to say: Okay, they're not refugees anymore, they should be Lebanese. Or the others in Syria, they should be Syrian. Or the others in Jordan, they should be Jordanian. And the identity of those Palestinians who are still there, they kept their status as a refugee. And this is seen by the Israelis as a threat because those people are displaced out of their historical Palestine.

Most of those like elderly people, they still have the keys of their properties on historical Palestine. And for them UNRWA means that those people will just remain

as refugees. And now they want to end this, like as if they end UNRWA, they will end the refugee status of the Palestinian people. And then the right of refugee to return back to their land is ended by ending UNRWA. And therefore they are attacking UNRWA to end UNRWA because they want to end the refugee.

I hope they will not be successful, but what I believe, even if they end UNRWA, they will not end the story of the refugees.

Me myself, I'm originally from Gaza. I was not displaced. My family was not displaced in 1948. But we have more than 60% of the Palestinian inside Gaza they are refugees. They are my friends. And I know some of those elderly people who left their land and they still have the keys.

AHMED: Most of them passed away, died, but they give the keys for their children and grandchildren. So the grandchildren, they still have the keys of their land, of their properties inside the historical Palestine.

The Palestinian awareness of their right, historical right, this is I would say the main issue that would just make all what they are trying to do meaningless. Even if they end UNRWA, they will not end the refugees. The refugees are still refugees. Their land was taken from them, their properties were taken from them.

RESH: And again, those keys and refugee status. represent fundamentally this attachment and belonging to the land .

Now, your work, including your recent talk, puts a climate lens on Palestine, and you're really examining this, as you said, through the nexus of climate, colonialism and geopolitics.

Why is it necessary to have a climate perspective on this situation?

AHMED: Palestine in general is a part of the Middle East and this area is actually vulnerable to the climate change. And climate change on the communities there, on the food system there is evident and creating significant implications.

Limited water resources is one of the main result of the climate change in the area. And therefore climate vulnerability in Palestine, in West Bank and in Gaza is a big issue. And this actually should call for adaptation, climate adaptation where we can support the community there to, deal or to cope with adverse impact with the climate change, and its adverse implication on living standards, on livelihood, but also on food system and food security.

In Gaza or in West Bank, in Palestinian Territories in general, climate vulnerability actually is associated with all this geopolitical context, adding even layers of suffering to the communities in West Bank and Gaza. Restricted access to land and limitation and restriction put on any adaptation measures that is needed to support the communities there that is put by the Israeli Occupation creates even a more

complicated context and more suffering to the people. And therefore, when we were just talking about climate vulnerability in Palestine, we should not only consider climate-related natural factors, but we also consider all those geopolitical context.

We may have like several examples where actually even the international community, were trying climate vulnerable communities to overcome the adverse impact of climate change, like providing water tanks or trying to provide even water wells or trying to help to install climate-smart agricultural models. Those were restricted by the Israeli Occupation. They were not allowed.

Like for example area C in West Bank, international NGOs are not allowed actually to intervene there before they are taking the permit by the Israelis. And most of their interventions in this area is not allowed.

So this, again, it's climate change and its implication on the community became even worse and worse without any adaptation model because this is not allowed by the Israeli occupation.

Just imagine the volume of water tanks to be delivered as a humanitarian aid to support Bedouin communities in area C in West Bank. The size of that tank should be agreed and approved by the Israeli authorities. As if, you know, it is meant that to keep the people suffering from the drought and its implication on the community and on the even livestock there. Again, they are not only using the food, but also they are using the climate change as mean for actually pushing the people out of their country and out of their land.

In Gaza Strip for example, even several projects were designed and implemented, funded by the international community to support the Gazan farming community and agricultural communities to overcome the negative implications of climate change. Those were actually destroyed by the Israeli Occupation.

Most recently, I mean this war, there was a relatively big project that was designed to use, we call it recovery scheme, where treated wastewater infiltrated into the groundwater. And there were actually a project to establish recovery wells where farmers can obtain recovery wells out of this infiltrated treated waste water to irrigate their crops because of the scarcity of water that is actually a result of the climate change, with even energy resource, solar energy plant that was designed to support those recovery wells.

And one of the first thing that were destroyed during this war, those wells and energy plant. So yes, climate change is everywhere, causing negative and adverse implication on the livelihood and food security for the people.

But inside Palestine, inside Palestinian Territories, even the attempts to adapt, to provide even support to people to adapt to the crisis of the climate change is restricted and limited by the Israelis. As if they are using the natural factors to create even more and more difficult situation for the Palestinian people in their ground.

RESH: So the climate crisis is itself becoming a weapon of war, is being weaponized?

AHMED: I do believe, yes. And this is evident actually in area C and in Gaza because people actually are suffering from the climate change, but they don't have any means to adapt.

Because even with the international community, like Green Climate Fund or even the World Bank, when they are trying to fund even some infrastructure programs or any type of project like the one in Gaza, either they don't get the permit by the Israelis to do this, or if it is done, it most likely will be destroyed.

RESH: Right. And all of these are connected, right? The current assault on Palestine is not only, as you've discussed, compounding a decades long food insecurity crisis that has been exacerbated through occupation, climate, and conflict, also water insecurity. But also again biodiversity, animals. You are the dean of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, at Al-Azhar University. So could you speak to this dimension of it?

AHMED: Yeah, I mean especially when you talk about livestock, this is really a very difficult story even. You know during this ongoing war, we have no animals, no livestock remaining in Gaza. Those were killed actually either by bombardment, just attacking the animal shelters and kill the animal directly, or starvation again because the Israelis did not allow any fodder to come inside Gaza.

RESH: So they're not only blockading food for people, but also food for animals

AHMED: ...not allowed to come in Gaza. So the animals were actually just simply were dying because they were starving. And it's very difficult to say maybe the only animal you can just observe nowadays in Gaza, are the dogs. And the dogs are actually mainly fed on dead bodies of the people who were killed by the Israelis, but Palestinians are not allowed even to to bury them or to collect them from the streets. So this is a situation.

This is kind of a also connection to the academia because I believe higher education is correlating with all sectors. In the veterinarian medicine faculty of veterinarian medicine, we are facing actually a significant challenge of providing even any practical training for our students. Not only because the university is destroyed, laboratory is destroyed, our farm is destroyed, all the animals are killed in our research station. But this is also the same for the Ministry of Agriculture, because all the facilities for Ministry of Agriculture and all even vet centers, private sector vet centers were destroyed. But also simply, we do not have animals. Even if we have some professors who are willing to provide the practical training, we don't have the animals actually to provide any practical training in Gaza.

So this is something which is really, I mean, even difficult to imagine. Thinking not only about human rights, thinking about animal rights. So the animals were killed intentionally. Yeah. But also not only directed by attacking them and bombardment of

their shelters. No, it was also intentional, they were preventing banning any fodder to come inside Gaza.

This is a horrible situation to reflect. Yeah.

RESH: It is. It is. I mean, the horrors of this are just unfathomable. Again, this did not start on October 7th, but since 2023, Palestinians, especially in Gaza, have experienced just this incredible amount of violence, including daily bombing, drone attacks, missile strikes, and so much more.

Could you speak about the environmental impact of the weaponry that's used, the continual bombing and deployment of new weapons as well?

AHMED: This is really very, very good question and very important aspect that we are still not fully aware of that implications. I mean the type of weapon that are utilized in Gaza in this war have never been experienced before.

In Gaza, since 2008, we had like five wars. Yeah. And every time we just experience new things. You can say like Gaza, people are familiar with the war and familiar with different types of weapons that were utilized against them.

But this time even reports coming from hospitals that there are like some weapons that we do not know actually, we have never experienced before. And therefore we cannot judge on their environmental implications. Even during previous wars when they were utilizing weapons that we don't know actually what is the implication of that weapon on our environmental system, on the land, on the water, groundwater. We don't know what is the implication of that.

We have been trying actually very hard to get even the equipment to analyze this implication. We were not able to get even because the Israelis did not allow actually equipment to come inside Gaza to conduct a research to reflect the environmental impact, the volume of pollution on the agricultural land, on our water resources.

We observe actually a trends of very serious health implication, like in increasing of the cancer rate in Gaza, increasing of the renal failure rate in Gaza. We just observe this by numbers and we really cannot link this, I mean we do not have the evidence to show what is the implication. And I believe that would need really a significant research work. But also with proper capacities that is beyond the capacities of the Palestinian academic institutions.

As I said before, is not a human resources issue. That we may have actually qualified environmental researchers and scholars who can conduct such research. But we may not have the equipment to do this. And this would need actually the international community to focus on that aspects. To see what type of weapon are utilized in this area of land and what is the implication of that? Because in previous wars, we were trying very hard to get even any equipment to conduct research to find out what is the implication. We observe actually the result of that implication,

environmental pollution. But actually we cannot quantify that. We cannot even describe it because we do not have the means to do that.

RESH: And part of this lack of means is the seeming, use the word failure of international law and international response when it comes to Palestine and the Palestinian people.

What are your thoughts on that? Because here we are, we're seeing this every day on our screens. Palestinians are experiencing it. There's no getting away from what this is, and yet there seems to be a lack of actions from world bodies.

AHMED: Yeah. I mean this is the case. International community when it comes to the Palestinian rights. It seems to be as they are not listening or we are not observed as human beings.

Once I remember, I was asked by a group of students, what do I think about the international community and if I see that there could be any improvement in the future in the international community stance towards the Palestinian rights?

I said it's important how we define international community.

International community actually can be influenced by the communities that can be moving through awareness like students, academic community, normal people. We should just work to bring awareness on what's going on on the ground and reflecting the real situation of the Palestinian people and show how the basic rights of the Palestinian people are denied by the Israeli occupation. And this can affect decision-making at the higher rank, the international community then maybe will move.

And I believe here we need to think about the power of people. Because the people can make the change and put pressure on the international community to change the way actually they deal with the Palestinian cause and all the atrocities that are committed against the Palestinian people.

And therefore, I do appreciate actually all those activities like this podcast. And I appreciate the opportunity to reflect on the Palestinian context and what's going on there because I believe with talking more, reflection more on the situation in Palestine and reflection the reality that can create the awareness that in future hopefully will change the stand of the international community towards the Palestinian cause

RESH: We're talking about climate and we're talking about this conflict, and we're talking about resilience. In recent years, global Summits on climate change and biodiversity have been calling for the recognition and resourcing of Indigenous-led conservation and expertise.

And you have made the connection between Palestinian resilience and climate resilience. We have the next climate conference coming up, COP 30. Has

Palestinian climate resilience been addressed by climate summits? And if not, how would you like it to be addressed?

AHMED: It's the issue here about proper representation of the Palestinians. Palestinian environmental authority was actually part of COP and actually the case was presented.

But again as all political issues, it is the weight of representation of a certain cause. Now, Palestinian political weight right now is actually not as strong as it should be to reflect the cause. And I believe here international community or even maybe Arab League can actually reflect more as more political weight. Because unfortunately the COP, how it is formulated and how the decision are made there, it's also affected by political power of who's going to present.

I believe the Palestinians tried actually to get even whatever support climate adaptation in Palestine. Sometimes they were even successful, as I said. Some projects are funded by Green Climate Fund, by the World Bank, even European Union they are trying to support some projects there. And they are very, very well justified and very well designed projects. Me, myself, I was involved in several, initiatives there.

But the issue again, it is when you just come to implement on the ground, you need actually to get what they call it, coordination. But after all, it's kind of getting the permission of the Israelis to do things on the ground. And sometimes when they achieve something on the ground and it became just operating, it is destroyed. The Israelis are not held accountable for this.

The same injustice that is practiced for the whole Palestinian cause is actually reflected also in the climate justice. Because if we justify the occupation, if we justify all the actions that are made by the occupation, even trying to justify killing innocent people in Gaza, that if innocent children are killed, it is justified. Just think about it. Who's going actually to care about any infrastructure that were actually designed to support climate adaptation for the people.

So the whole cause related to climate change, but also to any other sector, it is the same thing. It is about political representation and the power or the political will actually to change the situation because everything is interconnected. It's a human rights issue.

People are denied their very simple human rights, their right to live, their right to eat, their right to live on their land, their right to receive health, their right to receive education, rights of children, rights of women. Everything is denied, including the climate-related situation. Again, it's the same thing if it's the narrative is there, but how powerful the narrative is, is related to this political context. Which is carrying injustice for the Palestinian people.

RESH: At this point, by now, almost 55,000 Palestinians have been killed. A number that is likely much higher given those who are still lost beneath the rubble, which is

another climate impacting factor in all of this that comes from the bombing. Over a hundred thousand have been wounded. Women and children make up the majority of both of those numbers. In addition to all of the other destruction, we've also seen scholasticide, a systematic destruction of knowledge systems. What can and should ordinary people be doing? We are, we're seeing people out on the streets, obviously all over the world who are demonstrating against this. But what message would you have to listeners of this podcast in terms of actions that they can or should be taking?

AHMED: Yeah, I, I think the first thing is advocacy. Promotion and advocacy for the Palestinian reality, for what's going on on the ground. Reflection of the injustice of the whole case would enhance actually change at the decision-making level at certain point of time.

But also it's very important to think about how to enhance resilience of the Palestinian people to sustain actually their resistance. What I mean here by resistance is just to live and sustain whatever means of life for the Palestinians on the ground. Like supporting all institutions in Gaza to sustain their operations and their services in Gaza.

This can be done through even wide range of NGOs that they are trying to operate inside Gaza, but also supporting Palestinian institutions on the ground of Gaza.

Like I, just coming from academic institutions. One of the main thing that Israel is trying to do is actually to destroy education in Gaza by destruction of schools, universities, and all education infrastructure in Gaza.

So as higher education institution, we just decided, okay you destroyed the building, you destroyed the infrastructure, but we believe universities are not buildings, universities are about communities. So we decided, okay, we should start again. We started already May, 2024 to resume education online and we completed three semesters. And now we are starting the fourth semester providing education online. With a very clear message that the institution will remain and sustain operations on the ground.

Because their strategy is by destruction of institutions, they destroy the education or they destroy the health sector. So the people cannot access those services, then they choose to go and to leave. And now I believe that supporting those institutions by whatever means, I mean financial means to support their operation or supporting them by volunteering, for example, online teaching or supporting academic community, for example, is very important to conduct research about Gaza.

Research in Gaza is urgently needed mainly for two reasons. The first reason that we need actually to document all the atrocities and crimes that are committed against Gazan people in all aspects, talking about education, health, social, economic, environmental, we need to, conduct research to document those crimes, to hold those criminals accountable for what they did. But also we need this research

to reflect the Palestinian narrative and vision, how the Palestinians would like to see Gaza rebuilt.

That was very popular about this model of Trump. He would like to build a Riviera in Gaza. Yeah.

RESH: Yeah.

AHMED: So this is his vision. You know, he has already a vision for Palestine or for Gaza, how it should be rebuilt.

But I think the main say here should be for the Palestinian to say how they would like actually to see Gaza rebuilt. And this is a responsibility for researchers. Not only Palestinian researchers, but researchers all over the world should support a participatory research to reflect the Palestinian visions in all sectors, in all disciplines.

How they would like actually to see their Gaza rebuilt.

And this narrative and knowledge production and dissemination is very important for this context. And this is actually a mission of the international community, when I talk about international community, I'm just talking about the normal people. I'm talking about teachers, researchers, normal people, students like everybody need to be informed and need actually to disseminate that knowledge to reflect what's going on and what should be done. And try to support actually the resilience of the Palestinian people on their land

RESH: Towards resilience and peace.

And so just as a very final question, what does peace mean to you Ahmed?

AHMED: Peace. Actually, I wish that we can just reach a situation where we can live in peace in our land. But this actually seems to be very difficult right now.

The Palestinian have been disadvantaged for a very long time. They were ready actually for whatever peace agreement. The Palestinian were ready to discuss one-state solution. They were ready to discuss two-state solution. Palestinian Authority went for peace talks for 30 years to reach kind of agreement that guarantee dignity for Palestinian to live in an independent state. And all those were rejected by the Israelis.

Now, if you just ask the Israeli government or even the population about their vision of any resolution of this cause. They do not support one state solution. They do not support two state solution. The only vision that they have to get those 5 million people out of the Palestinian land and to take the land. And frankly it's really weird they speak it out. They don't hide it.

For me, I hope that one day we can reach a peace which for me is a Palestinian independent state where the Palestinian can live peacefully in dignity over their land.

RESH: Ahmed, thank you so much. It has been a pleasure speaking with you.

AHMED: Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. And thank you for all your work to support Palestinian people and for the great solidarity you are showing.

RESH: That was Dr. Ahmed Abu Shaban, visiting professor at York University and Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at Gaza's Al-Azhar University

And this is The Courage My Friends podcast.

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

Thanks for listening.

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